Canadian Literature / Littérature *canadienne*

A Quarterly of Criticism and Review
Number 238, 2019, Rescaling CanLit: Global Readings
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.

Canadian Literature is indexed in *Canadian Magazine Index*, *Canadian Periodical Index*, *European Reference Index for the Humanities, 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 onwards 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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Registration NO. 08647

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SUBSCRIPTION FOR ISSUES 236-239
CANADA (GST INCLUDED): INDIVIDUAL $60; INSTITUTION $242.55
OUTSIDE CANADA (SHIPPING INCLUDED): INDIVIDUAL $90 USD; INSTITUTION $272.55 USD

ISSN 0008-4360

Managing Editor: Donna Chin
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Production Staff: Janin Balleza, Niamh Harold, Brendan McCormack, Beth Veitch
Design: George Vaitkunas
Illustrations: George Kuthan
Printing: Hignell Printing Limited
Paper: recycled and acid-free

We acknowledge that we are on the traditional, ancestral, and unceded territory of the hən̓q̓əmin̓ən̓-speaking Musqueam people.

Editorial

Rescaling CanLit: Global Readings

Eva Darias-Beautell

Privilege

I belong to a privileged group of non-Canadian scholars of Canadian literature. I have a degree in English from the University of La Laguna (Spain), an MA in European Studies from Keele University (UK), and a PhD in Canadian literature from the University of La Laguna, where I work as a professor today. Why Canadian literature? People often ask me. I could reply that I had always felt attracted to Canada, or that I found the field fascinating. But my honest answer often is: Well, it was *there* for me. After taking courses in English (from England) and American literatures, I had become interested in a new and exciting field. I had gone to Madrid to attend my first conference on Canadian Studies and my PhD supervisor was fully involved in the creation of the no-longer-existing Spanish Association for Canadian Studies. There were study grants and research grants. During the 1990s, as I was writing my PhD thesis, I received a Government of Canada Pre-doctoral Award so that I could spend an academic year at the University of Toronto. Other important pre- and post-doctoral research grants followed both from the Canadian and the Spanish governments that paved my way towards specialization and moved my research forward, providing me with invaluable access to texts and experiences, and facilitating conversations and interviews with writers, professors, and critics. I visited Canada almost every year.

I still do. And I remain very grateful for all the opportunities. But, after a period of uncertainty and increasing cuts, the Canadian government funding—the specific programs designed to promote Canadian Studies abroad and help international scholars and students to conduct their research in Canada—has altogether disappeared. In the past thirteen years, my

frequent research visits have been exclusively facilitated by the government of Spain through the funding of a series of multi-year collaborative international research projects on Canadian literature which I have designed and directed.[1] But, since they do not have access to such sources of funding, fewer and fewer young researchers choose the field today and present doctoral students tend to move away from Canadian Studies into areas where they are given research opportunities.

Global Readings

It is in that critical context that the call for papers for this special issue made all the more sense as it implicitly probed the state of Canadian literature outside national boundaries. In their collected volume *Beyond "Understanding Canada": Transnational Perspectives on Canadian Literature,* editors Jeremy Haynes, Melissa Tanti, Daniel Coleman, and Lorraine York assert the importance of looking at "transnational CanLit scholarship in the aftermath of its defunding" (Haynes et al. xii). The essays in that collection draw on a Janus-faced notion of transnationalism, proving that looking at CanLit as transnational literature does not only rescale the field by positioning it firmly in global arenas that necessarily exceed national imaginaries, as Kit Dobson has done, for instance, in *Transnational Canadas*. That is a demand that comes from the very literary texts since the stories *are* increasingly global. Such a process of rescaling also involves the consideration of highly diverse global communities of readers with equally diverse contexts and frameworks of interpretation. Rescaling in this sense means recontextualizing, establishing the value of Canadian writing on a different scale, shifting the site of reading to look at texts from new critical lenses. While it is now commonly accepted that Canadian literature has become a global literature, implying that any understanding of textual localities is traversed by vectors that exceed, complicate, and extend the nation in literal and metaphorical ways, the gaze is seldom reversed and little attention has been paid to the role of international scholarship in the current transformation of the field.

Much has been written in the past decade about the need to open the national category to the porosity of the prefix *trans*—pushing institutional and disciplinary boundaries and reorienting critical discourse on Canadian literature. Smaro Kamboureli does this most notably in her critical work of the past decade, an important line of research initiated by the publication of the edited collection *Trans.Can.Lit*. Striking a parallel note, Diana Brydon

and Marta Dvořák put forward the metaphor of *crosstalk* as a "framing device" to investigate the capacity of different imaginaries to interact and "create complex forms of interference" (Brydon and Dvořák, 1). As several critics have pointed out, critical work by non-Canadian scholars remains crucial to those developments for various reasons. Firstly, it provides a "multi-positioned glimpse of a national literary culture in the very act of being transnationally consumed, represented, contested, commodified, and much else" (Haynes et al. xvi). Secondly, it "acknowledges the shift in Canadian literary discourse away from the thematic performance of 'Canadianness' and instead toward the pursuit of self-knowledge within a body politic that includes and exceeds those residing in Canada" (Haynes et al. xxv).

With those ideas in mind, our Call for Papers posed a series of important questions: How are Canadian texts read and circulated beyond the national borders? What is the place of Canadian literature in the institutional spaces of universities outside Canada? How do those transnational contexts negotiate the relationship between texts and readers? Are there defining differences in the ways non-Canadian scholars approach CanLit? How does transnational scholarship influence, challenge, enrich, and rescale Canadian literary production?

In Spain, some previous work has been done in the directions marked by our CFP. Most notably, the collected volume *Made in Canada, Read in Spain*, edited by Pilar Somacarrera, assessed the circulation and reception of Canadian texts in Spain, including the questions of translation and university curricula. This special issue planned to continue and expand that type of work by inviting scholars of Canadian literature from around the globe to engage critically with any aspect of Canadian literary production, dissemination, or reception.

We sent the CFP to all international Associations, Centers, and Programs of Canadian Studies abroad. We shared it on Facebook and Twitter, and I also personally contacted potential contributors. However, submissions were not very numerous, and, unfortunately, several of those articles submitted did not pass the peer-review process. That this was so should open a space for reflection on the situation of Canadian Studies as an international field. The articles in this issue certainly bring to view the two-way direction of reading and writing Canadian literature globally, demonstrating the porosity of transnational scholarship as well as advancing innovative perspectives that may contribute to the rescaling of the field.

Rescaling

Investigating the figure of Robert Kroetsch outside a strictly Canadian context, and most particularly from an American perspective, Simona Bertacco's "Rescaling Robert Kroetsch: A Reading across Communities, Borders, and Practices" brings to light insufficiently explored connections between regionalism and postmodernism both in Canada and the US. Kroetsch's literary aesthetic and technique, and especially his long poems, have much in common with American poetry of the 1960s and 1970s. Yet current institutional frameworks of reading, still often constrained by national categories, have prevented his writings from achieving prominence south of the border. Bertacco draws on Stephen Voyce's notion of *poetic community* to look at the role of Kroetsch, both as a writer and as a critic, across three different literary communities that transcend national borders: the group of writers, artists, and critics around the theoretically-oriented journal *Boundary 2*; the Canadian prairies community of writers and readers; and the innovative Black Mountain poets led by Charles Olson in the US and its Canadian counterpart, the *TISH* movement, on the West Coast. This article positions Kroetsch's work at the intersection of North American literary traditions and vindicates its decisive contribution to postmodern experimentation both in Canada and the US. This is what a literary rescaling looks like.

Bertacco mentions the popularity that Robert Kroetsch has enjoyed in Europe, although this strand is not pursued in her article. That is in fact the case, especially in Germany, where Kroetsch was often invited to give lectures and teach at universities. Interestingly, I have found nothing in the way of a comparative perspective between Kroestch's work and contemporary German literature.

While contemporary Canadian literature is taught and read in many European universities, comparative studies are still very scarce. It is precisely that lack that Anna Branach-Kallas' "Trauma Plots: Reading Contemporary Canadian First World War Fiction in a Comparative Perspective" implicitly aims at addressing by offering a panoramic study of Canadian WWI writing in the wider transnational context of war literature. Looking at the representation of trauma within that global framework opens up promising lines of research: such as the idea that Canada's WWI texts show a distinct emphasis on telling what was happening beyond the trenches and a tendency to break the masternarrative of glory and heroic sacrifice by paying attention to the role of marginalized voices in the war (be they women, people with

disabilities, or Indigenous characters). Rescaling Canadian literature relies here on a self-conscious exercise of zooming out to then zoom in again and see new things, other ways of reading, the presence of larger issues.

Ecology and Indigeneity often interact with each other, raising some of the most global issues today. Ana María Fraile-Marcos' "'Who's going to look after the river?': Water and the Ethics of Care in Thomas King's *The Back of the Turtle*" reflects on those two vectors as they touch and intersect in King's novel. The focus is on the role of water as a multivalent trope: used, on the one hand, to criticize extractive economies, and, on the other, to articulate and propose an ethics of care where Indigenous and feminist paradigms can cross roads and move forward in collaboration. Following Donna Haraway and Karen Barad, the reading is *diffractive*, meaning that the emphasis is on the points of interference, entanglement, and interaction between knowledges. Fraile-Marcos then takes a step further and looks at Gitxsan scholar Michael Blackstock's *Blue Ecology* as diffractive, in that it combines Western and Indigenous approaches to water, balancing them out against each other. In contrasting and probing worldviews on the environment in King's novel, this article implicitly highlights the potential of transcultural interdisciplinary readings of Canadian literature. The analysis offered is also necessarily global because the issues discussed are prominently so.

Tereza Virginia de Almeida's short study of Leonard Cohen's work as Neo-Baroque compositions is fascinating. She starts off with a personal note about the special resonance of Cohen's work in Brazil to then propose a highly creative reading of his life, music, poetry, prose, and even drawings. The project takes the Canadian author for an unusual trip through two interconnected notions: the Cuban Severo Sarduy's *the ellipse* and the French Gilles Deleuze's *the fold*. Cohen's inclination towards elliptical images—his tendency to leave things unsaid—sets the grounds for multiple readings according to also multiple, transnational contexts of reception, where unexpected meanings emerge. I look forward to hearing more of this Brazilian Cohen.

"Language and Loss in Michel Rabagliati's *Paul à Québec* and Sarah Leavitt's *Tangles*," by Andrea King and Kristiana Karathanassis, offers another kind of comparative framework. Working within Canada, the authors compare illness narratives across language and genre to consider Michel Rabagliati's *Paul à Québec* (2009) and Sarah Leavitt's *Tangles: A Story about Alzheimer's, My Mother and Me* (2010). Looking at the debilitating effects of cancer and Alzheimer's, respectively, the article shows how the interplay of visual and written language can tell the story of a life that ends in disease.

One of the most interesting aspects of Hsiu-chuan Lee's interview with Madeleine Thien is how, discussing the use of history and memory in Thien's novel *Do Not Say We Have Nothing*, the writer talks about a sense of vulnerability that is global, and therefore shared by all, wherever we are. For instance, the history of the Cambodian genocide is also our history, Thien says, since it "is inextricable from the repercussions of American policies and decisions." Transnational at its core, Thien's intricate interdisciplinary method exploits the possibilities of human empathy at this global level, while insisting on paying attention to the specificities of the different contexts of living, writing, and reading. In reference to one of the characters in the novel, Thien defines the work of a compiler as someone who carries "bits and pieces, take[s] on the weight, the burden, and carr[ies] them from place to place until they exhaust themselves and hope that someone else will pick up those things and keep carrying them." Reading literature globally becomes a compiler's job. I hope that the readers of the following articles take up this suggestion and find reasons to carry their words elsewhere. This issue opens the space for those possibilities as it contributes, however modestly, to the rescaling of CanLit.

NOTE

1 My most recent funded projects are "The City, Urban Cultures and Sustainable Literatures: Representations of the Anglo-Canadian Post-Metropolis" (FFI2010-20989) and "Justice, Citizenship and Vulnerability. Narratives of Precarity and Intersectional Perspectives" (FFI2015-63895-C2-1-R). I also direct the international group "TransCanadian Networks" (FFI2015-71921-REDT). The three projects have been generously funded by the Ministerio de Economía y Competitividad (Government of Spain).

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Catherine Owen

Sonnet on First Seeing It

How night can elide such solidities, only
the arch's girders lit by the taillights of early
morning cars, then like the twin hills
of some cadaverous kingdom, the topmost
lattice rises, sketches itself apart from sky.
The man who imagined this design in the denouement
of the Depression had dome in his mind, without doubt,
but one triangled with air, the juxtapose
between shifting weather and the certainty of steel.
Empire, however nebulous, embossed as cicatrice
and emblem, before graffiti darkened the intent
to surmount the underside, the truth.
And now nearly the whole bower of commerce
is visible; and yet the art of it endures.

Hsiu-chuan Lee

Writing, History, and Music in *Do Not Say We Have Nothing*

A Conversation with Madeleine Thien

The award-winning Asian Canadian writer Madeleine Thien (1974-) has gained increasing critical acclaim. This interview focuses on her most recent novel, *Do Not Say We Have Nothing* (2016), but the discussions extend to her other work—*Simple Recipes* (2001), *Certainty* (2006), and *Dogs at the Perimeter* (2011). An epic novel that spans China's tumultuous modern history from the establishment of the People's Republic of China, the Land Reform, and the Cultural Revolution, to the 1989 Tiananmen Movement and its aftermath, *Do Not Say We Have Nothing* explores modern Chinese histories via the form of creative writing. Since the novel was inspired by Bach's *Goldberg Variations* and at its core is the family saga of three classical musicians whose lives crossed at the Shanghai Conservatory, the interview probes particularly the interactions between music, writing, and the representation of histories.

In the first section Thien dwells on creative writing's mediating role in historical representation and comments on her relationship with characters and readers. The second section discusses the inspiring role of music and the meaning of music, silence, and mathematics in politics and for individual characters. The third section deliberates on the motif of "the Book of Records" and the implications of taking "compiling" and "copying" as creative forms. Thien turns in the last section to the connection between June Fourth and the Cultural Revolution. She also compares her writing with Ma Jian's *Beijing Coma* (2008) and discusses writing as a way to connect generations.

The conversation took place at Milk and Honey Cafe at 1119 Newkirk Ave, Brooklyn, New York, on Feb. 21, 2018. The transcript has been read and confirmed by Thien.

History, Memory, and Creative Writing

Hsiu-chuan Lee: In your 2015 essay in *The Guardian*, which protested against the closing down of the MFA program in creative writing at City University of Hong Kong, you stated: "For writers, literature is a carrier of history." Could you say more about the relationship between creative writing and history?

Madeleine Thien: I probably was thinking about Hong Kong itself, and about the books I was trying to write. Given the scale of the catastrophe in Cambodia, there have been few fictional works about the genocide though there are extraordinary non-fiction works and memoirs. Maybe the work of fiction is in part to get in between what history can tell us, the mechanisms that history shows us. It writes the shadow part of history. In *Dogs at the Perimeter* [hereafter *Dogs*], for example, I knew that it would have been almost impossible for someone to take the route that Janie takes out of Cambodia during the years of 1976 and 1977. I wanted to write what might have been possible in the life of one person—*if only* the escape had been possible. Whether someone in Janie's circumstances, who has lost her parents and will lose her brother, would have survived those years is an enormous question mark. So in some way the novel explores how, in such a shadow, a life might have been lived if history had allowed this life to continue. In *Do Not Say We Have Nothing* [hereafter *Do Not Say*], I wanted to see what was being written inside silences, what was in the unwritten music and the lost musicians—things that couldn't come into being but maybe there was still a shadow of them. That the writing of history might also contain this shadow.

HL: What's it like to work in between what has been known in history and the freedom given by fiction and characters?

MT: I think you live from moment to moment with the characters. It's a strange process. As the writer, you know what's going to happen politically or historically as the years progress, but the characters live moment to moment and react to each moment as we all do—unable to perceive what's around the corner. When we read history, we have this feeling of inevitability. But fiction is different. History knows how things are going to turn out, but for individuals, nothing is inevitable. This is a strange contradiction.

HL: You also said, in *The Guardian* essay, that "In Chinese, the word remembrance, jì yì, is a pun that can be heard two ways, 記憶 (to recall, record) and 技藝 (art)." Could you comment upon the idea of memory as an artistic mediation of the past?

MT: I wondered how, or if, the recording—or refashioning or writing into art—of characters' memories would give these memories temporary refuge. Memories

and histories are vulnerable: vulnerable to censorship, removal, erasure, disbelief. But as art they have their own house, their own parameters. The symphony that Sparrow writes has its own entryway; it exists in a different kind of space. In pulling different things together to make art, you create another holding place before memory flickers away.

HL: Do you agree that one important goal of creative writing is to write about something that didn't happen but might happen in history?

MT: This is what I did in *Dogs*, when I wanted to find an escape for Janie. But I also wonder, is it really possible for us to imagine something that didn't happen? I think that history contains all; everything is buried somewhere. It's almost like the camera of history is moving too quickly and we want to make it slow down for us so that we might look somewhere we didn't look before. It's the same panorama we are looking at. It's just that we're looking for something else in there.

HL: You did serious research before you wrote. I can sense a strong appeal to the historical real in your work.

MT: I tried not to take liberty with histories. The one [i.e., imagining an escape route for Janie] in *Dogs* was the biggest I took, but otherwise I was very exact about what was happening with the Khmer Rouge politically, with policy, with movement of people, with the specific way genocide was carried out. For me it was very important not to tamper with the historical record because this is a genocide in which there exists documentation and in which the terrible loss of life, the waste of life, was planned.

HL: Have you ever, in the process of your writing, entered any point of history where you were not quite sure about what happened?

MT: Sometimes you don't know the degree of what happened, and sometimes you don't know the specificities of a particular place. You know the larger picture but not the details. While writing *Certainty* I was researching my father's hometown in Malaysia. I found a great deal of information about the Australian and British soldiers who died in the Japanese prisoner-of-war camps but almost no documentation of local lives. It was an empty space in the historical record. And when I asked my family or interviewed my uncles, I understood they couldn't dwell on those details; mostly when they talked about the past they cupped it away in a few sentences (like *we were hungry* or *we did this or that*) and wouldn't or couldn't go into the details of that time. Emotionally they couldn't.

HL: Does imagination step in for those empty spaces?

MT: Yes, but the writer also has to let go of a lot of preconceived ideas. Maybe

one of the hardest things is to *not* project, as much as humanly possible, what you assume or think you know onto the characters. When writing about Cambodia and China, many people never thought that, within five years, their society could become something almost unimaginable. None of us would ever expect that totalitarianism would descend upon us. I think for a long time I've been interested in what is happening—within individual hearts and minds and in the social climate—as totalitarianism is taking root. What is it that we keep missing about ourselves? What causes people to rush headlong towards ideology? What happens when they realize that the freedoms they took for granted begin to feel, bit by bit, out of reach?

HL: Instead of writing about the autobiographical, you've insisted on writing fiction and using writing to explore others. Why are "others" so important?

MT: The intimate world I was surrounded with, my family and particularly my parents, sometimes felt caught between languages. I know my parents sometimes felt inadequate to the place they lived in. I think that growing up and seeing my parents try to live with dignity left a big mark on me. I want to value that they have knowledge of different worlds; maybe I also write against the undervaluing of that knowledge.

HL: What is then the relationship between you and your characters? Do you feel sympathetic for them?

MT: They have given me more than I could ever put into a book or what I could express. When my first book came out, my mom read it and said that it made her feel less alone; it made her feel that I understood what she went through in those hard years when I was a child and the family was struggling. When I was writing *Dogs* and *Do Not Say*, I wanted to think deeply about what it is to live the aftermath. The books are not there to set the record right or to write the history; they are about experiences that implicate all of us. Their history is also our history. The history of the Cambodian genocide is also American history, and is inextricable from the repercussions of American policies and decisions. We need to look at it, think about it, mourn it, be angry about it, and at least live in it for a little while.

HL: Are the victims of the historical events among your intended readers?

MT: Yes. I think a lot about what it would feel like to pick up a book like mine and feel that your life and history has been misrepresented, has been made superficial or has been skewed into something else—that is what I really don't want. I think a book shouldn't be afraid of its readers, no matter how close or how far they are from the historical or contemporary reality of the novel. I think that [a concern like this] isn't just an ethical or moral question;

it's a literary failure when people who have lived something close to this experience do not recognize any part of themselves in it; it's a failure of the art, a failure of imagination.

HL: Some readers might expect to see images of an author in that author's characters. But in your case, characters that appear to be like you at first glance usually turn out to be very different from you. One exception is the protagonist in "A Map of the City"—the last story in *Simple Recipes*. This character shares similarities with you.

MT: Yes, and I think it was the hardest to write. It is hard to see yourself well. And if you are very self-critical, you may turn that onto your characters, and that's not a good thing. You won't give them the kind of space you would give another character.

HL: How would you describe your relationship with your characters? Are they subjects of your study?

MT: No. They are like friends. And like friends, they don't tell you everything. There are some things they don't know, some things you don't ask them, and some things they might tell you while knowing that you have understood it as something else.

HL: Do you mean that you and your characters converse and figure out a story together?

MT: I think so. But mostly they are around me. Even now I can feel Sparrow sitting over there at the corner, listening, or Big Mother Knife will be stomping off in a second. It's not that I feel that they are inside me or jostling inside my brain, but that they are around us, thinking their own thoughts, knowing much more than I've known, much more about the things that they carry in the novel. And they also let me know: "you can do it," "you won't let us down."

Music, Silence, and Mathematics

HL: You taught creative writing at City University of Hong Kong between 2010 and 2015. Did you write *Do Not Say* mostly in Hong Kong?

MT: During those years I went to Hong Kong maybe three times a year, each time for a few weeks. The rest of the teaching was one-on-one mentorship and could be done through Skype, email, or telephone. I was sometimes in Germany, sometimes in the US, sometimes in Canada, in Singapore for six months, and in China for probably six to seven months. My boyfriend had a fellowship in Berlin so we lived there for a year. Berlin was a good place for me to work in the library and research Western classical music.

HL: Did the musical part of the novel develop from your stay in Germany?

MT: I don't know. It gets all interconnected. I started listening to Glenn Gould's recording of the *Goldberg Variations* in Berlin, but I don't know what triggered what. But Berlin was definitely a good place to think about Bach and classical music; libraries there are also vast with a good collection of Chinese literature translated into English. What I had trouble finding in Canada was easy to find in Germany.

HL: Where did you go in China for research?

MT: My base was Shanghai. And from Shanghai I travelled to different places such as Guangxi (廣西) and then to the northwest Gansu (甘肅), but the long period of intense writing was done in Shanghai.

HL: Did you write in the Shanghai Conservatory?

MT: No. But I spent a lot of time there. I walked around and drifted through the buildings, hallways, the practice rooms. The architecture has changed quite a bit since the 1960s but it has this feeling to it, and it's still in the same location. There is a little museum with the conservatory's history. It's a little bit hidden. It has a room specifically about the Cultural Revolution and the musicians who lost their lives.

HL: Is the story of He Luting (賀綠汀) your starting point to conceive *Do Not Say*?

MT: Not really. He was stuck in my mind, but what really interested me was why abstract art forms such as music could be so dangerous. I understood that words can be dangerous. I understood the terrible logic of persecuting writers. Poetry, literature, stories live inside people and put words to rage or beauty and of course to revolutionary desires.

HL: But classical music could be dangerous less because of its abstract form than because to some people it represents Western civilization and promotes Western cultural values.

MT: Yes. But there is also the power of music itself and the artist's desire to create new forms. A government's fear of art is also an acknowledgement of its power, how it can shape desires, shape us, and that it gets inside us in a way that is very difficult for any outside source to control. So on the one hand, music could be representative of a bourgeois sensibility—it could come from a certain class or social order, but at the same time a Beethoven symphony is also a powerful and uncontrollable experience that might show you something, or even expose some imperfections, of our world. That's a very interesting power. It's fascinating to wonder how music is internalized, how it might reveal something about the reality of our life.

HL: Despite this power of music, Mao Zedong's symphony was to convert music to nationalism.

MT: Yes, they had the orchestra and did believe that one could take Western instruments and Western classical music forms and use them to express Chinese selfhood. Music was taken as a tool because in revolutionary times *everything* must serve as a tool. It was considered something that was powerful and therefore something that had to be controlled. During the Cultural Revolution, the Party was very strict about what the orchestra could and couldn't play.

HL: But the musicians in *Do Not Say* still steal some freedom from the music.

MT: Yes, perhaps because one never knows where the music will go. I probably listened to *Goldberg Variations* before in my life, but I can't pinpoint the moment when I listened to it and I suddenly heard it, really heard it in the configuration of my life, my mind, and my feelings, and that intersection with the music at that particular moment led to this book. It's not an understatement to say that *Goldberg Variations* created this book. But why? And how? It seems to me that music has a truth or some form of understanding.

HL: Edward Said related the power of music to its "silence," by which he referred not to the victimized side of silence as being deprived of voice but to the signifying uncertainty of music.[1] "Silence" is a recurring motif in *Do Not Say*. Could you comment on the effects of silence in the novel?

MT: Silence in this novel isn't all negative. There is a silencing or censoring part; and there is also a silence, a space, in which you can think and question. I associate that kind of silence with privacy, private life, a life of the mind, which is very different from the public life which in its most totalitarian form is all volume, all performance, all fitting your words into the accepted structure. When Sparrow imagines that he sees Zhuli, he tells her that the only life is the one in your mind. Zhuli also tries to take refuge in silence when she goes through the denunciation meetings. It's the silence that signals her ending, her death, but she walks towards it as if towards a refuge. For her, at that moment, the silence doesn't need to be one thing or the other. It is what it is.

HL: In the talk "The Field of Sound," which you gave at the Summer Institute in Asian American Studies (SIAAS) in Taiwan,[2] did you mean to say that the opposite side of sound is *not* silence?

MT: That's right. A passage in the essay is about the different kinds of silence. One is where you *choose* not to speak, and one is about solitude, space, or tranquility—all those textures of silence. In a famous description of

Shostakovich denouncing another musician, one observer said that keeping silent would have been the sign of courage. Silence in this context is about not accepting the parameters and not accepting the conditions: refusing to denounce another human being. It could be the most courageous thing. Also, one reason for Sparrow to be able to produce such a true work at the end of his life is partly because he has lived in silence for so long, but it was a silence in which he still hears everything—such as the factories and the loudspeakers, the voices, machines, wind and air, the cadence of life—as music. He understands that music is much more than what he understood it to be when he was younger.

HL: Sparrow has been against the music with titles. When he finally creates music with a title—"The Sun Shines on the People's Square," he argues that the "square" refers not only to Tiananmen Square but also to the various "squares" he has experienced through life. It seems that you want to combine the abstract form of music with something concrete in Sparrow's life. Does the power of music come from this combination?

MT: If we live in a time of political orthodoxies, when there is a political desire to control our private thoughts and desires, maybe the abstract form offers freedom. In the case of Sparrow, abstract art allows different things to be combined. And the combination for him is not only about music, but all those squares or pieces from which he tried to build a life. Each square is part of an ongoing, recurring, emerging shape. His square is so different from creating a brand new human or a brand new Tiananmen Square that is going to hold everything in a social utopia. For Sparrow, the motion towards the square keeps repeating to create abstract forms, bringing different things into contact with each other. His music is brought to life by what he lived, what he saw, and how he pieced them together. The form gives rise to other forms. It's generative. A generative square that keeps shifting as opposed to a solidly defined square which closes around life.

HL: Is Sparrow's philosophy of creation also your philosophy?

MT: Only in the sense that I probably didn't have it until I met Sparrow. I tried to think about how Sparrow would think of it. My own experiences would never have let me have that formulation.

HL: How about Zhuli's idea of having classical musicians (such as Prokofiev and Bach) occupy the spaces of national symbols (such as the Party and Chairman Mao)? Do you also share that idea?

MT: I like Zhuli's idea when she talks about everything as part of an organic structure. For me, she is the most heartbreaking character because she

knows so much but she doesn't have the opportunity to live out how her ideas would grow. Zhuli has a clarity that the other characters don't have. For a long time, Sparrow thinks that he could find a way to remain himself through all the political oppression, but Zhuli knows that this isn't possible.

HL: Does Zhuli know more than other characters because of her family background?

MT: Exactly. Sparrow doesn't think that things could be overturned to that degree but Zhuli knows that everything can change in a moment. And she knows it doesn't matter, not really, what your class background is or what you did or didn't do or what you saw or didn't think. Someone can be made an enemy of the people overnight.

HL: Why did you make Zhuli die so early?

MT: I didn't. When I think through the choices she would make, or the choices she thought were available to her and the level of violence against her, I think that she couldn't accept living on. She is, in temperament, closer to the musicians who took their lives at the Shanghai Conservatory. Such a purity in their love for music—a purity and integrity they couldn't reconcile with the times in which they were living. Zhuli just wouldn't compromise with that kind of degradation, especially the humiliation to women. Sparrow and Kai compromise music: Kai makes music he doesn't believe in and Sparrow doesn't make music at all. But Zhuli couldn't do either of those things.

HL: Did you create Ai-ming as a continuation of Zhuli?

MT: Ai-ming also can't accept certain kinds of hypocrisy. Realistically, she could actually just go on with her life in China after the 1989 demonstrations. She probably would get into Beijing University. I don't know if I consciously created her as a continuation but it seems that this is what she is. And in a way Zhuli and Ai-ming make their choices because of Sparrow. When they see the person they love so much denying so much about himself, they won't relent in their own choices. Were Sparrow a different person, Ai-ming would probably be a different daughter.

HL: When you wrote *Do Not Say*, did you have in mind the increasing popularity of classical music in China?

MT: Not really while I was writing. In my research, I was very interested in Chinese composers who came up in the 1980s. I was interested in what they were thinking and doing. And definitely, when you're at the Shanghai Conservatory, you're surrounded by a younger generation. And when you attend concerts in Shanghai, they're packed with young people and enthusiastic audiences. The concert halls are stunningly full. This phenomenon was at the back of my head. Maybe it reinforced for me

the belief that taking music into yourself, performing music, loving music, is an instinctive and natural expression everywhere. It could be classical music and it could be other music. Music travels. It has this ability then and now.

HL: But classical music in China was also a legacy of missionaries, a tool of imperialism. After the Cultural Revolution, the arrival of renowned musicians such as Isaac Stern and Yehudi Menuhin then made classical music a tool that symbolically bridged China to the modern world.

MT: That's true. But I also think there are many [Chinese] composers who are in real kinship with composers like Tchaikovsky and Beethoven, though less so with Bach. I don't find it surprising that Beethoven speaks to the Chinese society. He was re-envisioning musical form and the Chinese musicians in the 1980s were living in the aftermath of revolution. I also have this feeling that music has a will to move. Music moves to where it's going to be heard. You could almost say that Western classical music is moving away from the Western world where audiences are in decline. It's moving to places where other people hear and feel it. And when people in China stop hearing and feeling it, it will go somewhere else. Same with traditional forms of music. Music almost has its own migration patterns.

HL: Music seems to have the power to escape any confinement or appropriation.

MT: Yes, it's like music has its own DNA and its own desire. It seems to have the power to move in a way that is much more difficult for literature. Literature has to be translated. Literature carries the norms and syntax of its time. Right now, for example, we are less willing to give up our narrative power to an omniscient narrator; we seem to prefer the first-person narrator; we prefer that level of intimacy and subjectivity. Literature is very marked by its era. Music is also marked, of course, but a phrase of music can be picked up by anyone anywhere and re-formulated into something else.

HL: How about the connection between mathematics and music? In *Dogs*, you also wrote passages about brain science. Are you interested in science?

MT: I love science. Up to the age of sixteen, math was effortless for me. I thought I could understand everything about numbers but then, one day, it just stopped. Even so, I still find mathematics fascinating. It's another form of describing the world. It signals a different kind of reality and numbers have another shape and depth.

HL: In *Do Not Say*, Marie initially tries to escape her family history through the abstractness of mathematics, but mathematics instead offers her a way to access her past.

MT: That's right. Marie is gifted in numbers; she is such a good mathematician that she hears and experiences it much like the way Sparrow understands the world through music. For her, mathematics is a world. It's multi-dimensional and she lives inside it. And maybe she is able to tell these stories because mathematics gives her a feeling of freedom. It gives her the kind of solidity that music gives Sparrow.

HL: Is "zero" important in *Do Not Say* because it's the most abstract concept, the most empty number?

MT: Yes, it is. And it's also the most stable one. I was looking at ideas of the X and Y graph, and the idea that everything depends on zero, everything is measured out from zero in all directions. To be minus five you've got to know where zero is and vice versa. So you can almost say that it's the only point that is real in a sense. In *Do Not Say*, everything is so dependent on other things, forward and backward in time. In some way you can't know any of these characters until you know the ones beside them. Everyone's identity is so dependent on each other. When Marie tells the story, the story that is partially missing is her own father's story. Her way of telling his story is to tell the stories of all the people he loved, betrayed, and tried to save. He exists through them.

"Copying" and "Compiling" as Creative Forms

HL: You mentioned elsewhere that *Do Not Say* was inspired by *The Tiananmen Papers* («天安門文件»; 2001).[3] In your novel, characters like Wen the Dreamer or Marie also engage in tasks of copying and compiling. Do you take "copying" and "compiling" as forms of artistic creation?

MT: I conceived "compiling" and "copying" separately. Wen the Dreamer is a copier. He copies in the Book of Records. Marie and Ai-ming are closer to compilers who put pieces and bits together. Copying is an art. You try to write in a style of the other, but your own voice is inextricably present (in this case, in Wen the Dreamer's calligraphy). A copy is more than a copy, and is a meeting of the copier and the originator (who may also have copied). And compilers are those who carry things—almost physically carry them. They literally gather up these bits and pieces, take on the weight, the burden, and carry them from place to place until they exhaust themselves and hope that someone else will pick up those things and keep carrying them. It's interesting, though, that Marie is both, because she gathers all the pieces and also writes new ones.

HL: I wonder how these ideas about "compiling" and "copying" might change our conception of subjectivity in literary creation. If a writer is understood as a

compiler or a copier, writing is to merge oneself into a collectivity. In *Do Not Say*, individual subjectivity seems to give way to kinship.

MT: Yes. It could be that I have some cynicism about the originality and individuality of one author. I think some of the greatest art happens when writers open themselves up to everything that they are not, and allow all those things to play again in a new configuration.

HL: Did you think this way when you started your writing career? Or have you acquired this along the way?

MT: There's a change, maybe in response to me thinking about the art being created now. The things we call original always seem to me to be the children of other things. And maybe the characters in my novel showed me this way of thinking.

HL: I have the feeling that individuality is more emphasized in characters like Janie and Hiroji in *Dogs* than in characters in *Do Not Say*, where characters are happy to merge with others. Big Mother Knife, for example, imagines her body parts as representations of her family members.

MT: This is true. It's also due to the historical conditions in which these characters found themselves. For Janie and Hiroji, it's an atomization. During the Khmer Rouge years, no one could save another person. The brutality of the particular war and genocide they lived through split each person from another. This also happened in China, but in waves over several decades. In *Dogs*, I was also looking for kinship. The two books are in conversation with each other. In some way they're asking how we might choose each time—because mechanisms of violence are not going away. They come back again and again in related forms. The difficult knots at the centre of these books are: how does one choose, how does one live, how does one create and re-create, and how does one *not* become atomized because honestly, it makes perfect sense that, after what they lived through, they would lose faith in other human beings.

HL: In *Do Not Say*, the characters are musicians, and "individuality" or "originality" seems to be problematized in musical performance as performers usually play with each other and on others' work.

MT: Yes. But don't you think that it's strange that in *Do Not Say*—where kinship and the blurring of lines is so important—the characters are actually more defined and individual than any of the characters in my other books? With so much communality and their embrace of certain blurred lines, they actually become clearer of who they are.

HL: Could you explain the mixed ways of naming in *Do Not Say*: some characters are named with pinyin while others are given nicknames like "Sparrow"?

MT: I know this is not a good answer, but I went by instinct—whether the name fits the characters and whether I could visualize the name in pinyin or in transliteration. Sometimes I wanted the image right away, like "Sparrow," "Big Mother Knife," and so on, but for others it was the poetics of the name, the sound. It was a juggling act. If every character was named with pinyin, it would be difficult for some readers because the names mean nothing to them and bring no images to their mind. Also, Marie tells the story. She lives between worlds and she would have access to both systems. She would, on the one hand, be able to see the instant image of "Big Mother Knife" even if she only sees the pinyin, and vice versa. So in some way this [mixture] comes from the fact that Marie is a compiler; she draws from both ways.

HL: How about the three images included in *Do Not Say*?[4] Are there reasons behind the choice of each image?

MT: The short answer is that they're all in Marie's section, and they're parts of her work as a compiler. She's putting together different bits and pieces; some of them would be the music and some of them would be archival images. What I wanted was a sense of the reality of her attempted documentation. The first two images were taken in the places where Marie was in that moment of compiling. The last image is such an iconic image. Such a simple image but it triggered the whole movement, the 1989 Tiananmen demonstrations. All these images are part of Marie's compiling and documentation. It's interesting that you ask this question, because the German publisher very much insisted not to have the images. They didn't think that the images added meaning and I didn't fight them. It's funny that with writing you do certain things by instinct, by your sense of the whole, and of the totality of the ideas you're weaving together.

June Fourth and the Issue of Generations

HL: You said that, when you first conceived *Do Not Say*, you wanted to write about June Fourth. But the novel doesn't reach June Fourth until the last few chapters. Have you intentionally started from somewhere else before pushing the narrative to its core subject?

MT: That's what happened intellectually, in a way. In practice, when I was writing I realized, a few hundred pages in, that I was still a long way from 1989. I had started in 1990 and 1991, and I knew that I would circle back to 1989, but I didn't expect to take so long. I thought that the path would be more direct. But actually, now that I think about it, this is the most direct path I could have taken. I think you have to go through all those doors, all those

political campaigns, all those turns of fortune and fates, before you can really understand what might have been in people's minds on June Fourth.

HL: One of the sources for the Tiananmen part of *Do Not Say* was Ma Jian's *Beijing Coma*.[5] How's your approach to the Tiananmen Square Protests different from Ma's?

MT: I'm a great admirer of Ma Jian. In *Beijing Coma*, he imagined himself into the life of the students; it's a book about the students, who are of a different generation from Ma. He himself left Beijing before June Fourth because his brother had suffered an accident. He thus also writes about the in-between space of remembering, imagining, and creating, but what he wrote in his novel is closer to what he saw and understood first-hand, as a person who knows China intimately. I was inspired by the way he wrote about the students' generation, but I turned the telescope around: his focus is the students and my focus is Sparrow's generation. I wanted to be able to tell Sparrow's story from its beginning to its end. Ma Jian went into the generation that came after him and I entered the generation that came before me. I think these two books are part of each other's worlds, tied together by histories, desires, and impulses that echo and resonate with each other. We usually think about one generation after another, but never get to be pushed back again to an earlier generation like a wave.

HL: *Do Not Say* connects the Cultural Revolution and the Tiananmen Square protests. Is this why Sparrow's perspective is so crucial in the novel?

MT: Yes, it's interesting to see how many revolutionary ideas of the young generation were revolutionary ideas of the past. If we could see how much different generations have in common, we might understand why the wave (of social change, of deep and just revolution) never touches the land—why it keeps failing at the last moment. Each generation thinks that it discovers an idea for the first time. It doesn't heed its connection to other generations.

HL: Talking about the connection of generations, I'm intrigued by your interest in writing about your parents' generation. In comparison, you wrote little about your own generation.

MT: Yes, and when I do, they are like Janie, who is about my age. But even when she is of my generation, I'm more interested in looking outside. It's funny that I don't know how else to be—I don't know how else to live my life or my writing life without thinking about my parents.

HL: In addition to writing about your parents, it seems that you also have the tendency to move away from what you are most familiar with, such as your writing about China and Cambodia.

MT: This moving away, writing about China and Cambodia, is a complicated one, because the histories are close to my family, but not my family history at all. My parents have a fragile connection with China because they were both born outside and speak minority dialects. So it's a moving away into the world.

HL: In *Do Not Say*, you offer subtle details on the side of China but reveal little about what Marie and her mother experience in Canada. Do you have any plan to write more about Canada in the future?

MT: Yes, the next book will be closer to me and to my generation. I am taking everything I have learned. I don't think I could have done this three books ago. I guess I had to know more about the world before I could think about my own life.

HL: You mentioned in a previous interview that some publisher suggested to leave off "the last third" (which is on June Fourth) of *Do Not Say* for it to be published in China.[6] How do you think about this suggestion?

MT: It really fits the form of the book—that readers will get only a part and maybe, one day in the future, they'll find another part. Publishing this way would only be okay for me if it was very clear that the rest of the book had been torn out: it has to end in mid-sentence. It has to be very clear that there's much more to this book that you don't have in your hand. And I would hope that one day the other part will be published in China and be available and will find its way into the readers' lives. I would like this. I would love to see the novel published much like the Book of Records, in its different chapters. This is how history comes to us, in bits and pieces out of order. In some way this would be the best way to publish the book, true to its form.

HL: Finally, about the length of the novel. Your works before *Do Not Say* are much shorter. Since your language is poetic and refined, readers tend to read slowly. Given the length of *Do Not Say*, do you expect your readers to read it slowly or do you want them to speed up?

MT: I want both. This is my experience of reading the Russians. I can read Dostoevsky quickly because his plots and psychology are so gripping that I just want to turn the pages. But I can also read Dostoevsky slowly. Many people came up to me saying that they had read *Do Not Say* twice or even three times, or they had read it once and were going to read it again. As a writer that made me happy because it took me five years to write it, and it takes a reader maybe twenty hours to read it. So I don't mind people reading it twice.

HL: I'll definitely read *Do Not Say* more than one time. Thank you very much.

NOTES

1 Said wrote: "Of all the arts . . . , music which depends on and is sound, is the most silent, the most inaccessible to the kind of mimetic meaning we can get for example from a poem, or a novel or film" (262).
2 A revised version of this talk appears under the title "The Act of Listening" in *The Subject(s) of Human Rights: Crises, Violations, and Asian/American Critique* (2019).
3 See Patterson, Polley, and Thien.
4 The three images are (1) "an overpass that crosses a six-lane thoroughfare" in Hong Kong; (2) "a small columbarium" in a cemetery near the Chinese border; and (3) a photo taken on April 22, 1989, featuring three petitioning students on the Tiananmen Square.
5 See Patterson, Polley, and Thien.
6 See Chen.

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Chris Johnson

Publication

after Artie Gold

In a sense
it is the conflicted desire of each progressive white liberal and
that unpublished thought isn't death
but a fence.
something greener grows somewhere,
you see there are things iconic
taunting our composition, those spider fingers taking on life
of their own, poking six time zones and growing nails larger
than the corpses we'll leave. the abjection is each white splurge
of a page, growing larger through the magic agency of blank
stares at blank pages worrying each black letter will grow into
a likeness of our genitals traced with our non-dominant hand.
there's so much corporeal we can keep it all. my friends say: CJ,
what do these scribbles mean?

Simona Bertacco

Rescaling Robert Kroetsch

A Reading across Communities, Borders, and Practices

> Robert Kroetsch has had a tremendous influence on Canadian writing. Kroetsch's insistence on local pride has been taken up by writers from many parts of Canada—beginning in earnest in the 1970s and continuing to this day; so many scholarly papers have been published about his work (in Canada and in Europe, as well as numerous conferences dedicated to it) that it is difficult to represent their breadth in one volume such as this.
> —Nicole Markotić, *Robert Kroetsch: Essays on His Works*

Thus Nicole Markotić opens her volume on the Canadian literary legacy of Robert Kroetsch, a volume that gathers some of the best critical voices on Kroetsch's influence. Any reader modestly familiar with Kroetsch's literary fame cannot but agree with Markotić's stance. Exploring why Kroetsch may be more famous in Europe—even though he has not influenced European literature—would make for an interesting topic, and would require a study of the funding of Canadian literary studies in European universities, but it is outside the purview of this essay. Instead, reflecting on the possible reasons why Kroetsch is not better known or more influential on American literature is of import here, since so much of Kroetsch's poetry organically aligns with what has been done by poets across the border. However, there is not much American criticism devoted to Kroetsch's contributions to American poetics, and this is unfortunate to say the least. How literature, and poetry in particular, are anthologized and canonized is part and parcel of the problem, of course, and, in Kroetsch's case, a lot of the blame falls on US poetry scholarship. Looking at the American context, Christopher Beach laments the "continued polarization or even balkanization of the poetic field . . . leaving many deserving poets within what [Ron] Silliman calls 'the ranks of the disappeared'" (Beach 8). In the US, Kroetsch can be said to belong to this rank. The "balkanization of the poetic field" mentioned by Beach brings into view the operations in reading in which, as literary critics, we engage, and

the communities that we help establish through our readings. In this paper, I engage with Kroetsch from a comparative perspective that highlights points of connection between different intra- and inter-national intellectual communities and poetic practices.

In *Poetic Community*, Stephen Voyce argues that

> some of the most significant practices in contemporary poetry—projectivism, "nation language," concrete and sound poetries, the "new sentence," aleatoric and constraint writing, even confessional verse—occurred *generatively and collectively*, through a process that involved many poets adapting and transforming a poetics to which they contributed (5, emphasis mine).

Voyce uses a comparative approach to bring together four distinct groups of poets active in different parts of the world in the Cold War years—the Black Mountain College in rural North Carolina, the cosmopolitan Toronto Research Group, the Caribbean Artists Movement between London and the Caribbean, and the Women's Literary Movement between Europe and the US. What is refreshing about Voyce's approach is how the concept of *poetic community* is understood as a *shared practice of poetry* that expresses itself within a specific historical and social milieu, i.e., through readings, journal editing, lectures. He shows how geographically and ideologically distant groups of artists were understanding and practising poetry in very compatible ways between the 1950s and the 1990s, and how their larger communal experience is often made invisible by our common—and institutionalized—ways of reading. Literature scholars traditionally rely on the distinctness of nations and/or languages. That is how we organize literary histories (Italian, English, German, French, etc.), literature anthologies, and course syllabi. In the case of Canadian literature, the language division within the nation marks the separation between francophone and anglophone literatures, and comparative studies of anglophone Canadian and francophone literatures are quite rare. One such study, Caroline Bayard's *The New Poetics in Canada and Québec* (1989), still stands out as one of the most thorough and valuable explorations of poetic forms in twentieth-century Canada and a great model for a Canadian comparative literature. Although Bayard's and Voyce's books are about thirty years apart, they share a comparative approach to reading literary movements horizontally, with a focus on poetic forms rather than national constructs, and therefore prove particularly useful to reconsider a literary icon as complex and multi-voiced as Kroetsch posited at the intersection between different traditions that were extremely generative on both sides of the border and that, collectively, participated in postmodern practices.

Reading Kroetsch as a postmodern writer, as many have done, imposes by default a transnational model of understanding. If, in fact, Kroetsch's works performed an invaluable cultural function to establish a sense of a literary community—Canada- and Prairie-centric—at the same time, his involvement as a critic and a journal editor produced a counter-hermeneutics that set Canadian literature forcefully against the backdrop of world literature. The region Kroetsch is associated with (the Prairies), and the genre that defines his poetic production—the long (or never-ending) long poem—can be seen as North American in a large sense, and the same, in fact, can be said about Kroetsch's critical corpus. Linda Hutcheon famously dubbed Kroetsch "Mr. Canadian Postmodern" for the multisidedness of his intellectual intervention:

> In his novels he has radically problematized the notions of creativity and commentary. . . . In his critical essays Kroetsch deliberately subverts academic convention: They are willfully fragmentary, discontinuous, asystematic, incomplete—and provocative because of this. . . . Kroetsch is at the paradoxical centre of the decentered phenomenon called postmodernism: as novelist, poet, critic, teacher, mentor and clown. (160-62)

In particular, Kroetsch's poetic corpus, for the way in which it organically aligns with the leading poetic movements of his time—from Charles Olson's *field composition* (honoured in the very title of Kroetsch's never-ending long poem), the Black Mountain College teaching and writing experiments, and the West Coast *TISH* experiences, to the formal experimentalism of concrete and conceptual poetries—places him as a seminal cross-border figure in terms of late-twentieth-century poetics in North America.

In this paper I look at three communities I consider essential to understanding Kroetsch's poetry. The first is the cross-border community of North American postmodernism during the Vietnam War years that coalesced around the journal *boundary 2* and its engagement with European theory and political activism. The second group is the Prairie writers community and the network of friends with whom Kroetsch was in constant dialogue throughout his career. And the third is the "transgeographic community" (Beach, 5) of like-minded poets, influenced by Charles Olson, who played an important role in pluralizing the forms and the themes of poetry in North America in the 1960s and 1970s.

Writing about Kroetsch outside of the Canadian national framework represents an obvious challenge for me as a critic, for this is a writer who played a pivotal role in the definition of a Canadian aesthetics from the mid-1960s

throughout the first decade of our century. However, it is an intriguing challenge, as it allows me to re-read Kroetsch against a different background, spelling out connections and alliances that go beyond the Canadian literary framework within which Kroetsch is usually studied. My reading originates from the conviction that the poetry of Robert Kroetsch has not yet received a fair and comprehensive assessment within the larger field of North American poetry studies, and that such an operation is simply overdue.

1. *boundary 2*: A Cross-Border Postmodernism

> [T]he title had its "origins" in the sense of crossing over, of crossing a border into the unknown, or entering into a "period" which was not really a period but which was precipitated by the end of Modernism.
>
> —Bové, "A Conversation with William V. Spanos"

Kroetsch's exposure to poststructuralist theory and his active engagement with the decentering operations of postmodernism would be inconceivable without considering his experience as co-editor of *boundary 2* with William Spanos at SUNY, Binghamton, between 1972 and 1978. *boundary 2: a journal of postmodern literature* was the first literary magazine to use the term *postmodern* in its title. The editors read the word as "a kind of rejection, an attack, an undermining of the aesthetic formalism and conservative politics of the New Criticism" (Bové 21). It was Charles Olson who, in the early 1950s, had started using the term in his writing and lectures at Black Mountain College in North Carolina. Postmodernism for him pointed to the need to debunk the rationalistic grids of liberal humanism in order to recapture the possibility of a pristine experience of the world (Bertens 20). From the oral poetry of Olson, Creeley, Antin, and Rothenberg, a new poetic practice would emerge, a practice in which language ceases being the expression of a transcendent self but expresses the subject's unmediated experience. In the early 1970s in the US, Hans Bertens writes, there developed "a distinctly Heidegerrian postmodernism" (22) that found its philosophical ground in Heidegger and its major mouthpiece in *Boundary 2*.

In those years, Kroetsch and Spanos were both working in the English Department at SUNY, Binghamton. They were "ideologically compatible" (Spanos 188) despite their dissimilar readings and interests: Spanos was drawn to the postwar European existential novel, and especially to the philosophies of Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Sartre, Husserl, and Heidegger; while Kroetsch's interests floated in the realm of the long poem as it had been articulated by Whitman, Williams, Pound, and Stevens in the US, and

was being reshaped by contemporary writers on both sides of the border such as Dorn, Olson, Creeley, Nichol, Marlatt, Bowering, and Mandel. Other important influences on Kroetsch in this period were the Latin American tradition of magic realism, and the writings of two Canadian critics—Marshall McLuhan and Northrop Frye—who spoke of the need to provide Canada with a more secure literary identity. Above all else, however, it was their common engagement with Olson and Beckett that provided the shared ground between the *literary* Kroetsch and the *philosophical* Spanos.

A cursory look at some of the first issues of the journal and at the years in which these topics were explored gives an idea of the groundbreaking project that *boundary 2* represented: *A Symposium* (1972); *Charles Olson: Essays, Reminiscences, Reviews* (1973); *A Special Issue on Contemporary Greek Writing* (1973); *A Canadian Issue* (1974); *The Oral Impulse in Contemporary American Poetry* (1975); *Martin Heidegger and Literature* (1976). It also reveals the main directions the journal was embracing in its early years: on the one hand, a commitment to establishing a dialogue between Canada and US writing, from the open forms of poetry after Williams and Olson to experimental fiction in the works of Barth, Pynchon, and Nabokov; on the other hand, a more international commitment to European theories understood as part of the emancipatory politics of the journal.[1]

Within this framework, *boundary 2*'s Canadian issue, published in 1974, provides an interesting case study for the exploration of the postmodern cross-border community and its importance in shaping Kroetsch's own literary self-consciousness. The Canadian issue of *boundary 2* marked an unprecedented occurrence in US literary history. Kroetsch showed what the border hid in terms of intellectual possibilities by making Canadian literature and criticism visible to the American reading public as having their own specificity and constituting a lively intellectual community. He pointed to a fertile cross-pollination of interests, concerns, and styles, while remaining keenly aware of the differences between the US and the Canadian literary establishments and dominant modes. Thinking in terms of intellectual community provides an ideal angle to understand how this issue worked and what it represented. As a matter of fact, while he figured as the general editor, Kroetsch turned to his colleagues in Canada for the actual editorial work: Eli Mandel oversaw the selection of criticism, Margaret Atwood and Warren Tallman selected the poetry and were listed as guest editors, while the two world-renowned Canadian critics of the time—Frye and McLuhan—were discussed in a section called "Context," their roles

reviewed, respectively, by George Woodcock and Wilfred Watson. The Foreword marked Kroetsch's famous first words as a critic, recording his attempt to locate and define the Canadianness embedded in the works produced by contemporary poets and novelists north of the border: "The country that invented Marshall McLuhan and Northrop Frye did so by not ever being Modern" (*A Canadian Issue* 1). Kroetsch's project to tell a different story of Canadian literature started with this bold statement and would be developed, from that moment onward, in his critical essays.

It is within this context that Robert Kroetsch's creative work assumes its relevance: he used the decentering pull of postmodern theories as "a provocative force" (Pache 67) to push the boundaries between reading/criticism and writing, regionalism, and nationalism, the local and the global. This would not have been possible without the *boundary 2* experience and the affiliation with the postmodern writers and critics around the journal. *boundary 2* was a formative *and* generative experience for Kroetsch. More than that, it constituted one of Kroetsch's intellectual communities that provided him with a comparative framework to establish a dialogue between what Canadian writers and what writers elsewhere were doing. In 1974, he wrote to Spanos:

> There is a danger in too narrow a definition. I suppose I even feel there is a danger in definition itself. *Exploration is the key: not to make boundaries but to cross them.* And as you well know, that involves some desperate risking. . . . (Letter to Spanos, June 12, 1974, emphasis mine).

In the end, if postmodernism identified to Kroetsch and Spanos a global revolutionary movement set to debunk any form of dominant thinking, that "desperate risking" is indeed what Kroetsch would do in his own writing.

2. Postmodern Practices: From the Prairies to the West Coast

> Kroetsch's poetics and his cultural affiliations are of a piece. His abiding love for the local and his respect for contemporary theory prompt him into a body of writing that bears his unmistakable signature and his peculiar brand of prairie postmodernism.
> —Dennis Cooley, *The Home Place: Essays on Robert Kroetsch's Poetry*

Kroetsch's relationships with his fellow Prairie writers is wrought into his long poems, explored in his critical essays and in the many interviews, and well documented in the critical literature about the writer, not to mention the vast body of correspondence between Kroetsch and his friends. Dennis Cooley's reading of Kroetsch's poetry in *The Home Place* provides a brilliant—and loving—study of Kroetsch's poetics hand-in-hand with a

rich and detailed contextualization of how that poetics came into being. Cooley—a lifelong friend and one of the most active members of the Prairie community of writers, artists, and academics Kroetsch belonged to—reads Kroetsch's poetry in light of the writer's progressive uncovering of the Canadian Prairies as *home*. Writing about *Seed Catalogue*, Cooley notes that Kroetsch "provides three different ways of naming 'the home place.' They enact Kroetsch's attempts, in *Seed Catalogue* and elsewhere, to uncover what has been obscured in his world" (138-39).

The Prairies are indeed, as Cooley maintains, the *primary* locale animating Kroetsch's creative energy; however, they are not the *necessary* locale for its reading. Kroetsch was a pivotal figure in the 1970s poetry scene in English-speaking Canada, not just in the Prairies, as he was able to render, through his collected work, the shared existential experience of his generation. As Susan Rudy writes, with his poems *The Ledger* (1975) and *Seed Catalogue* (1977), "Kroetsch redefined the long poem, the work of the poet, and the function of poetry" (115). So, while it is true that the early long poems (*The Stone Hammer Poems*, *The Ledger*, and *Seed Catalogue*) deal with the home place, the tension that generates the desire to write stems from a profound and existential feeling of dislocation, as Dennis Cooley points out. It is not accidental, thus, that the poems forming *Completed Field Notes* find one of their main motifs in the journey; yet the poet's is not a journey of nostalgia for, and return to, a lost home place but rather of meditation on the existential condition of homelessness of the contemporary (North American) poet. In *Completed Field Notes*, home is the place of familiarity of touch and taste, but it is also, intensely, the place where absence manifests itself to the poet's consciousness for the first time. Additionally, home is the place of storytelling, and therefore the place where the poetic vocation of the writer shaped itself. In *The Stone Hammer Poems*, the link to the lost home place is provided by a stone hammer that is used as a paperweight by the writer and that figuratively metamorphoses into the poem being written; in *The Ledger*, it is an old ledger that performs the same function of both localizing the poem and the poet while opening its metaphors to include meditations on history, time, and writing. In "Mile Zero," the operations defining the poetic process are displayed by the layout of the poem: the page on the right contains the central poem, inspired by the trip that the poet is taking through western Canada, while a black arrow moves backward along a diagonal line to the notes about the parts that were erased from the main poem, that is to say, to the traces of the compositional

process contained in the page on the left. The poem that is visible on the page is not only there in words to be read, but it also creates a figurative space to be seen. The lines below are from the left-page poem:

: being some account of a journey through
western Canada in the dead of six nights

I.

I looked at the dust
on the police car hood.
I looked around the horizon.
(Insert here passage on
nature—

try: The sun was blight
enough for the wild rose.
A musky flavour on the milk
foretold the cracked earth …

try: One crow foresaw my fright,
leaned out of the scalding
air, and ate a grasshopper's
warning …

try: A whirlwind of gulls
burned the black field white,
burned white the dark ploughman
and the coming night …)

I AM A SIMPLE POET
I wrote in the dust
On the police car hood. (126)

Kroetsch's reflection on the process of artistic creation and reception provides the connecting ground to other writers and other communities. One author, in particular, is mentioned repeatedly in Kroetsch's writing, criticism, letters, and interviews as marking an inevitable influence on his idea of poetry and of the postmodern intellectual. That unavoidable figure was Charles Olson, the author of "Projective Verse" and *The Maximus Poems*, the rector of Black Mountain College in North Carolina between 1951 and 1956, and one of the first intellectuals to use the term postmodern in his writings and in his lectures to describe a "Heideggerian poetic practice that breaks with the western rationalist tradition and . . . allows a primordial experience of the world" (Bertens 21). If Olson's "Projective Verse" was among the readings shared by Spanos and Kroetsch in their early years, it was his *Maximus Poems* that pointed, for Kroetsch and for many poets

of his generation, to a new way of writing and a new way of being a poet. Interestingly, Kroetsch came to reading the poetries of Charles Olson, Robert Duncan, and Robert Creeley through his conversations with the poets of the *TISH* group in Vancouver, particularly George Bowering and Fred Wah.[2] Pauline Butling describes *TISH: A Poetry Newsletter, Vancouver*, founded in 1961, as "one of the main socio/historical sites for the development of radical poetics in English Canada in the 1960s" ("*TISH*" 49). It was the closest collective, ideologically, to Black Mountain College poetics. The Black Mountain idea of poetry arrived in Canada through Robert Duncan via a series of invited lectures at The University of British Columbia, but also through Donald Allen's anthology *The New American Poetry, 1945-1960*, which Warren Tallman put on his reading list for his course Studies of English Poetry at UBC in 1960-1961. The 1963 summer poetry workshop organized at UBC by Tallman brought the two communities together: Charles Olson, Allen Ginsberg, Denise Levertov, Margaret Avison, Robert Creeley, and Robert Duncan participated as the instructors and many Canadian poets participated in the workshop itself. However, as Eli Mandel points out about the *TISH* mandate: "[T]hey were not poets of American poetics; they were poets of Vancouver" ("Talking West" 29). Along the same line, Kroetsch was quintessentially a Prairie poet, but in the forms through which he turned the Prairies into poetry, he was *not* a Prairie poet, but a North American poet, participating in the "network of multiple, asymmetrical, interconnected nodes" that, as Butling writes ("One Potato" 29), describes the radical poetics field of the 1960s and 1970s.

The wavering between an idea of form, read and learned in Williams, Olson, and Stevens, and the new openings of structure that current poets—from the Toronto Research Group to the *TISH* collective—were showing exerted a major role in Kroetsch's evolution as a writer, and particularly as a poet. What Kroetsch was doing was not only claiming a right to speak as a Canadian Westerner, but also drawing attention to the form, rather than the themes, that writing could assume.

That the whole of Kroetsch's art is conceived—as is the final book that he writes, with the coalescence of his poetry, fiction, and criticism—as a crossbreed book, androgynous in its appropriation of ways and styles from the various literary genres, is one reason for it being called postmodern. The ways in which the author pursues this formal enterprise are many and diverse and explain his polymorphous idea of writing and the many forms that he explored: fiction and non-fiction, (long) poetry, literary criticism and literary

theory, travel writing. Among the techniques used to break away from formal constrictions are the inclusion, explicit or implicit, of other texts; allusion to the socio-cultural contexts outside the book; use of vernacular idiom; deliberate intrusion of nonsense into the poem; abundance of visual play with language, of puns, or hyperbolic and digressive narrative strategies. Thus, Kroetsch's poetic language, growing out of an oblique relation to cultural and literary authorities, works through absence and resistance while it attempts a new language. It is a poetic method that returns continually to the poet himself and to his personal experiences of difference. When he looks for foremothers and forefathers, Kroetsch finds settlers and homesteaders keeping records of their daily activities, and when he looks to foreign models, he reveals his position as a disinherited son of their cultures. And so, he fools around: with words by playing with prefixes, hyphens, suffixes (*un-hide, un-write, muse/if, book-ness*); with genres, like the novel of the West, the impossible autobiography, the never-ending long poem; or with themes like identity—national, regional, sexual—history, place. To what an extent his experience of cultural and poetic dispossession can be read as quintessentially Canadian, or postmodern and transnational, is a question that only a comparative reading of Kroetsch can yield.

Like Olson, Stevens, and Rothenberg, Kroetsch makes place and language the central issues governing the form of his poetry. And, following Olson's model, one perception moves on to another, pulling the reader through a tunnel where words flicker and flash out of assonance and sense, where phrases clip and abandon syntax, voices weave in and out of prosaic statement, and the structure of the single poem falls apart. The final poem, *Completed Field Notes*, is not to be read primarily in isolated sections, but as a simultaneity of twenty instances, the twenty long poems it contains. The lifelong poem—*Completed Field Notes*—becomes, then, a configurative field in which the multiple directions taken by its single elements find a coherence in the potentiality provided by a unified reading.

3. Kroetsch's North American Epic

> This is the problem which any poet who departs from closed form is specially confronted by. And it involves a whole series of new recognitions. From the moment he ventures into FIELD COMPOSITION—puts himself in the open—he can go by no track other than the one the poem under hand declares, for itself. Thus he has to behave, and be, instant by instant, aware of some several forces just now beginning to be examined. (It is much more, for example, this

> push, than simply such a one as Pound put, so wisely, to get us started: "the musical phrase," go by it, boys, rather than by, the metronome.)
> —Charles Olson, "Projective Verse"

> Olson, I think, is the central figure of postmodern poetics. Because of his difficulty, Olson's direct influence has not been very great outside limited circles.
> —Charles Altieri, *Enlarging the Temple*

Kroetsch can be said to have written the postmodern epic for the Canadian Prairies, and the poems composing this epic are all the poem-series included in his *Completed Field Notes*, with *The Hornbooks of Rita K* functioning as the epilogue. As a collective work, *Completed Field Notes* is divided into several sections: "Stone Hammer Poem" makes up the prologue, "Field Notes" occupies the first section, "Advice to My Friends" constitutes the second, and "Country & Western" the third. *The Hornbooks of Rita K* picks up from where the *Completed Field Notes* left off: the collection ends with the author's note containing the long poem's dedication to "Ishtar," the reader "towards whom one, always, writes" (*Completed* 270), and this emphasis on the reader, on the centrality of the experience of reading in poetry, becomes the major motif in the *Hornbooks of Rita K*.

Within the general economy of Kroetsch's epic, each poem sequence marks a specific step in the process of the collective poem, both a continuation of and a disjunction from what has gone on before. There is always a narrative engine in Kroetsch's texts, an urge to tell a story as their central motive, so the poems are all interrelated by the overarching metaphor of the writer-as-archaeologist's field notes, inscribing the names of people, animals, and places in his own text, but also, and well-fitting James Miller's definition of the American epic, "resonant with interrelated images and allusions" (297). The writing process in North America, in one of its regional contexts—the Prairies—is recorded as it happens, and related to texts and authors from other regions and other times in the attempt to write out of the forgetfulness of a post-settler culture. *Seed Catalogue* opens—famously—with these lines: "Start: with an invocation / Invoke—" (25). And on the next page, we read: "A strange muse: forgetfulness" (26). The Prairies are not idealized: they embody absence as an ontological experience. Kroetsch was not alone in his exploration of absence. Robert Creeley, for instance, turns to absence, emptiness, and the void as the generative energy of his poetry: "All I knew or know / Began with this— / Emptiness" (*Pieces* 58). Like many of his contemporaries, Kroetsch seeks to find his identity in the ordinary and familiar objects around him. At the same time, he does not let his readers forget that absence is all around, that his own attempts at a new poetry are:

. . . only a scarred
page, a spoor of wording
a reduction to mere black

and white/a pile of rabbit
turds . . . (*Seed* 33)

The whiteness of the page surrounding the lines reminds us that the void is all around us, as a condition of our living and our self-consciousness. Kroetsch's poetry steals a smile from its readers, but it's a melancholic smile, one that recognizes the ironic distance between the Prairies and what they are not:

> The absence of the Parthenon, not to mention the Cathédrale de Chartres (*Seed* 25)

Typography and semantics are fused like in the absence quotation above: the layout of the lines on the page, the breaking up of the word *Cathédrale*, in French, make it stand out: the familiarity of the Parthenon leads to the partial familiarity of the word cathedral, but the accent and silent *e* at the end of the word make the foreignness of the building—its magnificence, the actual distance from the place of writing—immanent and palpable in the moment of reading. In general terms, the syntax of the poem, in *Completed Field Notes*, is broken through delay, parataxis, free association, erasure, superimposition, wordplay. The line extends in a continuous flow from left margin to right margin, or else, it is broken down, in fragments, the white of the page engulfing the vertical trickling down of words. No metrical convention is followed; the line seems to *just happen* in a certain way, absorbing as it goes maps, dictionary entries, quotations from other poets, letters, scraps of journal articles, ads, tombstone inscriptions.

As one of his later books, *The Hornbooks of Rita K* (2001) marks a culmination of the various techniques that have permeated Kroetsch's poetry from the beginning. In the late 1990s and early 2000s, in fact, several of Kroetsch's early works were republished with editions that recuperated the original mixed media textuality (Bertacco 2009). I have in mind here especially the twin works *The Ledger* and *Seed Catalogue*, published in book format in 1975 and in 1977, which were re-issued, respectively, in 1997 by Brick Books and in 2004 by Red Deer Press. From the *The Stone Hammer* to the *Hornbooks*, we follow the development of Kroetsch's poetic language from the documentary, anecdotal impulse, aimed at locating the place of writing, to the reflection on the trace left behind by writing, collected in the book, and interpreted by the reader.

It is precisely the way in which it marks the act of reading as its central theme that makes this book the epilogue to *Completed Field Notes*. The book plays with the poet's real name—his initials are the same as Rita Kleinhart's—as the supposed author of the hornbooks. Raymond who puts the hornbooks together—whose name begins with R—describes himself as a reader but is actually the author of the book as well as the writer of some of its portions. All of this erases the poetic persona—the I—of lyric poetry. It stages the Author's final disappearance, his Barthesian death, but it also stages the reader as the archivist and as a central figure in the text. By picking up the book, the reader is picking up the hornbook and finds that the hornbook reflects her image like a mirror.

> [hornbook # 4]
> The hornbook is itself a book, but a book one page in length. Framed and wearing a handle, covered in transparent horn, it sets out to fool no one. It says its say. Rita Kleinhart seems not to have got a handle on this realization. What she claimed for her poems was exactly that which they did not provide: the clarity of the exact and solitary and visible page. The framed truth, present and unadorned. Not a page for the turning, no, but rather the poem as relentless as a mirror held in the hand. (*Hornbooks* 24)

What we, as readers, see in the texts is a reflection of ourselves and what we are doing: reading. The return to the materiality of poetry—through the use of another object-poetry in this late collection and through the use of images as part of the poetic composition—is powerful. As a poet, Kroetsch is at his best when he is grounded, when his poems sound different from his essays, when he leaves behind his reflexions on linguistics and archaeology and revels in the elation of naming the world as he sees it. "hornbook #19," which, Raymond informs us, is written on the reverse side of the sheet, does precisely that:

> A patch of scarlet mallow appears in each spring in the *grasses* on the edge of the coulee directly in front of my house. That little patch of orange-red blossoms, *emerging* on a dry, south-facing slope, is one of my reasons for living. (*Hornbooks* 36, emphasis mine)

In these four lines, we find the compositional signature of Kroetsch's poetics: the vision is precise and powerful ("the clarity of the exact"), its value conveyed, in concrete, ordinary language, by the plural of grass at the beginning of the second line. The scarlet of the patch blurs into the orange-red blossoms that

"emerge" despite the unfavourable position in which they are planted (grasses, dry, south-faced). With Altieri we could call this a poetics of immanence. At the same time, the poems make us reflect about the implied limits of our visions; they present us with a poetry of the trace, of a flawed, incomplete, subjective, and decentred vision. Self-effacement and cumulative defacings are processes that happen again and again in Kroetsch's work, and *The Hornbooks of Rita K* is no exception. But the self-destructive process seems to reach its limits, and it might be worth asking why this happens and what it means. As always, with Kroetsch, readings are complicated. And it is with a reflection on reading that I would like to close this essay.

4. Rescaling Robert Kroetsch

> Instead of further dividing history into yet smaller and more precisely delineated epochs, critics might choose to trace practices, mapping generative constellations of authors, groups, social spaces, events, texts, and technologies. If one insists upon the connection between experiments in forms of writing and experiments in forms of living, it is because poetry does.
> —Stephen Voyce, *Poetic Community*

> [hornbook #28]
> A poem is an empty house.
> [Stranger, you must enter, then knock.]
> —Robert Kroetsch, *The Hornbooks of Rita K*

What turns linguistic innovation into a literary event, rather than just a fun game to play (and there indeed is a lot of fooling around in all of Kroetsch's works!), is the event of reading—the moment, that is, in which the reader walks through that back door into Rita's house and reads the stacks of papers that she has left behind and tries to articulate the possibilities of meaning and feeling conveyed by the text. This kind of experience of the literary text is described by Derek Attridge in *The Singularity of Literature* as an invitation to "ideas and emotions, or conceptual possibilities that had hitherto been impossible—impossible because the status quo (cognitive, affective, ethical) depended on their exclusion" (59).

Readers of *The Hornbooks of Rita K* can relate very intensely to this experience of *invitation into the unknown*, as conceptual possibilities are unlocked by the strange way the poem holds together. In reading, we have the responsibility to make new meanings and new feelings happen through our own acts of interpretation. The emphasis falls on our responsibility in the meaning-making process enacted by the act of reading: What are the

changes that Kroetsch brought to poetic form? And what is the best literary framework to read them: a national or a transnational one?

The answer to the first question is straightforward: Kroetsch's texts bring to the page a poetry that does not believe in first times, poetry as abrasively honest about its limitations as a tool of knowledge, but aware of its power to move its readers beyond rational discourse. The second question is still open: Kroetsch's critical and literary legacies are crucial to read Canadian literature, but Kroetsch's poetry also imposes a conversation with other—cross-border—communities to read late-twentieth-century poetry in North America.

NOTES

1 The political strain of the journal was never consistently articulated and it represents one of the main reasons for the *failure* of Spanos and Kroetsch's original project. It is surprising, actually, when we consider the inaugural issues, to see that the editors did not try to limit the political range of thinking about the postmodern of the journal. It is even more surprising to look back at those issues and see no feminist or Black critic represented in the wake of the many liberation movements of the 1960s. In the last editorial piece he wrote for the journal, Spanos admits the failure of *boundary 2* to represent a real "Copernican Revolution" within the intellectual scene in America, and reads it as an effect of the lack of material support on a regular basis which could have won a larger readership. The limited financial resources also imposed a natural resistance to, and a delay in, extending the intellectual horizon of *boundary 2* and thus inhibited the realization of the full potential of the journal. That said, *boundary 2* was able, in its first years of publication, to bring together some of the most fertile minds of the period, whose names range from the critical and theoretical field (Hassan, Altieri, Stimpson, Bloom, Said, Cixous, Starobinski, Barthes) to the literary one (Antin, Rothenberg, Ignatow, Eshleman, Pynchon, Nabokov, Barth, Vonnegut, Barthelme, Robbe-Grillet, Baraka).

2 "It's ironic that I discovered these 'distant allies' by reading the poets of the West Coast of Canada," Kroetsch stated (Miki 124).

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Jake Kennedy

Landscape

I have been asking myself whether natural forms—a tree,
a cloud, a river, a stone, a flower—can be looked at and perceived
as messages.
—John Berger

Shadows are being recalled
by their bodies

there are crows
leaving the trees; allow them

their cronks to distinguish
themselves from dusk

moving as sea-patterns
over the sleeping men

they know that we're heartless:
immensities and vastnesses

made to become wind
moving through a house.

Anna Branach-Kallas

Trauma Plots
Reading Contemporary Canadian First World War Fiction in a Comparative Perspective

(Trans)National Memory and Trauma Paradigms

In the wake of the centenary of the First World War and of recent reassessments of Canada in various theatres of war, it is urgent to reconsider the wide-ranging Canadian contributions to what I refer to as a *transnational trauma paradigm*, by placing this specific legacy of violence in a comparative framework. The purpose of my article is to examine Canadian novels about the First World War published in the past forty years in relation to this transnational paradigm. My contention is that as with much contemporary British, French, Irish, and Australian fiction, the dominant theme of recent Canadian Great War novels is war trauma and its aftermath. This in itself is not a revelation. What is revelatory is how the Canadian works of fiction analyzed below depart from the national metanarrative of sacrifice to include marginalized voices from the war front and the home front, proposing new ways of reading the traumatic impact of the First World War that echo in other national literatures. As Jay Winter and Antoine Prost remind us, "every nation has its own Great War" (193), yet the 1914-1918 conflict was also a global one that radically transformed lives all over the world. Winter and Prost see the future of war studies in comparison, and stress the importance of transcultural dialogues in reinterpreting the conflict (193).[1] It is particularly important at this historical moment to read war studies in transnational contexts in order to bring into relief unexpected overlaps and divergences in the way people all over the globe responded to the war and remember it today.

If, for obvious reasons, Canadian scholars tend to examine this historical and literary tradition in the Canadian context, aiming to identify its distinctive

national characteristics, it is perhaps easier for non-Canadians to place this specific legacy of violence in a comparative framework. By highlighting "connections in dissimilarity" (Rothberg, *Multidirectional* 18), such an approach might also disclose a productive, intercultural dynamic between different national responses to the war at its centenary. The research perspective adopted here is inspired by Astrid Erll's concept of *transcultural, transnational* or *travelling* memory "directed towards mnemonic processes unfolding *across* and *beyond* cultures" (9). In this article, I provide a broad-based overview survey of a number of trends in contemporary Canadian World War I fiction, departing from a notion of national culture conceptualized as an exclusive heritage, to deal with both sites of memory (or *lieux de mémoire*) and travels of memory (*les voyages de mémoire*) (Erll 11). Canadian World War I literature thus becomes a site of memory which engages with the heterogeneous narratives of Canadian memorial heritage, yet which is synchronously traversed and reshaped by the flows of transnational imaginaries.

Historically, the Great War has been seen as a catalyst of Canadianness. For generations of Canadian historians, the capture of the impregnable Vimy Ridge on 9 April 1917, during which four Canadian divisions fought together for the first time, was a foundational battle that shaped modern Canada. Its strategic significance was limited, yet the story of Vimy soon metamorphosed into "the birth of a nation" (Vance, *Maple* 103; Zacharias). As Jonathan F. Vance skillfully demonstrates in *Death So Noble: Memory, Meaning, and the First World War (*40-41), key to Canada's myth of the Great War, shaped in the post-war years, was the idealization of the fallen who gave their lives in a crusade for a righteous cause. The combatants formed a community of sacrifice, which had the power to atone for the sins of the world. With few exceptions, early Canadian war literature contributed to popularizing this idealized vision of war. Vance emphasizes that, although used by the elites to maintain the status quo, the myth primarily fulfilled a consolatory function for a society devastated by war (*Death* 262-67*)*. This metanarrative was not radically challenged until the 1970s, when scholars began to question the strategic triumphs of the Canadian Corps, as well as to explore the wider resonance of the war.[2] At approximately the same time, after at least forty years of near absence in literature, the history of the First World War became a source of inspiration for Canadian writers and playwrights.

The emergence of a significant body of fiction about the First World War at the end of the twentieth century also attracted the attention of Canadian academics. While earlier interpretations were limited to specific literary

works, Timothy Findley's *The Wars* (1977) in particular,[3] Dagmar Novak's *Dubious Glory: The Two World Wars and the Canadian Novel* (2000) placed Canadian war writing in a coherent perspective of historical continuity. Furthermore, two studies published at the war's centenary offer insightful analyses of recent Canadian war writing. In *Landscapes of War and Memory: The Two World Wars in Canadian Literature and the Arts, 1977-2007* (2014), Sherrill Grace examines the spectre of the two global conflicts in Canadian culture by focusing on the role of the contemporary reader as a witness. Grace contends that Findley's *The Wars* had a strong impact on the development of contemporary Great War literature in Canada, as it "established a number of tropes and narrative strategies for remembering and representing that war" (*Landscapes* 11). In her view, several post-1977 Canadian works aim to revise historical records, but also urge the reader to reconsider what it means to be Canadian and human today (*Landscapes* 16). In *Catching the Torch*: *Contemporary Canadian Literary Responses to World War I* (2014), Neta Gordon in turn engages with the transformations of the Canadian myth of the Great War in novels and plays published over the past twenty-five years,

> and the concurrent myth that a number of Canadian values were forged during the events of that war—values such as a sense of duty toward the just cause, a quiet, communal strength, a disinterest in ostentatious personal heroism, and a sense of pride that Canadian soldiers could be counted on to fight while remaining morally committed to mediation and peace (4).

In Gordon's opinion, some Canadian novelists and playwrights radically question the mythical construction of the conflict and expose its horrors, yet synchronously approach it as "a site of cultural progression" (14). Even those Canadian writers who attempt to reinterpret the war from the perspective of marginalized "others" often "celebrate the way the nation came together in grief" (117).

The "return" of the Great War as an important theme in popular culture since the 1970s is not a uniquely Canadian phenomenon. Due to numerous films, television documentaries, books, theatrical plays, and songs, the Great War has become a significant cultural point of reference in Western Europe, North America, and Australia. With time and the changing ethics of memory, many nations tend to reassess the neglected traumas of marginalized social groups and to question the metanarrative of remembrance (Alexander 10-11). By saving the memory of the conflict from oblivion, First World War literary, cinematic, and artistic representations situate the war as a vital component of individual and collective identities.

Significantly, however, although produced in very different cultural contexts and shaped by specific national traditions, these popular representations usually maintain an image of the war as trauma, focusing on the suffering of soldiers and societies (see Wilson 47). As a result, images of mud, craters, and wire, as well as shell-shocked soldiers cowering in the trenches to clamber heroically "over the top," have become part of a transnational memory of the Great War (Sokołowska-Paryż and Löschnigg 7-8).[4]

Yet, the centrality of trauma in recent World War I fiction is also a product of the "wound culture" characteristic of late modernity, what Mark Seltzer calls "the public fascination with torn and opened bodies and torn and opened persons, a collective gathering around shock, trauma, and the wound" (3). Trauma, broadly understood as extreme individual and collective suffering caused by limit events, has become "a privileged site for identity" in contemporary cultural discourses, from fiction and life writing to photography and film (Luckhurst 64). Trauma theory, influenced by Holocaust and post-Vietnam War studies, serves today to explicate earlier and later traumatic histories. Depending on the theoretical school, traumatic memory either is situated beyond conscious recall or, on the contrary, can be retrieved, verbalized, and modified.[5] Consequently, as noted by Roger Luckhurst (79), trauma often engenders a crisis of representation and thus a radical challenge to the capacities of literature, yet at the same time it paradoxically generates retrospective narratives that attempt to verbalize the traumatic past and its sequels in experimental ways. Furthermore, recent trauma narratives can be viewed in the frame of the theories of the ethics of care as proposed by such distinct philosophers as Emmanuel Levinas and Judith Butler, which conceptualize individual and collective identities in terms of vulnerability and interdependence. As a result, according to Susanna Onega and Jean-Michel Ganteau, drawing the reader's attention "to the wound of the Other, or to the Other as wound," the spectacle of trauma creates a community of suffering that redefines humanity as a relational concept (12).

Trauma Plots

Several Canadian novels, such as Findley's *The Wars* (1977), Jane Urquhart's *The Underpainter* (1997), Jack Hodgins' *Broken Ground* (1998), Allan Donaldson's *Maclean* (2005), and Frances Itani's *Deafening* (2003) and *Tell* (2014), approach the First World War as a cataclysmic event and thus contribute to an "intensification of atrocity consciousness" (Luckhurst 89). This concern with psychological wounds characterizes much contemporary

World War I fiction published in other countries as well. The symptomatology of trauma is key, for instance, to British writer Pat Barker's *Regeneration* (1991) and *Another World* (1998). Yet, what distinguishes Donaldson's *Maclean* and Itani's *Tell* from other trauma novels about the First World War is their complex representations of the processes of *acting out*, i.e., the compulsive repetition of the traumatic event, and *working through*, i.e., the disengagement from the traumatic past (see LaCapra 58, 142-43). By using non-linear, interruptive techniques, Itani and Donaldson attempt to illustrate the aporia of traumatic memory and the paralyzing power of flashback. Whereas Itani's *Tell*, through its focus on the veteran's healing and reintegration, can be classified as a "harmonizing narrative," using Dominick LaCapra's terminology (13), Donaldson's *Maclean* examines the spectral power of war, which continues to haunt and disable the protagonist many years after the conflict. Maclean's bitterness and anger caused by the social marginalization of veterans are echoed, perhaps more than in Barker's fiction, in such French novels as Pierre Lemaitre's *Au revoir là-haut* (2013*; The Great Swindle* [2015]) and Gisèle Bienne's *Le cavalier démonté* (2006). Trauma serves in these texts as a vehicle for a critique of biopolitics and the neglect of ex-servicemen in the post-war years, as well as the erasures of collective memory. With detailed attention to specific national contexts of repatriation and reintegration, this historical fiction exposes the failure of the nation-state to assume responsibility for traumatized veterans. Yet, by doing so, it also signals the current transvaluation of the war survivor, who deserves empathy and respect as a powerless, tragic victim.[6] This contrasts with the attitude to ex-servicemen in the post-war years, when especially those suffering from shell shock were often seen with hostility as unsettling reminders of the horrors of the front. Consequently, by exploring the forgotten stories of traumatized veterans, these fictional texts "provide an inroad into how national identities and social memories are shaped" (Montgomery 10).

Itani's *Deafening* and Hodgins' *Broken Ground* in turn explore the problem of survivor guilt, defined by Robert J. Lifton (115-79) as the survivor's identification with the dead and a sense of moral transgression resulting from participation in unjustified slaughter. Itani complements the national war story by giving a voice to a stretcher-bearer, a perspective previously neglected in official accounts of the conflict. As a result, *Deafening* provides a particularly affecting testimony of the emotional pain of medical personnel when confronted with mutilation and mass death at the front. While it is usually the suffering of the wounded that is foregrounded in war literature (Acton and Potter 2), Itani

explores the moral and emotional breakdown of the carer. The extremes of resilience and emotional dyscontrol illustrated in *Deafening* challenge the Canadian cliché of eager acceptance of a war conducted for a higher cause. In this, Itani challenges the shift in public representations of the valour of war. Immersed in a world of suffering and death, Jim, the male protagonist of the novel, experiences a traumatic shock, accompanied by shame for being healthy and unscathed. Witnessing violence shatters not only his own moral integrity, but also his trust in communal bonds and values. Itani's concern with survivor guilt, a category of trauma which emerged as a focus from Holocaust studies and was reconceptualized after the Vietnam War, redefines the ethical crisis of the First World War in ways more familiar, yet disturbing, to contemporary readers.

These ethical dilemmas are broached with exceptional depth in *Broken Ground*, where Hodgins depicts the protagonist's struggle to accept his own culpability for the horrors of war. The novel asks important questions about the impossible necessity of confronting ethical responsibility for the brutality of the war zone, both the violence of others and one's own, when war memories challenge the integrity of the self and survival appears, in Cathy Caruth's terms, "a betrayal into life" (*Literature* 67). The entangled roles of victim and perpetrator, as depicted in the novel, have become important ethical issues at the turn of the twenty-first century in contexts beyond Canada. They are also central in British First World War fiction, for instance Robert Edric's *In Desolate Heaven* (1997) and Louisa Young's *The Heroes' Welcome* (2014).[7] Like Hodgins, Young depicts the veteran's emotional devastation and slow recovery after the loss of his men at the front, while Edric's protagonist is a broken man who punishes himself for the horrors committed at the front and the moral catastrophe caused by the conflict. Although located in very different historical contexts, the three novels explore the brutalization of bodies and minds following the destabilization of the human in the war zone. Hodgins' protagonist is particularly sensitive to the collapse of ethical values at the front and the painful realization that the war did not bring a better world. He is determined to expose the implicit connections between the world of organized violence and middle-class culture. Nevertheless, as Grace points out, Hodgins "explores the postwar failures of Canadian society as much as the endurance and hope that enabled veterans and their families not just to carry on, but to help build the new nation" (*Landscapes* 456). His portrait of the multi-ethnic Returned Soldiers' Settlement on Vancouver Island stresses communal bonds and the veterans'

determination to survive in spite of various adversities. Similarly to Young's novel, while paying tribute to the First World War soldiers and their families, *Broken Ground* shows, moreover, how traumatic memory can become the foundation of community when trauma victims use their alienation to create an ethos that separates them from those who never went to war.

Findley's *The Wars* and Urquhart's *The Underpainter* stand out of the corpus of post-1970 World War I literature by engaging, in the most ambitious ways, with what Roger Luckhurst describes as "the impossible possibility of an aesthetics of trauma" (81). The complex structure of Findley's text, consisting of several levels of narration, including diaries, recordings, transcripts, and historical research, illustrates the difficulties of writing about the war confronted by those who did not experience it directly. The reliance in Findley's novel on sophisticated aesthetic means to convey the evasiveness of the conflict for the post-war generations is shared by masters of French war fiction, such as Claude Simon and Jean Rouaud. Simon in *L'Acacia* (1989; *The Acacia* [1991]) and Rouaud in *Les Champs d'honneur* (1990; *Fields of Glory* [1998]) also employ non-linear structures, narrative fragmentation, and metafictional comments to signal a sense of distance of the 1914-1918 conflict to the narrator's (and the reader's) present. The three novels can be seen as examples of what LaCapra (179) refers to as post-traumatic writing, which highlights the problematic aspect of representation in relation to catastrophic events. The loose, apparently incoherent structure of *The Wars*, which, nevertheless, provides a powerful testimony to the horrors of the front, thematizes the difficulty of comprehending trauma and the process of writing about it. The central protagonist, Robert Ross, appears marked by an excess of knowledge, which remains beyond the possibility of narrativization. This enigmatic figure, maimed and silenced at the end of the novel, becomes an emblematic witness to the atrocities of history, "a history [that] can be grasped only in the very inaccessibility of its occurrence" (Caruth, *Unclaimed* 18). In this way, according to Grace, Findley warns us about the easy acceptance of war myths, particularly that of the birth of Canada in bloodshed and slaughter ("Remembering" 234). Findley exposes the fallacy of colonial ideologies; Robert's ultimate desertion, as well as his radical shift of loyalties, undermines any attempts to give war a coherent meaning. As one of the first novels to question the hegemonic memory of the Great War, *The Wars* has inspired other Canadian writers and can be therefore seen as a *catalyst*, according to the typology of roles played by works of fiction in

the performance of cultural memory proposed by Anne Rigney (351). At the same time, however, although relying on incertitude, inconclusiveness, and contingency, *The Wars* might be paradoxically classified as a *stabilizer* of cultural memory (Rigney 350), as the confrontation of trauma with the limits of representation has become a significant motif of First World War writing and remembrance itself in Canada and beyond.[8]

In Urquhart's *The Underpainter*, the *Erasure* series of paintings, produced by the American protagonist Austin, both enacts and erases the past, thus illustrating the way memory repeats and simultaneously effaces the traumatic event. The particularly complex process of mediation in the novel (see Grace, *Landscapes* 113) signals the opacity of trauma and the ethical problems connected with the representation of the survivor's traumatic experience. Imprisoned in the memories of catastrophe, and struggling against their toxic impact many years after the Armistice, the Canadian protagonists, Augusta and George, function in *The Underpainter* as, applying Caruth's terminology, "self-erasing inscriptions of history" (*Literature* 78). Their desperate efforts to keep the past at bay contrast with the attempts of the fictional artist to recapture their experience and to render, in painting and in writing, the mimetic and anti-mimetic poles of traumatic memory, and thus to simultaneously reveal and conceal the violence of war. Urquhart engages here in a critique of trauma art, which "does not simply supplement the witness's account but manages, in the operation, to annihilate the witness" (Gordon 107). Importantly, *The Wars* and *The Underpainter* radically deny any sense to war, an important departure from the excess of meaning attached to the myth of nation-building in the earlier Canadian imaginary of the 1914-1918 conflict. Both novels produce troubling knowledge about the traumatic past and refuse any sentimental consolation.

Writers such as Findley, Urquhart, and Itani, as well as the less well-known Mary Swan and Michael Poole, have foregrounded in their novels the victimization of women serving during the First World War. Susan R. Grayzel (11) suggests that the image of the home front as a serene, feminized domestic sphere, defined by contrast to the violent front lines, became popular during the 1914-1918 conflict. Such clear divisions helped maintain the illusion of a war waged for the protection of women and children. Propaganda insisted on a radical separation of genders to protect the status quo, yet in reality many women served in the combat zone and many men never left their homes. In Urquhart's *The Underpainter*, Swan's *The Deep* (2002), and Poole's *Rain before Morning* (2006), the lethal impact of war

is depicted from the perspective of female nurses, who are exposed to life-threatening situations and are deeply transformed by the visceral knowledge they acquire at the front. Together with Australian writer Thomas Keneally (*The Daughters of Mars*, 2012) and British writer Louisa Young (*My Dear, I Wanted to Tell You*, 2011), Canadian authors give voice to forgotten heroines of the conflict and contribute to a reconceptualization of the relation between war and gender. By exploring the traumatic impact of war on women, they also question the dominant focus on the emotional wounds suffered by men in war and trauma literature.[9]

The suffering of women at the home front—mothers, wives, fiancées, sweethearts, and sisters of the men fighting at the war front—has been disregarded for a long time in war remembrance, focused on the combat zone and the combatant's experience. However, according to Winter, thinking in a global framework, "the story of family life in wartime is the most powerful vector of transnational history. War tore families apart and reconfigured them in myriad ways. In all societies at war, the pressures on families to adjust to new circumstances differed not in kind, only in degree" (46). The disruption of family life, the intimate tragedies of women separated from their lovers/husbands, and the difficulty of surviving the war have become important topics of World War I fiction and have been movingly explored by writers such as, for instance, Anna Hope (*Wake*, 2014) in Britain, Alice Ferney (*Dans la guerre*, 2003) in France, and Brenda Walker (*The Wing of Night*, 2005) in Australia. Findley in *The Wars*, Urquhart in *The Stone Carvers* (2001), and Itani in *Deafening* supplement this body of women-centred texts by illuminating female war experience in Canada. As Grace points out, Findley's portrait of a suffering mother, who rebels against the savagery of war and inexplicably loses her sight when her son is injured in Europe, challenges the false separation of the fronts and the ethics of war ideologies which required mothers to accept serenely the death of their sons (*Landscapes* 134, 137). The representation of Klara's heart-rending grief after her lover's death in Urquhart's *The Stone Carvers* bears little comparison to any other recent novel about the First World War. Living in a village of German immigrants of whom very few enlisted, Klara is isolated in her pain. She has to censor her sorrow, as she was not married or officially engaged to Eamon and therefore has no right to display her grief. As a result, she suffers from profound dejection, which disconnects her even more from the community. It is only by travelling to France and by working as a stone carver in Vimy that she manages to find consolation. Urquhart reaffirms here

the centrality of the Canadian National Vimy Memorial as the epitome of the nation's grief, yet she also rewrites the national myth by including alternative points of view, such as her heroine's (see Zacharias 128; Fahey 418). In this respect, by disguising her female protagonist as a man to be accepted in the team of stone carvers working on the monument, Urquhart exposes the relation between war art and gender. Pat Barker in *Toby's Room* (2012) also depicts a woman artist who challenges men's exclusive access to the "truth" of war. Both Barker's and Urquhart's female protagonists suffer agonizing pain after the death of their loved ones and they both translate their loss into art—painting (*Toby's Room*) and carving (*The Stone Carvers*). While the art scene was dominated by male artists in the war and post-war years, Barker and Urquhart imagine female figures who reconfigure the substance of war art and, in Urquhart's case, even the texture of a national memorial. In a larger sense, the two novels thus undermine the dichotomy between women as passive grievers and men as inspired artists, and both are important feminist reassessments of gender clichés.[10]

Itani's deaf protagonist Grania is an exceptional figure as a person with a disability, she is particularly vulnerable in a time of war. However, her deafness is also empowering. The parallels Itani draws between Grania, who loses her hearing as a child, and her husband Jim, who is paralyzed by war's deafening noise, highlight the issue of belatedness in the processing of traumatic experience. Itani is careful, however, not to conflate the two traumas, each of them retaining its specific opacity. The title of the novel also implicitly refers to extreme events and our inability to process and comprehend them. Significantly, Grania's experience of exclusion as a person with a disability enables unexpected solidarity with the veterans returning from the front, an ethical and thought-provoking vision of analogies in difference. Moreover, *Deafening* radically questions a dichotomy between military front and home front. The novel depicts a small Canadian community in Ontario devastated by loss and absence. Awaiting news about their loved ones, the female protagonists of the novel experience profound anxiety. Their lives are grim and miserable because of economic privations in wartime Canada, too.[11] In Grania's sister, Tress, Itani explores the distress suffered by women who had to assume responsibility for the men returning from the front. While Grania manages to communicate with Tress' husband, Kenan, her sister is incapable of reconnecting with the injured veteran. The desolation of no man's land is thus transposed into the lives of the protagonists, which become "barren" in the emotional sense, deprived of vitality and hope (Itani, *Deafening* 15).

Post-war readjustment does not only apply to the returning men in Itani's novel, but also to women, who have to face entirely new challenges. For Tress and her husband, the aftermath of the conflict is marked by ceaseless suffering, stress, and bitterness. The war continues to take its toll when Spanish influenza reaches Canada; Grania barely survives, while her beloved grandmother succumbs to the disease. By focusing on female protagonists during the war, both Urquhart and Itani contribute to what Claire Tylee refers to as "an imaginative memory of the First World War which is distinctively women's" (16). Their sacrifice, suffering, and psychological disorders deserve remembrance side by side with the combatant's story—both men and women are *deafened* by war. In this fiction, "trauma is not a category that encompasses death directly, but rather draws our attention to the *survival* of subjects in and beyond sites of violence" (Rothberg, "Preface" xiii). The purpose of such literature is not to portray men and women as "interchangeable" victims (Silverman 14) of the first modern war, but to place their different experiences of suffering in relation to each other, and thus reconceptualize the sequels of extreme violence.

A redefinition of war trauma in terms of emotional and social wounds indirectly related to the battlefield can also be found in French-Canadian World War I fiction. Louis Caron, in *L'Emmitouflé* (1977; *The Draft Dodger* [1980]), and Daniel Poliquin, in *La Kermesse* (2006; *A Secret between Us* [2007]), address the disruption the Conscription Crisis of 1917 caused in French-Canadian communities.[12] Caron's novel retraces in a realistic manner the destiny of two Francophone deserters against a background of persecutions and denunciations in French Canada. Constantly on the run, trying to evade the English-Canadian soldiers by hiding in the woods, Nazaire, the central protagonist, is overwhelmed by an increasing anxiety and sense of alienation. Many years after the war he still suffers from a traumatic disorder. The novel reiterates the French-Canadian martyrology by placing the experience of French Canadians within a broader perspective of ethnic conflicts dividing English and French Canada since the eighteenth century. As to Poliquin, with bitter irony he examines the hypocrisy of both English Canadians and French Canadians during the war. He wonders at the decisions of Francophone volunteers and compares them to other peoples of the British and French Empires who, in the moment of early-twentieth-century crisis, pledged allegiance to the colonizer in spite of the centuries of oppression. The protagonist of the novel, who joins the Princess Pats for materialistic reasons, returns, traumatized, to Canada, only to discover

that he has become an outcast from his home community (see Gordon 150-59; Branach-Kallas and Sadkowski, *Comparing* 113-24). The Canadian historical context is of primary importance in both Caron's and Poliquin's texts, yet the image of war as productive of sharp divisions within the colonized community echoes, for instance, in Irish novels such as *At Swim, Two Boys* (2001) by Jamie O'Neill, *The Canal Bridge* (2005) by Tom Phelan, and *A Long Long Way* (2005) by Sebastian Barry. Such fiction then serves to valorize the war effort of marginalized groups, whose contribution was erased from collective memory due to the dominant, anti-colonial agenda. Their experience of pain can be properly commemorated only today, when it is finally verbalized by new "carriers" (Alexander 10-11) of trauma whose ideological interests differ from the mainstream.

Furthermore, postcolonial World War I fiction might prove particularly effective in illustrating Cathy Caruth's famous statement that trauma has the potential to bridge gaps between different cultural experiences ("Trauma" 11). This ethical promise is aptly realized in *Three Day Road* (2005), in which Joseph Boyden reinterprets the Canadian war story from the perspective of two Indigenous protagonists. He thus pays tribute to a group mainly absent from the collective imaginary. The novel juxtaposes the story of Cree snipers, Xavier and Elijah, with a plot centred on Aunt Niska, which places European colonization of North America in a historical perspective. In this way, Boyden draws thought-provoking parallels between the First World War front lines and the trauma of genocide confronted by First Nations in Canada. The war appears in the novel as the apogee of colonial violence, a culmination of the mass violence used so far by European colonizers in relation to non-European peoples. Boyden thus contrasts the European conception of trauma as a reaction to a single stressor or event with trauma conceptualized as structural violence and quotidian oppression (see Craps 49). Moreover, the process of witnessing is complicated in the novel by the narrator-protagonist's alterity and the cultural shock he suffers when confronted with a system of values different from his own. Several times in *Three Day Road*, Xavier contrasts the world of white soldiers, in which human death is stripped of dignity, with his own culture, in which even acts of violence towards animals require complex rituals. Deeply traumatized by the war, he becomes an unwilling witness, confronted with the necessity to testify from inside his own annihilation.[13] The spiritual figure of the Windigo functions here as a metaphor of the transformation of soldiers into bloodthirsty beasts. While it is possible to interpret the protagonists' mental wounds in

reference to Western trauma theory, the novel also depicts non-Western strategies of coping with trauma, such as the sweat lodge ritual or Niska's healing narrative. Crosscutting colonial war memories have been explored in other national contexts, e.g., in Pat Barker's *The Ghost Road* (1995) and J.-M. G. Le Clézio's *Le Chercheur d'or* (1985; *The Prospector* [1993]), yet *Three Day Road* remains a particularly powerful vision of the entanglement of apparently distant histories in the context of the First World War.

Conclusion: Rescaling Canadian Literature

The Great War appears a privileged point of reference in the Canadian "wound culture," which inspires reflection on the trauma of the past but also addresses present concerns, proposing alternative values and identities. The literary exploration of the legacy of the 1914-1918 conflict in Canada signals perhaps more openness, in comparison with other national literatures, to the inclusion of multicultural and other marginalized voices. There are more women in Canadian contemporary Great War fiction than in contemporary French and Australian war writing, and the voice of Itani's disabled female protagonist remains unique. The dialogical ethics of trauma, which illuminates "other" traumatic experiences and disparate responses to limit events, seems a distinctive feature of contemporary Canadian World War I literature, which thus acquires the power to "broaden the realm of social understanding and sympathy" (Alexander 24). Sherrill Grace (*Landscapes* 45) and Neta Gordon (5) are certainly right in suggesting that the sacrificial narrative, with its powerful affective potential, occupies a special place in Canadian First World War fiction. Nonetheless, the exploration of traumatic aftermath reconfigures the war in terms of its seminal effects—disastrous, transformative, and often unspeakable—sustained by individuals, society, and nation. The focus on shattered selves/communities, as well as the critique of the nation-state, represents a most radical departure from the earlier efforts to "confer meaning on the meaninglessness of war" (Gana 78). By resisting emotional closure, Canadian trauma plots ultimately situate the Great War as an extreme event that resists fixed interpretation.

Although the war has not produced identical responses in Canada, France, Britain, Ireland, and Australia, certain points of convergence between cultures, which "share a common, if unequal, history" (Rothberg, *Multidirectional* 313), prove, in my view, illuminating, too. As Ross J. Wilson argues, trauma "provides a means for contemporary populations to experience and feel the events of the First World War as a continuing disturbance" (55). Contemporary trauma

plots seem to offer a paradigm for conceptualizing extreme forms of violence for generations that have lost any direct, familial connection with the first global conflict. The question of historical accuracy is less important here, however, than literature's capacity to produce an affective response in the reader. It is true that the global "wound culture" is saturated by communalities of trauma, at the cost of its trivialization. Nevertheless, the novels mentioned above challenge us to rethink our settled assumptions about war, the boundaries of the human, and remembrance of catastrophic events. In thought-provoking ways, they reconceptualize the meanings of trauma itself, "involving dislocation of subjects, histories, and cultures" (Rothberg, "Preface" xii).

Reading Canadian WWI literature within the context of transcultural overlaps may provide an important framework through which to approach the rescaling of Canadian literature. A transnational perspective complicates the notion of "single memory cultures," questioning territorial and temporal lenses we impose upon the complexities of remembering (Erll 8). The First World War appears a shared site of memory, which encourages us to look beyond established assumptions and methodologies and to create new interpretations, displacing earlier ones. If memory "travels," as demonstrated above, it does so in response to local and global transformations, and "fluid negotiation[s] between the desires of the present and the legacies of the past" (Olick 159). Comparative perspectives on the Great War are usually Eurocentric, focused on the French-British or German-British contexts. Here it is important to see that Canadian novels also inscribe themselves within a transnational cultural tradition, which they supplement with their own (re)visions.[14] Reading Canadian First World War fiction in a comparative perspective establishes a dialogue between the local and the global, and shows how Canadian trauma plots respond to, and synchronously reconfigure, the ethics and aesthetics of contemporary transnational Great War literature.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This research was supported by grant DEC–2013/11/B/HS2/02871 from the Polish National Science Centre (Narodowe Centrum Nauki).

NOTES

1 The transnational framework seems more applicable to the First World War than the remembrance of other conflicts, starting with the Second World War. See Whitehead 148-49.

2 See Gordon (7-12) and Grace (*Landscapes* 11, 23, 26) for discussion of the most important academic works on Canadian military art and culture. Note that the return of the war

as an important theme in fiction coincided with the Vietnam War and a postmodern questioning of Canadian national metanarratives.

3 Because of lack of space, I cannot mention all of them here. Most inspiring in my case were studies by Diana Brydon, Anne Geddes Bailey, and Peter Webb. It is also important to acknowledge the special issue of *Canadian Literature* (no. 91, 1981) devoted to Findley's *The Wars*. Attempts to analyze early Canadian World War I literature in a transnational perspective were made, for example, by Evelyn Cobley and Colin Hill.

4 In spite of the efforts of revisionist historians, particularly in Britain, who deplore the misrepresentations of the conflict popularized in fiction (Wilson 43-45; Bond 63-82).

5 For a history of the concept of trauma, see Luckhurst 19-76.

6 This shift in the approach to war survivors is mostly due to the works of Robert J. Lifton and Judith Lewis Herman after the Vietnam War. See Luckhurst 62-65.

7 For a detailed comparative analysis of *Broken Ground* with these two British novels, see Branach-Kallas and Sadkowski, *Comparing* 88-134.

8 When discussing the roles played by fiction in the maintenance of cultural memory, Ann Rigney places Erich Maria Remarque's *All Quiet on the Western Front* (1929) in the latter category, claiming that it has provided "a cultural framework for later recollections of the First World War" (350). See Geddes Bailey and my "Narratives" for a discussion of the critique of imperialism in *The Wars*.

9 On "the implicit gendering" of trauma, see Kaplan 24-41.

10 For a broader comparative reading of women's trauma in Canadian, French, and British fiction, including Itani's *Deafening*, see Branach-Kallas and Sadkowski's *Comparing Grief* (52-87; 137-56).

11 See Branach-Kallas and Sadkowski, "Sharing," for a discussion of the representation of the home front in *Deafening*.

12 The remembrance of World War I in French Canada radically departs from the English-Canadian emphasis on glory and nation-building. The Conscription Crisis deepened dramatically the gap between Anglophones and Francophones, and the war generated further tensions between the two groups. As a result, the number of literary responses to the conflict by French Canadians is limited (see Djebabla-Brun).

13 See Felman for an insightful discussion of the witness surrounded by death. I have consciously decided not to address the claims of cultural appropriation that have been made about Joseph Boyden here as my focus is on the thematics of the novel rather than authorial identity. A full and deep discussion of the complex topic of cultural appropriation is not possible here.

14 Findley's novel was published in the Penguin Modern Classics series, while Urquhart's *The Stone Carvers* was longlisted for the Booker Prize. Both novels have been translated into French and other languages. Itani's *Deafening* has become an international bestseller, and has been translated into Polish as well.

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John Donlan

The Muscle Motor Molecule Myosin

Smaller than the wavelength of light
like a drunk walking
a length of pipe, myosin staggers battered
by jet-fast random atoms

each raised leg
flung into all
possible positions
in chaos-driven steps

until one fits and locks;
work gets done;
heat-maddened water spins CANDUs;
I stumble into poetry;

house finches sing
delirious with lust without a plan
feathered heads are turned and hearts
are lifted and again it's spring.

Ana María Fraile-Marcos

"Who's going to look after the river?"

Water and the Ethics of Care in Thomas King's *The Back of the Turtle*

> [W]ater teaches us about an ethics of care and response.
> —Cecilia Chen, Janine MacLeod, and Astrida Neimanis, *Thinking with Water*

Water, a symbol of life in many contexts and cultures, is a recurring theme in Thomas King's writing.[1] Among his most prominent musings on how humans currently relate to water are his novels *Green Grass, Running Water* (1993), nominated for a Governor General's Award, and *The Back of the Turtle* (2014), which won the Governor General's Award for English-language fiction in 2014. The latter provides an opportunity to reflect on today's environmental destruction caused by human beings, and the various discourses supporting or countering it. Although there has as yet been little scholarly response to *The Back of the Turtle*, the first reviews and articles readily identify the novel as a cautionary environmental tale. Shoshannah Ganz, for instance, reads the novel for the toxic discourse/narratives embedded in it (5). In a forthcoming essay, Susie O'Brien focuses on the function of storytelling in King's novel to map two contending versions of resilience that emerge from current responses to devastation, namely, a dominant version based on "devotion to self-preservation with conviction in the inevitability of capitalist resource exploitation" (n.p.), and an alternative model rooted in Indigenous cultures supporting the notion that human beings' adaptive capacity depends on the health of the land. These examples point to the differential effects of contrasting anthropocentric and ecocentric worldviews on natural and social ecologies in King's fiction.

This article aims to engage in and extend these conversations by focusing on water, a central trope in *The Back of the Turtle* affecting the social,

economic, and natural ecosystems portrayed in the novel. I contend that this approach provides an opportunity for placing Indigenous and Western epistemologies into a fruitful dialogue that contests the hegemonic ideology of modern progress at the core of neo-liberal global capitalism and its extractive techniques. In particular, I am interested in aligning a feminist ethics of care with Indigenous relational thinking to highlight the latter's relevance for the exploration of alternative ways of being and doing in the world that respect, nurture, and foster social and natural ecological balance.

I find inspiration for such a reading of the novel in the combination of two key notions. On the one hand, I loosely borrow the metaphor of diffraction from the works of Donna Haraway and Karen Barad to signify "another kind of critical consciousness" that records "the history of interaction, interference, reinforcement, difference" (Haraway, *Modest_Witness* 273). As Barad explains,

> Diffraction, using quantum physics, is not just a matter of interference, but of entanglement, an ethico-onto-epistemological matter. This difference is very important. It underlines the fact that knowing is a direct material engagement, a cutting together-apart, where cuts do violence but also open up and rework the agential conditions of possibility ("Matter Feels" 5).

Further, diffraction consists of "the spreading of waves around obstacles. . . . The phenomenon is the result of interference (i.e., when waves are superimposed, they may reinforce or cancel each other out)" ("Diffraction"). Interference, therefore, also becomes a central notion in my reading of King's novel. In particular, I draw on its meaning regarding reciprocal actions of overlapping waves that "augment, diminish, or otherwise affect one another" ("Interfere") to explore the possibility of aligning and allying various distinct epistemologies emerging from Indigenous cultures, Western feminisms, and environmental theories, thereby expanding their socio-political effect.

Concurrently, I draw on the notion of "Blue Ecology," an ecological philosophy propounded by Gitxsan scholar Michael Blackstock, "interweaving First Nations and Western thought that acknowledges fresh and salt water's essential rhythmical life spirit and central functional role in generating, sustaining, receiving and ultimately unifying life on Earth Mother" (Blackstock 43).[2] Blackstock's theory, I would like to argue, is profoundly diffractive: by underlining the interference of Indigenous and Western knowledges, it highlights their mutual benefit. Thus, Blackstock claims that "Blue Ecology does not jettison the great work of modern ecology; however, it does reshape its foundation and opens up new paths of

inquiry. This new theory is meant to be a companion because it augments existing Western science hydrology rather than displacing this knowledge" (43). By applying to my reading of *The Back of the Turtle* the diffractive perspectives found in feminist new materialism and inherent to Blue Ecology, I aim to reveal the kinds of violence and possibilities entailed when the waves—metaphorically speaking—of the various systems of knowing interfere or overlap, sometimes cancelling one another out, sometimes magnifying each other.

My discussion of King's novel is divided into two sections. The first section provides a critique of an approach to water derived from the discourse on modern "progress," as pervasive in the current logic of global neo-liberal capitalism. The second section attempts a *diffractive* reading that disturbs the epistemological and ethical binaries characteristic of modern humanist tradition by underlining the intersections, interferences, and entanglements between Indigenous epistemologies and the ethics of (feminist) care.

I. "Modern Water" and Western Epistemology

The advent of the Western quest for progress based on the exaltation of reason and science has brought about a shift from respect and reverence for water as a life-giving force (Blackstock 44) to its consideration as an inanimate fluid to be disposed of as needed. Thus, understanding water in scientific terms as an "abstract, isomorphic, measurable quantity" reducible to the formula H_2O (14), the anthropocentric Western imaginary deterritorializes water. As a result, water is rendered "placeless" (18), and detached from its dependent ecosystems. The geographer Jamie Linton uses the terms "modern water" and "global water" to describe this "dominant, or natural, way of knowing or relating to water, originating in Western Europe and North America, and operating on a global scale by the later part of the twentieth century" (qtd. in Neimanis 18). The feminist scholar Astrida Neimanis also draws attention to this epistemological turn by referring to "Anthropocene water" (Neimanis 4).

Unsurprisingly, the abstraction, deterritorialization, and management of water under the paradigm of modernity is intrinsically linked to the history of Western colonization and the oppression of Indigenous peoples that went hand-in-hand with the creation of new nation-states and the legislation legitimizing them. In the case of Canada, the on-going centrality of the control of water underpinning the country's development and sovereignty continues to have an impact upon Indigenous lives through laws such as

the Indian Act, the Navigation Protection Act (former Navigable Waters Protection Act), and the Environmental Assessment Act. Accordingly, water lies at the core of Indigenous land claims and activism.[3]

In King's novel, the allusion to a Hamm's Beer commercial (*Turtle* 197) illustrates the popular commodification of both water and Indigenous culture. The advertisement draws on Charles Wakefield Cadman's well-known 1909 song "From the Land of the Sky-Blue Water," whose lyrics (by Nelle Richmond Eberhart) are a translation and commodification of an Omaha love song. Following this tradition, the modern paradigm that places the irresponsible exploitation of natural resources at the centre of progress is best illustrated in King's novel by the transnational agribusiness conglomerate called Domidion and its successful CEO, Dorian Asher. Domidion's commodification of water is evident upon entering the business of bottled water (441). However, the dire consequences of the modern abstraction of water are most noticeable when a tailings pond at Domidion's oilsands facility in Alberta gives way, dumping thousands of gallons of toxic sludge into the Athabasca River (275). Rejecting Domidion's responsibility and accountability, Dorian cynically explains that "[t]he modern world runs on energy" (425), that "the occasional spill is the price we pay for cheap energy" (305), and that causing natural disasters is simply the bill to be paid for guaranteeing "the security of the nation and the protection of our children's future" (425). The fallacy of the discourse on fossil fuels as the only source of energy guaranteeing progress dovetails that of water's infinite capacity to renew itself:

> Nothing to be done about the spills. Shit happens. It would happen again. The Athabasca would shove the toxins into the Mackenzie, and the Mackenzie would dump everything into the Arctic. . . . The river would eventually clean itself. That's what rivers did. (303)

This view on water is at odds with Barad's notion of "response-ability," that is, the understanding that agency is "about the possibilities of mutual response . . . about possibilities for worldly re-configurings" ("Matter feels" 8). Shunning the response-ability characteristic of such ethics of care, Dorian represents the moral blindness and indifference that come with having no attachment to place and prompt the destruction of the kinships that sustain the balance of natural and human ecosystems necessary for the well-being and survival of all.

Significantly, this attitude towards water parallels the corporation's commodification of history and its callous insensitivity towards the dire

consequences of colonization for Indigenous peoples. Thus, Domidion pays lip service to First Nations by setting its world headquarters at Tecumseh Plaza in Toronto. The Plaza's name memorializes the Shawnee warrior who organized an Indian confederation to oppose Euro-American expansion and was killed in the War of 1812 after the British betrayed him (16). However, Domidion's abstraction of water and disregard for the land involve also the disregard for and abuse of Indigenous peoples. Hence, when Domidion's spillages begin to make Indigenous people sick, Dorian cunningly plays on the legacy of settler prejudice against First Nations people and the general public's apathy regarding environmental issues: "Cancel a favourite television show. Slap another tax on cigarettes. Stop serving beer at baseball and hockey games. That was serious. Spoil a river somewhere in Humdrum, Alberta? Good luck getting Norm off the sofa" (422). When it becomes apparent that most of the people dying in the area affected by Domidion's spillage belong to Indigenous communities, Dorian carries his cynicism to the extreme of blaming Indigenous peoples for their dreadful situation, suggesting that it is "difficult to determine whether the additional deaths are the result of the spill or lifestyle" (437) given their "alcoholism, drug use, and irresponsible behaviour" (438). This illustration of "ecological imperialism" (Huggan and Tiffin 4) and environmental racism underlines King's pervasive representation of a connection between the careless exploitation of nature and the oppression of Indigenous people (Curtin 145).

Whereas Dorian stands for a vision of modern progress dominated by the callous anthropocentrism of current global neo-liberal capitalism, Gabriel Quinn, a young Indigenous scientist from Lethbridge, Alberta, working in Toronto as Domidion's Head of Biological Oversight, embodies the conflicting tensions between Western and Indigenous ethical epistemologies. At the beginning of the novel, Gabriel has come to recognize his arrogance and his error in unquestionably believing in the ethics and value of scientific knowledge. His scientific hubris makes him complicit with Domidion's irresponsible behaviour and unethical response to the many environmental crises the company has triggered over the years. In particular, Gabriel feels responsible for the destruction brought about by a powerful defoliant product known as GreenSweep, which he helped to develop for Domidion. Used to clear the land in order to lay an oil pipeline, the condensed herbicide reached the Kali Creek watershed, and the poison spread quickly all over the Samaritan Bay area. As a result, it caused a massive environmental crisis and an unprecedented human tragedy. The Smoke River reserve was particularly

affected, becoming a ghost town after most of its residents died—including Gabriel's own mother, sister, and nephew—and after the survivors were forcibly evacuated to distant towns. The intrinsic interconnections between the land, water, and all living beings become evident, at the same time as the author highlights the disconnection of global economics and Western knowledge from any sense of responsibility, or even a connection to place. Distraught by the belated realization that his research has been abused by global corporations such as Domidion, whose priority is to achieve power no matter what, Gabriel wonders, "How had he come to such a fantasy, that there was a benign purity in scientific inquiry?" (446). His guilt leads him to quit his job without notice and to attempt to commit suicide in the polluted waters of Samaritan Bay. However, he understands over the course of the novel that helping to rebuild the connections that may restore the socio-environmental ecosystem is a better way of taking responsibility for his actions than seeking atonement through self-destruction.

As the examples of Gabriel and Dorian indicate, the adoption of a Western knowledge paradigm that abstracts water from its place-based relations destroys the fabric of life. In terms of the watery metaphor of diffraction, it looks as if the interference between the waves of modern Western knowledge and Indigenous epistemologies cancel out the latter, exerting both material and epistemic violence on Indigenous peoples. However, approaching King's novel through a feminist ethics of care might help us reconsider ecological relations at the heart of some Indigenous modes of thinking.

II. Reading Indigenous and Western Epistemologies Diffractively

In contrast to the approach characteristic of hegemonic modern epistemology, Indigenous thinking from Turtle Island—otherwise known as North America—often emphasizes the intrinsic connectivity and interdependency between human beings and Earth. Paradigmatic of this relational ontology is the Haudenosaunee creation story "The Woman Who Fell from the Sky," which runs as a leitmotif throughout *The Back of the Turtle*.[4] In King's version of the story, a pregnant woman falls from the sky "through time and space" (King, *Turtle* 224) onto a small blue dot of water that happened to be the Earth. She is rescued by the birds and aquatic creatures inhabiting it, and placed on the back of a turtle for lack of any other available dry land. The animals dive to the bottom until one of them manages to gather some soil in which to plant the seeds the woman had brought with her in her fall, thus guaranteeing her survival and that of the

left- and right-handed twins she gives birth to, who represent the balance between order and chaos, creation and destruction. The Nishnaabeg writer and activist Leanne Betasamosake Simpson explains that the collaborative ethics involved in this story demand that all accept "the responsibility to get off the log and dive down no matter how hard it is and search around for that dirt" (Klein 9). This, to her, is "profound and transformative" (9), as it is in stark contrast to the individualism that characterizes the liberal and Christian paradigms. Comparing the Sky Woman story with the Biblical creation story in *The Truth About Stories,* King explains that "the elements in Genesis create a particular universe governed by a series of hierarchies—God, man, animals, plants—that celebrate law, order, and good government, while in our Native story, the universe is governed by a series of co-operations—Charm, the Twins, animals, humans—that celebrate equality and balance" (23-24). Whereas creation is "a solitary, individual act" in the Bible, in the Haudenosaunee story "creation is a shared activity" (24); while the world begins in harmony and slides toward chaos in the Bible, in the Indigenous story it is the other way around. The former describes a "world marked by competition" and the latter, "a world determined by cooperation" (25). King ends up wondering whether a different world might have been created out of the Indigenous story that was marginalized by hegemonic Western culture.

Generally, Western knowledge tends to marginalize Indigenous epistemologies that foreground relationality. However, setting feminist care ethics that contest Western thinking paradigms side by side with Indigenous thinking not only underlines their common focus on the relationality and entanglement between humans and non-humans, but may help Western readers to engage and understand the value of Indigenous stories and ways of knowing. Reading these distinct epistemological traditions diffractively "through one another" (Barad, *Meeting* 30) highlights, for instance, the fact that Barad's notion of "agential realism" interferes with traditional Indigenous notions about the agency of water and the land, augmenting the reader's awareness of it. While for Barad "agential realism" is based on the mutuality of "response-ability," and the understanding that "[i]t is an enactment. And it enlists, if you will, 'non-humans' as well as 'humans'" ("Matter feels" 8), for Lee Maracle (Stó:lō), "The earth is not a stupid insensitive lump floating numbly throughout space to be conquered, pillaged, and plundered at will, but rather an intelligent being with its own journey, its own way of resolving illness within itself" (*Memory* 146).

Anishinaabe scholar and activist Deborah McGregor reiterates the idea that from an Indigenous perspective water is "a relation," "a living spiritual being with its own responsibilities to fulfil," and so we "do not have the right to interfere with water's duties to the rest of Creation" (37-38). Maracle similarly emphasizes water's agency and its "duty by all the living beings" ("Water" 34) when she argues,

> *We do not own the water, the water owns itself. We are responsible for ensuring that we do not damage the water. We do not have an absolute right to use and abuse the water; we must take care of the water and ensure that we have a good relationship with it. This relationship is based on mutual respect.* (37, emphasis original).

For Maracle, water lies at the heart of her cosmogony, as it certainly does in King's broad literary corpus.

Moreover, the interference between Indigenous and Western feminist ethics of care enhances women's agency as caretakers of the environment, inasmuch as women, and more specifically the mother figure, stand up for the planet and the healthy relationships that sustain it. In Indigenous contexts, the Earth is often seen "as a woman" (Maracle, *Memory* 146), and women acquire certain responsibilities related to the preservation of the environment. The Nishnaabe, for example, consider women "The Keepers of the Water" or "The Carriers of the Water"[5] due to their ability to bring forth life. Nishnaabe-kwewag Elder Shirley Williams explains,

> Woman is given the responsibility of looking after the water because it is the Mother Earth, it is the woman. The woman is the Mother Earth and through the Mother Earth she has the rivers and the lakes, that's her bloodline. We in turn because we are women we are given that responsibility to help her, to clean her by praying and singing and to help her to clean herself. (qtd. in Bédard 97)

Williams' words reinforce the fictional Dorian's belief in water's power to clean itself in King's novel. However, contrary to Dorian and the profit-oriented epistemology he represents, Williams does not justify human disregard for nature on the premise of nature's resilience and capacity for renewal, but highlights human responsibility and cooperation in the process of regeneration. More specifically, Williams underlines women's responsibility for nature.

In *The Back of the Turtle,* Mara Reid embodies the dovetailing of these discursive traditions, as she faces the challenges to fulfill her foremothers' cultural mandate to be a caregiver while seeking her own personal realization as a female Indigenous individual living in a society dominated

by Western ideologies and values. From an early age, Mara has struggled with the consequences of colonization and the acculturation of her people in Samaritan Bay. In a passage that features Mara in her last year of high school, she pays her respects to the river, an old ritual her mother and grandmother had passed on to her. Like them, she begins each day "standing on the bank, touching the water, sprinkling tobacco on the current. It was a reminder of the relationship that human beings had with the world" (45). Even if Mara does not articulate the purpose of this ritual act, the narrative voice explains it in a way that is reminiscent of María Puig de la Bellacasa's take on feminist materialism through the notions of *caring thinking* and *knowing as touch*. Thus, this episode brings up a neglected sensorial, haptic way of knowledge that takes into account the ambivalences resulting from "an intensification of involvement and proximity" (19). Mara had described this ceremony in an English class essay about her family, receiving an A. However, her teacher's question at the bottom of the last page, "Is this the way Indian people send prayers to their water god?" (45), puzzles her. Mara's mother and grandmother are also perplexed by the teacher's question—"'Didn't know we had a water god'" (45). Rather than a god, for Mara and her family, the river is treated as a relation, an element to respect and care for as an interdependent equal. Mara's explanation to her teacher that "the women in her family had always gone to the river at dawn to lay tobacco on the water. It wasn't a ritual or a ceremony, so much as it was a long-standing custom, a way of welcoming the day" (46), eschews exoticization and challenges her teacher's expectations. As a result, Mara's marks for the rest of the year do not rise above B-pluses.

Besides signalling the ongoing processes of Eurocentric colonialism, this episode suggests a situated knowledge based on material-embodied relationality expressed through touch. Touching the water becomes a sensorial metaphor for the connection between humans and other-than-human entities that eschews the abstractions of dominant epistemologies embedded in the visions of progress represented by either Gabriel and his faith in science or Dorian and his embracing of neo-liberal capitalism. Touch in the novel can be seen in terms of what Puig de la Bellacasa calls a "metaphor of transformative knowledge" (20), a kind of caring thinking that underlines human ethical obligations to water and the environment. Touch also poses the question of reciprocity in the context of thinking in terms of care, as touch has the quality of reversibility, or, as Puig de la Bellacasa puts it, "of being touched by what we touch" (20). The risk involved in touching

toxic water and being affected in turn by its poison is an instance of this haptic interaction. Fortunately for Mara, "the Smoke was running clean again, and you could reach into the water and draw your hand back without incident" (King, *Turtle* 47).

As a female character, Mara represents fertility and the potential to give birth to future generations, ensuring the survival and continuity of her community and the ecosystem it cares for. However, after rejecting her mother's and grandmother's suggestions to get married or become a nurse—both roles associated with female caregivers—Mara leaves the reserve to pursue her dream of becoming an artist in Toronto. In addition to her rebellion against family demands, she is constrained by the structures of settler colonialism that force Indigenous people to leave their communities to pursue an education, and she relinquishes her duty to nature and the community at the Smoke River reserve. Nevertheless, far from embracing Western individualism, Mara intends to resume her ancestral role as keeper of the water once she returns to Smoke River. Thus, when her mother complains, "Who's going to look after the river?" Mara's reply is "I'll come back" (153).

Unfortunately, when Mara manages to return to Samaritan Bay, the lethal environmental disaster has claimed the lives of her loved ones. This is the moment when she discovers that her art may help fulfill the role she had unwillingly relinquished as keeper of the water, and help to re-establish some sort of ecological balance. Mara thinks that "art [like the river] was fluid and continuously full of potential" (189). This idea is similarly shared in Cathy Stubington's claim that "Life is Water, water is art, art is life is water" (178). Mara's project to paint the portraits of each one of the community's absent members of the Smoke River reserve and hang them on the fronts of their houses symbolically restores historically located people to their ecological system and community. It thereby stresses the impossibility of separating ecological relationships that are both biophysically and socially formed, and constitutes what Donna Haraway calls "naturecultures" (*Companion*). Through her memorializing act, Mara not only learns how to mourn her loved ones, thus starting her personal healing, but metaphorically brings the dead to life. Such a nature culture act has the potential to produce a radical reshaping of social environmental responsibility, fostering a relational or ecological approach to systemic change. Mara's move back to her grandmother's house further reclaims the legitimate existence of the survivors of the Smoke River reserve. She is now convinced that "they would

find their way home. Mara was sure of this" (156-57). While stressing the regenerating power of both water and art, Mara's rightful occupation of Indigenous space with her art and physical presence points to an Indigenous resurgence. Thus, when she starts working on a portrait featuring her deceased best friend, Lilly, and Lilly's family, as a way of bringing them back to life, Mara also "realized that she might have found a purpose, something that would help her push past the numbing sorrow, something that would help her make the world whole again" (127).

The histrionic character Scott Nicholas Crisp also provides an example of the way different systems of knowing can be entangled, with water as the fluid element that gathers and collects. Crisp has survived the Kali Creek catastrophe and stayed in Samaritan Bay. His practice of an ethics of care includes keeping an eye on his orphaned nephew, Sonny, and looking after the personal possessions of those who left after the Kali Creek disaster, which he calls "The Ruin," in the certainty that they will return some day. A lover of language, he revels in equal measure in the lushness of Biblical stories, Shakespearian drama, and Indigenous orature. Every year he commemorates the environmental catastrophe by retelling the Sky Woman story at the hot springs. By respectfully preserving the Indigenous creation story while repurposing it to evoke new beginnings in the post-apocalyptic context of Samaritan Bay, Crisp endorses a transcultural ethics of care. His assertion "it's not my story to tell. I only do so when there's not a proper human being [i.e., Indigenous person] in the assembly" (222) acknowledges the story's legitimate tellers. Crisp's claim that "It's a story that comes with the land, and the two are forever wedded" (222) also highlights "natureculture" interdependency and the symbiosis between stories, place, and specific Indigenous epistemologies—even if the fact that King has transplanted this Haudenosaunee story to British Columbia problematizes this observation. Crisp's place-based perspective leads him to respond to the environmental and social crisis by accepting responsibility as the guardian of his absent neighbours' possessions and cultural traditions. The character holds a kind of faith in the cleansing power of water that stems from his rootedness in his specific place. He holds such faith as a precondition for the reconstruction of the human and other-than-human communities.

Sonny, Crisp's nephew, is a character deeply enshrined in Christian precepts that he struggles to come to terms with following his pious father's departure. He relies on a different, but no less significant, relationship to water than his uncle to create order in his life and in his tormented mind.

Thus, he tirelessly salvages materials from the sea, which he repurposes to build a lighthouse that may guide both the turtles and the people back to Samaritan Bay, thereby inciting the rebirth of both nature and the community itself. The return of the sea turtles points again to the Sky Woman story, which holds that a new world emerges from the back of the turtle. This narrative of regeneration is therefore signalled on multiple levels. With Sonny and his late father resonating, respectively, as the Christian figures of God the Father and God the Son, the novel contraposes and integrates a medley of stories from both Christian and Indigenous cultural traditions; stories that constitute distinctive ethical paradigms and ways of caring and knowing.

Soldier, the stray dog from King's *Truth and Bright Water* also appearing in this novel, shares the Bay's ecocentric caring ethics, accompanying Gabriel in his most troubled moods, saving Crisp from drowning, being always attentive to and provoking decisive action. He is a crucial example of kinship and collaboration between humans and non-humans. However, Gabriel is the character who best represents the entanglements of Western and Indigenous knowledge and ethics. Thus, undergirding Gabriel's actions is his unconditional acceptance of modern ways of knowing through science and technology, as well as his solipsistic individualism and a belief in punitive justice grounded in the Christian law of retaliation "an eye for an eye," which leads him to the idea of killing himself. However, his time in Samaritan Bay rekindles his childhood memories, which in turn uncover the alternative epistemological system represented by his family and his mother's stories, thereby revealing the possibility of moving from self-annihilation to rebirth.

The process of retrieving his Indigenous ethos is triggered when, in the opening pages of the novel, Gabriel, who has walked into the ocean resolved to kill himself, is compelled to put off his suicidal intentions due to the emergence amidst the crashing waves of a drowning girl struggling to keep afloat. Once he manages to place her safely on the rocks known as The Apostles, he finds that "suddenly the sea was alive with people" (9) he must rescue. It is later disclosed that they are the Taiwanese crew of *The Anguis,* Domidion's stranded barge loaded with—Alas!—GreenSweep toxic drums (441), which has run aground near Samaritan Bay. In the exhaustion and exhilaration that follow the rescue, Gabriel thinks of the survivors as "the sea people. The ones who had come to the ocean when the world was new. The long black hair. The fierce eyes" (9). As he is reminded of the collaborative ethos inherent to the ancestral cosmogony stories that

his mother used to tell him and his sister Lilly when they were kids (4), he abandons his empirical thinking and envisions the possibility that this event may signal "a new beginning." Alluding to the Sky Woman creation story, he muses, "Perhaps it was time for the twins to walk the earth again and restore the balance that had been lost" (9). The bond of kinship that he creates with these strangers is transformative. Changing the memorial song that he had chosen to sing before committing suicide for "A fierce song. A song for warriors" (9), the Taiwanese people gradually join him in his singing, and Gabriel swaps the will to die for the will to struggle and live on. Although he played a key role in the destruction of Samaritan Bay, his compassion and care for the people in need foreshadow the possibility of new beginnings for those he rescues, for the environment, and for himself.

King also writes with the character of Mara playing a key role in the process of building solid social structures of survival based on kinship and collaboration. Her reflection on the liquidity of art leads her to consider that Gabriel's troubles may lie in his alienation from the community, the severing of his human and ecological connections: "Maybe that was Gabriel's problem. Maybe he didn't have a community, didn't have anyone to anchor him to life. People weren't single, autonomous entities. They were part of a larger organism" (189). As a consequence of this revelation, Mara contributes to the emergence of a new web of relations that may sustain a renewed all-inclusive community to which Gabriel can reconnect and may even play a caring role. In tune with this self-ascribed role, Mara adopts an Indigenous ethics of hospitality and care that emphasizes "the importance of specific relationships involving reciprocal, though not necessarily equal, responsibilities among participants who understand one another as relatives" (Whyte and Cuomo 240), even when they are not blood-related. Accordingly, Mara invites the Taiwanese refugees to her grandmother's house in the Smoke River reserve, where they share food and their stories "as if they were family" (433). While the Taiwanese refugees are saved by Gabriel, fed by Crisp, and sheltered in Mara's family house, they now reciprocate by sharing their own cuisine and the story of their trials and tribulations. Their presence in Samaritan Bay has the potential to help restore the area's economy and reconstitute the community, as they agree to settle down in the Bay, live with Sonny in his rundown hotel, and refurbish the place while cooking for prospective tourists. In short, their settlement offers the possibility of social and ecological regeneration. Water appears again at this juncture as a symbol of cleansing and rebirth when Crisp invites

them to the hot springs, "where ye can throw off the trials of your old life and warm yourselves in the new" (436).

The collective responsibility for one another epitomized by the Sky Woman story is further emphasized at the end of the novel, when Mara follows Gabriel into the sea as he attempts to commit suicide once again. She is willing to risk her own life to have him tell his story—"The one you don't want to tell" (502). As a result, Gabriel's suicidal plans are aborted another time (475). Finally, the collaborative ethics adopted by the Samaritan Bay characters is highlighted at the end when they come together to push *The Anguis* off the beach, where it had stuck, thus preventing its toxic cargo from spilling onto the shore, triggering a new environmental catastrophe. Responding to Gabriel's scepticism about being able to move the ship, Mara tells him, "It's not about moving . . . It's about community" (498). Hence, Gabriel is invited to "sing that song"—the warrior song he sang at the beginning after rescuing the Taiwanese crew—and all the characters in the novel join him as they push the ship into the sea, with the help of the rising tide.

Yet, despite the prospect of a hopeful future brought about by the success of their common endeavour and nature's incipient rebirth, the threat of destruction never disappears, as the toxic barge is still afloat, and Dorian and his unscrupulous global economic ventures proceed as usual. Indeed, the success of the human and non-human collaboration at Samaritan Bay is paralleled by the triumph of Dorian's individualistic Western ethos, epitomized at the end of the novel by his repetition of the last lines from William Ernest Henley's poem "Invictus": "I am the master of my fate. I am the captain of my soul" (481, 484). King always reminds us of the sort of ecological balance represented by the left-handed and right-handed twins and the forces of creation and destruction they stand for.

The Back of the Turtle creates a dialectical space—or "cultural interface" (Christian and Wong, *Downstream* 4)—where Indigenous epistemologies and Euro-Western thinking interfere. Reading through the diffraction patterns around the centrality of water in the novel highlights the interference and entanglement of the stories the different characters tell and live by. They reveal that for the Samaritan Bay community, knowing is a "direct material engagement" (Barad, "Matter Feels" 5) with nature, with language, and with one another. In contrast, Dorian's corporate mindset is unfettered from the materiality of the land. The interference of these stories increases our awareness of the various kinds of violence deriving from the hegemony of modern discourses on technology-based progress that situate

the human outside of nature, while reducing the natural environment to a passive object. A diffractive reading of the novel also shows that the unquestionable adoption of the modern metanarrative leads to epistemic violence against the place-based, relational knowledge of Indigenous peoples and nations, which has been stifled and suppressed through a history of settler-colonialism and current neo-liberal capitalism—remember the cultural uprooting of both Gabriel and Mara. This has led to the violence of appropriation of the land and its natural resources, seriously affecting the survival of Indigenous (and non-Indigenous) peoples and their cultures. Ultimately, the diffraction pattern emerging from the interference of stories reveals the catastrophic consequences of the material violence against all life derived from modern discourses on extractivism and exploitation.

Applying the notion of diffraction to my own critical methodology, I have aligned Indigenous relational thinking around water and women's role as keepers of the environment with the relational care ethics of feminist materialism. The interference of both ethical epistemes emphasizes the relevance of natureculture in the novel, and enhances the link between storytelling, knowledge systems, ideology, and agency, reaffirming Haraway's claim, in another context, that "it matters what stories we tell to tell other stories with . . . it matters what stories make worlds, what worlds make stories" ("Staying" 12). Just as the novel emerges as an important reminder of our ecocultural relations and decisively contributes to the hydrological shift in the Humanities, it also encourages us to embrace a renewed ethico-political practice of relational care that can pave the way towards sustainable futures.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Research for this article took place within the larger project *Narratives of Resilience* funded by the Ministerio de Economía y Competitividad (Gobierno de España) and FEDER (FFI2015-63895-C2-2-R).

NOTES

1 Water is a recurring symbol in many of his titles, such as *Medicine River* (1989), *Green Grass, Running Water* (1993), *Truth and Bright Water* (1999), *Dreadful Water Shows Up* (2002), and *The Red Power Murders: A DreadfulWater Mystery* (2006).

2 Chen, MacLeod, and Neimanis' collection *Thinking with Water* (2013), Christian and Wong's *Downstream: Reimagining Water* (2017), as well as Astrida Neimanis' *Bodies of Water* (2017), and Stacy Alaimo's *Exposed* (2016) equally attest to the current interest in water and the interdisciplinary shift in the Humanities.

3 For instance, the Indigenous grassroots movement Idle No More defends "Indigenous Ways of Knowing rooted in Indigenous Sovereignty to protect water, air, land and all creation for future generations" ("Idle"). First launched in December 2012, this movement has attracted wide support from non-Indigenous people whose environmental concerns coincide with those of Indigenous people. Together, they opposed Bill C-45, a legislative amendment introduced by Stephen Harper's Conservative government for removing the obstacles to industrial development, thereby deregulating forests and waterways, many of which stand on traditional First Nations land.

4 The Haudenosaunee creation story also appears in King's previous novel, *Green Grass, Running Water*, and in his Massey Lectures collected in *The Truth About Stories* (2003). The choral retelling of "The Woman Who Fell from the Sky" in *The Back of the Turtle* is an example of King's characteristic interfusional literary strategy that blends oral storytelling and print culture (Dvořák).

5 The term has been adopted by the Anishinaabe grassroots movement Keepers of the Water, launched in 2006 as a response by the Indigenous peoples of the Deh Cho (Mackenzie) river basin to the alarming pollution of the river and the depleting water resources in the watershed caused by the extraction of oil and natural gas, mining, intensive agribusiness, and the construction of transport infrastructures. Their annual water conferences are an example of transnational collaborative activism (see D'Souza 198).

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Shane Neilson

The Death-Trick

Why do we die?

To serve.

*

I chase the ghost nowhere, but for everything.

I wish childhood was the answer for every hurt-box on the page,

but the correct answer is "We All Have So Little Time Together."

Tip for self-help toymakers: manufacture a foam bat with *that* engraved slogan. People will run through the streets, whacking each other on the head as reminder.

Say "We All Have So Little Time Together" out loud, on your knees, three times in the morning.

Then go to work where you must touch the smart phone to find an app that divides people by time.

Peopletime.

*

Close your eyes.

I'm half-past-dead and the ghosts won't be chased.

They haunt everywhere by disappearing forever.

Which is why I look.

I'm ready for my close up:

knees on the street, Christopher Smart with the camera.

*

Here's an app: the poem.

Self-improvement is memorization, recitation.

All of this so-called love! And we're dead in forgetting, the dead forgetting.

Andrea King and Kristiana Karathanassis

Language and Loss in Michel Rabagliati's *Paul à Québec* and Sarah Leavitt's *Tangles*

Michel Rabagliati's *Paul à Québec* (2009) and Sarah Leavitt's *Tangles: A Story About Alzheimer's, My Mother and Me* (2010) are comics that portray characters who experience and witness the debilitating effects of pancreatic cancer and Alzheimer's, respectively. As these diseases progress, the characters' relationships to language and to telling their stories inevitably shift.[1] In *The Illness Narratives: Suffering, Healing, and the Human Condition*, Arthur Kleinman defines an illness narrative as "a story the patient tells, and significant others retell, to give coherence to the distinctive events and long-term course of suffering" (49). Much of the existing scholarship on the reading and writing of such stories stresses their therapeutic and pedagogical value for persons with illness, caregivers, and treaters of illness. According to scholars studying graphic medicine, comics emerge as an ideal medium for illness narrative because "[v]isual understanding is intuitive in ways that verbal understanding may not be" (Green and Myers 576) and because "[c]omics offer an engaging, powerful and accessible method of delivery and consummation of these narratives" (Williams, "Graphic Medicine" 25). Though it is a truism to argue that "[c]omics can show us things *that can't be said*, just as they can narrate experiences without relying on words" (Squier 131, emphasis original), we aim to investigate the deeper impact of this notion within individual stories of illness involving the breakdown of verbal communication and understanding. Foregrounding the function and effect of the words, or the lack of words, both within the world of the story and on a structural level, we argue that in *Paul à Québec* and *Tangles*, verbal and written language plays an important role in constructing

and telling the story of a life that ends in disease, but at certain moments is inadequate and ultimately unnecessary for communicating the truths of the experience of illness and of the people it affects.

Before undertaking our analysis, we wish to acknowledge that the notion of "language" in comics is much debated by theorists, who aim to define the relationship between words and images in order to shed light on how comics create meaning. For Scott McCloud, the text and the images within any given comic are inseparable and together form "a single unified language" (47). While Thierry Groensteen supports this premise (*System* 2), he largely ignores the verbal dimension of the medium to emphasize "the primacy of the image" in the meaning-making process (3). Similarly, Jan Baetens and Pascal Lefèvre note that the image is "materially superior" to the text, further arguing that the words should, ideally, "avoi[d] tautology" (188) and serve a "complementary" (189) role in relation to the image. Neil Cohn also chooses to focus on the visual dimension of the medium and posits that "comics *are written in* visual languages in the same way that novels or magazines *are written in* English. Potentially, comics can be written in both a visual language (of images) and a written language (of text)" (2, emphasis original). He therefore differs from the above theorists in that he argues for the existence of two separate languages within comics that nevertheless "shar[e] the same key traits (modality, meaning, and grammar)" (7). Finally, Hannah Miodrag also cautions against conflating text and image into a single language, but whereas Cohn argues that the verbal and visual languages create meaning through identical processes (7), Miodrag insists that as separate languages, they "generate meaning in different ways" (250). Like Cohn and Miodrag, we recognize that the words in comics are distinct from the images, but do not intend to weigh in on the theoretical discussion of their technical functions within the medium. Rather, we are interested in studying the *effect* of the words (or of wordlessness) on the creation of meaning through an analysis that considers how written or verbal language functions formally and thematically within two specific comics about illness.

Paul à Québec

Paul à Québec is the sixth work in Québécois author Michel Rabagliati's oeuvre of eight semi-autobiographical comics, or *bandes dessinées*,[2] which recount formative and everyday events in the life of the author's cartoon alter ego, Paul.[3] Ultimately, *Paul à Québec* is a graphic novel[4] about Roland Beaulieu, Paul's father-in-law, and recounts Roland's experience with

prostate and pancreatic cancer, and his death surrounded by his family. Paul occupies the role of an observer or spectator to the events that go on around him, instead of assuming the role of protagonist or active participant as in the other works in the *Paul* series. In Rabagliati's own words, "dans *Paul à Québec* . . . [Paul] est vraiment en retrait, il est assis sur le banc en arrière, comme on dit, et puis il regarde ce qui se passe en avant" ("Michel Rabagliati").[5] To emphasize that the story is about neither Rabagliati nor Paul, but about the character of Roland and the last few months of his life, the final page of the volume features a painted portrait of Rabagliati's father-in-law in place of an author photograph ("Michel Rabagliati"). In the comic itself, this same portrait hangs on the wall of the Beaulieu family home (*Paul* 16). It visually blends author with protagonist, and reality with fiction, and becomes a symbol of the story that Rabagliati aims to tell: "[E]n fait je fais un portrait du père, du grand-père" ("Michel Rabagliati").[6] The title of the English translation, *The Song of Roland* (2012), further emphasizes that Roland's voice remains the focus of the volume. As Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson write, "[l]ife narrative is seen as a process through which a narrator struggles to shape an 'identity' out of an amorphous experience of subjectivity" (125). In *Paul à Québec*, Roland's identity as more than just a cancer patient, or a victim of his disease, is shaped in part through his changing relationship to the narrator and storyteller role.

Although Paul is the overall narrator of the story, Roland seemingly participates in his own process of characterization and meaning-making. When he goes for a walk with Paul and gives him a detailed account of his past, he emerges as a complete person with an interesting and complex life. In this sequence, which spans thirteen pages of the volume, Roland's voice replaces Paul's in the captions, and he officially becomes the narrator (60-72). Some of Roland's story is told pictorially by Rabagliati, such as when a young Roland wanders small and alone in the lushly illustrated streets of Québec (63), but every panel and sequence is accompanied or complemented by Roland's descriptive, narrating words. He tells a story about a resourceful, hard-working, and independent young man who perseveres through life's hardships, and becomes the successful vice-president of a company and the loving father of a large family. Rabagliati could have summarized Roland's memories with Paul's narration just as he summarizes an entire year of Paul's life in a few pages (55-57), or he could have inserted the sequence directly into the story as a flashback by rounding the corners of the panels to distinguish the sequence from the rest of the narrative (30). His choice to

make Roland the narrator at a formal level is significant. As Arthur Frank writes in *The Wounded Storyteller: Body, Illness, and Ethics*, when people fall ill and their life narratives are disrupted, "[t]hey need to become storytellers in order to recover the voices that illness and its treatment often take away" (xii). By granting his character Roland control over the verbal dimension of the text in order to tell his own life story, Rabagliati imbues him, and, by extension, his real-life equivalent, with agency, dignity, and humanity in the face of his disease.

In *Paul à Québec*, language is used not only to facilitate the telling of Roland's self-story—and through that act, the formation of his identity—but also to define relationships between the members of his family, and to serve as a functional tool of communication and connection. As Rita Charon writes, "[h]uman beings do not become—or create—themselves in autonomous and deracinated acts of will but instead develop over time in concert with others" (75). The family's favourite bonding activity is playing card and board games, and as Paul specifies, "[c]'est encore le Scrabble qui tient la vedette dans cette maison. Roland et Suzanne sont . . . [d]e véritables requins" (32).[7] Scrabble—the game of constructing, connecting, and assigning value to words—is a game that the entire family enjoys together, but it is most importantly something that they all share with Roland. When Roland becomes ill, playing Scrabble is one of the ways Paul, Lucie, and their daughter, Rose, keep him company when they visit him at the palliative care facility. As Roland's illness progresses, he loses the physical capacity to formulate words and sentences, and becomes uncommunicative and unresponsive altogether. When he is no longer able to play, the game as a form of family entertainment no longer appeals: "[S]ans p'pa, c'est pas pareil . . ." (136).[8] The members of Roland's family collectively turn instead to other ways of being and communicating with him, such as chatting by his bedside, holding his hand, and tending to his basic physical needs. *Paul à Québec* may be the story of an individual, and of that individual's experience with illness, but the role of language in the text places an emphasis on the collective, and the community experience of living with illness and with caregiving.[9]

Within the comic, when Roland loses the ability to wield language to communicate clearly with his loved ones, and to express and shape his own life story, his son-in-law steps in to do so for him. This is perhaps best illustrated by the fact that Paul retakes control over the narration only after Roland is hospitalized for an intestinal blockage, and the cancer which has spread to his pancreas is discovered to be advanced and untreatable

(81). However, Paul's narration never dominates the story, nor does it turn into Paul's subjective account of Roland's experience. For example, when Roland talks with Paul's father, Robert, Paul simply speculates about the details of their conversation: "De trucs de gars de leur âge probablement. Travail, femmes, enfants, petits-enfants, souvenirs de jeunesse" (111).[10] He does not presume to know, or attempt to relay, the details of Roland's thoughts, feelings, and memories. In the seventy-one pages preceding Roland's advanced pancreatic cancer diagnosis, there are seventy captions containing Paul's narration (9-80). During the eighty-four pages of Roland's illness, Paul's voice interpolates a mere thirty-two times (81-165), and after Roland's death, Paul narrates the final twenty-one pages of the volume across thirty-three captions (166-87). At the physical level of the text, therefore, Paul's narration recedes when Roland's cancer, and the various ways he loses language as a result of it, becomes the focus. According to G. Thomas Couser in *Recovering Bodies: Illness, Disability, and Life Writing*, "many of the sick and disabled are simply too ill—too debilitated or traumatized by their condition—to imagine writing about it. . . . And for some disease annihilates selfhood, or ends life, before they can undertake a narrative—what distinguishes the autobiographical subject may also extinguish it" (5-6). Though identity can be linked to narrative ability, Couser's notion that the autobiographical self is destroyed when the self-story is lost or taken over by illness does not take into account the power of polyvocal narration, such as the kind on display in *Paul à Québec*. By ensuring that Roland's voice is always heard instead of and above Paul's own, even when that voice falters, Paul—and on a meta-level, Rabagliati—manages to preserve and continue asserting the individuality and personhood of Roland Beaulieu.

Ultimately, Roland's loss of language at the level of the story is balanced by the fact that verbal or written language becomes less important at the formal level of the text overall. There are frequently moments and entire sequences of complete wordlessness, which contrast visually and strikingly with the moments of verbal and audio overload when the family is together, whether they are talking (34), arguing (16), joking (14), singing (15), reminiscing, or explaining their family connections (31). For example, the sequence depicting Paul, Lucie, and Rose visiting Roland and going through the motions of their routine, which includes a game of Scrabble, is a rare moment in the text when togetherness is enjoyed by the characters in silence (101-02). As suggested by the sequence in which Paul's father and Roland converse in illegible squiggles, it is unlikely that the characters actually perform the

activities in these scenes without speaking (110-11), but in opting to ignore or de-emphasize the verbal dimension of such moments, the reader understands that the specificities of the words exchanged are less important than the fact that the characters are spending time together to exchange them. Language in the form of narration and dialogue is similarly absent from scenes of quiet contemplation, such as when Lucie takes a moment for herself to sit alone under the stars, inhabiting and reflecting on her place in the universe (132), and when Roland listens to an instrumental rendition of Schubert's "Ave Maria"—a sequence of five panels that is devoid of sound markings altogether, juxtaposed with a panel that depicts, with the conventional use of music notes, Paul's father whistling (106). Perhaps the most significant of these moments is when the palliative care doctor administers morphine to Roland in order to ease and hasten his passing "à travers cette épreuve ultime" (153).[11] In a surrealistic two-panel sequence, the medication spreads throughout Roland's body, leaving in its wake flowers and swirls that symbolize peace and tranquility (154). Words are not able, nor are they needed, to effectively communicate the significance of this moment for Roland at this stage in his illness, or for his family or even the reader.

Just as Roland's agency and dignity are not contingent on his ability to articulate them in his own authorial voice, his personhood is palpable even in moments of narrative silence. For individual characters, words are similarly inadequate and unnecessary for expressing, navigating, and coping with grief. When Roland's friend, Solange Thériault, passes away, there is nothing Lucie can say to the woman's daughter, Chantale, to alleviate her pain, and so she is silent (112-13). Language similarly fails Paul when he attempts to find words to explain to his young daughter the process of life and death, and what happens afterwards (126). Lucie's own overwhelming and complex thoughts, memories, and feelings about her father, her relationship with him, and his illness experience manifest as a wordless dream-turned-nightmare that spans six pages (142-48). The culminating moment of the text likewise lacks words from both the characters and the narrator: the reader follows Paul and Rose as they embark on a silent drive through three full pages of unremarkable road signs and storefronts, until they arrive at the palliative care centre and learn from a simple sign on the front desk that Roland has died (161-65). By employing two small words—"Roland Beaulieu"—to summarize pages of wordless action, and to encapsulate the meaning of an entire volume written to celebrate the life of one man, Rabagliati demonstrates that the use of verbal language can help to articulate and clarify meaning, but it does not

create it. The essence of Roland Beaulieu, at least as he is depicted in *Paul à Québec*—and the profound truth, beauty, and significance of his life story—transcends the language used to compose and convey it.

Tangles: A Story About Alzheimer's, My Mother and Me

Unlike Rabagliati's *Paul* series, Sarah Leavitt's *Tangles* is explicitly autobiographical. *Tangles* documents events that took place over eight years in the Vancouver writer's life (1996-2004), recounting her witnessing of her mother's experience with Alzheimer's disease. The author, narrator, and protagonist are presented as one in Leavitt's first-person story, and the narration lacks the distance that characterizes Rabagliati's Paul. Whereas Paul is somewhat removed from his father-in-law's experience of illness, Sarah plays a more involved role in Midge Leavitt's care, and has a more intimate connection to the content of the narrative. As Midge's illness narrative unfolds—beginning with her symptoms and diagnosis, going on to document her decline, and concluding with her death—so too does Sarah's story of how she used language to shape into a coherent narrative her own traumatic and overwhelming experience of watching her mother die.

Though Leavitt herself describes her book as a "graphic memoir" (7), one might also describe it as a *graphic pathography*, a term coined by Michael Green and Kimberly Myers to describe works which present "illness narratives in graphic form" (574). The term and its definition are adapted from Anne Hunsaker Hawkins' definition of prose pathographies, which she describes as published accounts of an individual's direct or indirect experience with illness and death, born out of the patient's or caregiver's "need to communicate a painful, disorienting, and isolating experience" of illness (10). Though *Paul à Québec* can also be considered a graphic pathography—or a *bande dessinée médicale* in French—such a term is perhaps too tidy to refer to Rabagliati's graphic novel.[12] Dardaillon and Meunier frame Rabagliati's text as a traditional pathography, arguing that "[r]ien n'est épargné aux lecteurs depuis les premiers symptômes jusqu'à la phase terminale" ("*Paul* à *Québec*" 87),[13] but the story skips over the early stages of Roland's cancer and treatments as he hides the diagnosis from his family (and therefore from the narrator, Paul) for months (*Paul* 43). Instead of focusing on Roland's suffering and struggle with cancer, *Paul à Québec* seeks to find meaning in the small, quiet moments of life that are too often taken for granted. Rabagliati's narrative thus de-emphasizes the tragedy in Roland's story to instead celebrate who he was in life, the

lives of those around him, and the beauty in the fact that those lives will continue even after his ends. *Tangles*, by comparison, largely focuses on who Midge becomes in illness and death through the process of diagnosis and the worsening of her symptoms, and on how her physical and mental deterioration affects how her family—and Sarah, in particular—sees and relates to her as her story is told.

In contrast to Paul's narration in *Paul à Québec*, Sarah's is never wordless. However, within the narrative, Leavitt repeatedly points to the failure of language to capture the detail and scope of her mother's illness. First, Sarah and Midge attempt to make a video about Alzheimer's with the dual intention of documenting their experience for themselves, and putting it into words to potentially "help other families" (49). When talking about her illness out loud proves to be more traumatic than healing for Midge, the project is abandoned (53), and Sarah seeks another outlet: "I decided to take a couple of creative writing classes to help me write about what was happening to our family. . . . It helps to get it down on paper" (89). According to numerous scholars, pathographies—graphic or otherwise—serve both didactic and therapeutic purposes for their writers and readers.[14] However, the curative value of the exercise for Sarah is again undermined when she shares her writing with her parents, verbalizing the impact of her mother's disease on all of their lives, and Midge is reduced to tears. Discouraged, Sarah "didn't try that again" (89). The final mention of Sarah's efforts to record her experience as a daughter and caregiver comes at the end of the story when she privately sketches Midge as she lies on her deathbed (121). In the introduction to *Tangles*, Leavitt explains that it was not until "nine months after [Midge] died . . . [that she] realized . . . [she] wanted to do a graphic memoir" instead of a book in prose (7). Leavitt relies heavily on the words of the comic to tell her story, and her simplistic, black and white style of cartooning allows—and perhaps even encourages—the reader to focus on the verbal element of the graphic memoir more than on the pictures. However, her choice to reflect on the form of the story that became *Tangles* within the narrative of the finished product makes language, the consequences of its limitations, and its uses beyond personal therapy and social education in an illness context, into important thematic questions of the text. In comparison to *Paul à Québec*, the narration is distinguished not so much by a lack of language in the sense of words on the page, but rather by a deficiency of language in terms of what Sarah and her mother are able to accomplish with it—both together and separately—as the illness experience unfolds.

Whereas language loss is an eventual result of Roland's cancer, Midge experiences it as a symptom of dementia. The relationship between language and Alzheimer's in *Tangles* has much in common with depictions of the disease in other Canadian Alzheimer's narratives that focus on how "Alzheimer's causes its victims to lose not just the ability to remember life stories but also the ability to narrate them through written and, eventually, spoken language" (Roy 42). However, one aspect that sets *Tangles* apart from other Alzheimer's narratives is the importance of language proficiency in Midge's life prior to the development of her illness. Professionally, Midge was a devoted kindergarten teacher and a designer of educational programs and curricula for New Brunswick's Department of Education (*Tangles* 18). She met Sarah's father, Robert, at Harvard University where they bonded over a mutual love of words, and both became "teachers and teachers of teachers" (39) who "built a life of books and art and creativity" for their two daughters (38). As a result, language appreciation also played a central role in Sarah and Hannah's early development and identity formation: "Our parents taught us, as very young children, that language, words, and books belonged to us, that they were exciting and powerful, and that being smart and good with words was one of the most important things to strive for" (39). When Sarah introduces her mother in the first chapter of the book, "Nightmares," she describes her as an embodiment of Miss Clavel, the beloved literary character from Ludwig Bemelmans' *Madeline* books (11). The repeated emphasis on Midge's affinity for language suggests that her declining relationship to spoken and written words is not only important in *Tangles* as a feature of her disease. Rather, it is primarily significant as a fundamental part of her identity—a part that is jeopardized when she develops Alzheimer's.

When Midge becomes ill, she, like Rabagliati's Roland, loses the ability to give her life story the ending she intended it to have. After her diagnosis, her husband asks, "It's not how we planned things, is it, Midge?" (41). Midge's loss of narrative control is reflected in her distance from the narrator role, despite Leavitt's care to represent her mother as someone for whom language has always been important for processing and shaping her own experiences. When Midge was young, after the death of her parents, she wrote poems about herself and her family (12). When her daughters were growing up, she wrote them humorous, fantastical short stories about banal everyday activities like hair-brushing (63), and when Sarah was away at university, Midge sent her weekly handwritten letters with news about herself and

the family (16-17). In the early stages of her Alzheimer's, Sarah catches her writing in a small notebook to "keep track of [her] blankety-blank headaches" (34), but even before Midge's dementia is officially diagnosed, her narrative impulse and skill begin to deteriorate. Sarah writes: "I asked [my mother] to write down some things about my childhood, since her long-term memory was still good and mine never had been. She was excited about writing a lot of lists for me, but she only managed one. It took me a while to decipher her new handwriting" (40). The transformation that Sarah observes in her mother's ability to represent herself is more than a sign of her illness; it is a symbol of the changes her daughter perceives in her identity. The only sequence that Midge narrates spans a single page and further marks the redefinition of who she is and how people see her. She tells a story about getting lost walking home on a familiar route, and being returned home by the police. The medical alert bracelet that she is made to wear from that point on reads "Midge Leavitt / Memory Loss / Call Police," and officially links her identity with her disease (50). Couser writes that "[w]hen the body takes a turn for the worse, the mind often turns toward words" (*Recovering Bodies* 295), but in Midge's case, the worsening of her condition is defined by her inability to wield language autonomously and in all of its forms for the first time in her adult life.

In an interview with Robyn Read, the editor of *Tangles*, Leavitt explains that communicating how her mother "kept on being herself, the woman [she] loved, no matter how sick she was" was one of her primary motivations for writing her graphic memoir ("Strange Little Creatures"). However, for much of the text, Sarah perceives and describes her mother's illness as a linear process of decay—decay of the body, of the mind, of language, and of the self. As Midge loses the ability to articulate her observations, participate in conversations, and be fully present during the time she spends with her daughter, Sarah sometimes talks about her and treats her as though she is absent or already dead (108, 115). At one point, she confesses: "I realized that part of me believed the real Mom lived somewhere else, unchanging, immortal, observing the new Mom" (94). Renata Lucena Dalmaso argues that the way Leavitt uses "visual metaphor[s]" like "the split body" and "the blank stare" to visually portray Midge's disease reinforces the problematic "notion that Midge as someone with Alzheimer's [is] inherently disconnected from the person Midge" (82). Dalmaso reads *Tangles* as a story of two Midges "coexist[ing], in a balance of some sort. At one moment, however, a shift occurs and . . . [t]he marked Midge, who at first appeared

only episodically, begins to completely eclipse the familiar Midge" (84). Kathleen Venema similarly frames Alzheimer's as an "identity-erasing disease" (63) and suggests that *Tangles* is a story about "disappearance" (62, 66, 69), "effacement" (63), and "the irreversible deterioration of one's capacity to be oneself" (49). In Leavitt's representation, Midge also struggles to reconcile who she is in illness with who she was in health as language slips in and out of her control.

In Midge's lucid moments, she declares a connection between her Alzheimer's and the loss of her personhood by stating and repeating variations of the notion that she "[isn't] a real person anymore" (67, 75, 89, 98). Neither Dalmaso nor Venema considers the ways that Leavitt herself denounces such statements and views as problematic within the story. One such example is when Sarah's partner, Donimo, scolds her for speaking as though her mother is, to use Dalmaso's term, a "non-person" (84; *Tangles* 115). Rather than presenting an account of an ill person who needs to "reclaim her personhood from Alzheimer's" (Dalmaso 81), Leavitt, therefore, affirms the personhood of the ill subject when she loses the ability and the will to do so herself. By further depicting herself learning to accept the process and effects of language receding from her relationship with her mother, Leavitt communicates how Alzheimer's does not erase Midge or make her into a wholly new or different person. Rather, Midge's Alzheimer's leads Leavitt to expand her understanding of her mother's personhood and humanity—specifically, that she retains it throughout the disease.

As in *Paul à Québec*, in *Tangles*, verbal language becomes less essential overall by the end of the story. As Midge becomes increasingly impaired (70-71), Sarah learns to use non-verbal methods of communication such as touching, body language, and facial expressions to relate to her in a new, but still intimate, way. She becomes uncomfortably aware of her mother's body in order to provide her with adequate care, and at first she is hesitant and reluctant: "Like I ever wanted to be so familiar with her body, her bad breath, her smelly underarms" (85). Later, however, she begins to desire and initiate such contact in order to remain physically and emotionally close to her (92, 114). The act of brushing Midge's hair becomes particularly meaningful to Sarah: "I never used a comb or brush on Mom's hair, just my fingers. At some point I started putting little balls of her hair in my pocket . . . [a]nd then I started collecting my own hair. . . . Some of my friends found it disturbing. I found it comforting" (63). No longer able to relate to Midge intellectually or creatively, Sarah searches for other things that they have in common, and discovers that

she can relate to her through a physical trait that they share—their curly, tangled hair. Sarah adapts to these changes in their relationship and ultimately recognizes that the connection between her and her mother transcends their mutual love of language, and words like *mother* and *daughter* that previously described their roles. Sarah writes, "[s]he had very few words. But in some way she recognized me. My voice and face had some meaning for her" (115). Though *Tangles* is in part Sarah's story "des transformations subies par sa mère et de ses propres transformations" (Miranda-Morla 257),[15] we argue that it is not fundamentally "about a mother's heartbreaking disappearance [woven] inextricably into an account of a daughter's permanently reshaped identity" (Venema 61-62). Rather, *Tangles* is about how Midge's disease turns mother and daughter into veritable strangers who have to fight back towards familiarity without the aid or uniting force of language in a continual process of loss and rediscovery.

Despite becoming less central to Sarah's understanding and appreciation of her mother by the end of the text, Midge's connection to language remains important until the end of her life and after her death. As in *Paul à Québec*, language in *Tangles* serves the additional purpose of defining relationships and facilitating co-operation and intimacy between *all* family members. The section of the book titled "Language" (38-39) focuses on the ways in which this theme is central to the majority of the Leavitt family interactions. As in Rabagliati's text, "cutthroat Scrabble" is one of the family's favourite pastimes (39), and in the Leavitt household, language is seized upon and put to use in a variety of other imaginative ways:

> In junior high, Hannah took our language play to the next level with a collection of acronyms and made-up words that were so apt that Dad and Mom and I adopted many of them for our own use. Like if a couple was having an overly affectionate goodbye, we'd say they were being "piss," short for "parting is such sweet sorrow." (38)

Lucia Miranda-Morla argues that Leavitt's emphasis on the collective importance of language is meant to highlight how the impact of Alzheimer's on Midge's ability to communicate clearly and coherently is a family tragedy as much as a personal one (261). Ultimately, however, we argue that it serves to establish their shared love of reading, writing, and wordplay as Midge's personal and professional legacy, a part of Midge that will live on in everyone she loved. The turbulent relationship with language that she and her family experience in the last stage of her life does not negate the value it previously held for her, or undermine the role it will continue to play in the lives of her family members.

Before Midge loses language completely, her capacity to deliberately manipulate language and meaning increasingly dissolves into accidental gibberish and non sequiturs, not unlike Hannah's invented language. She develops a new way of speaking that consists of fragmented sentences and nonsense that Sarah refers to as a series of "poetic mistakes" (54). These "mistakes" include synesthetic observations, such as when Midge comments that "the grass feel[s] lovely and green today" (54); perceptive reflections, like "[d]oesn't this music just reach right in and grab your heart?" (54); and poignant declarations, like "I think it's going quite sadly" (82), "I just can't tell what is and isn't" (88), and "[o]h broccoli, who are simple" (103). The breakdown of standard and conventional syntax and language usage and the development of a new, fragmented language seem to mark the erosion of the old Midge, and the emergence of a new Midge. However, it is perhaps more accurate to view her confused but strangely precise use of words as evidence that her intellect and her creativity are increasingly obscured or rendered inaccessible by her Alzheimer's, but remain fundamentally part of her identity. Midge herself lends this reading support when she says, "[l]et people hear you, Midge. Let people see you, Midge" (98). That Midge's self is present even as she loses the capacity to express or externalize it directly with language is reminiscent of the wordless, full-page panel in *Paul à Québec* that depicts Roland tapping his fingers to his favourite music (157-58), even though he has been unresponsive for days and recently administered a dose of medication meant to ease his disconnection from the world (154). According to Miranda-Morla, "[l]a question centrale de *Tangles* est peut-être celle de la vérité de l'être et de ce qui peut la définir" (296).[16] In her view, "*Tangles* ne donne pas de réponse" (296),[17] but by the end of the story, it is clear that Leavitt, like Rabagliati, has demonstrated various ways a self can be defined without and beyond language. Ultimately, *Tangles* is the story of Midge, a woman with Alzheimer's, holding onto, or continuing to possess, selfhood, and not just in her lucid moments as Dalmaso argues (81). It is also the story of her daughter coming to terms with the challenge of recognizing and communicating with her mother without recourse to a stable linguistic code.

Conclusion

Both *Tangles* and *Paul à Québec* demonstrate that words are not always adequate or necessary for capturing and communicating the truth of a life, especially when that life is affected by a terminal disease such as Alzheimer's or cancer. Rabagliati's exploration of how meaning is amplified when

language is absent at the structural level of a story culminates in the final pages of *Paul à Québec*, which are completely wordless except for a brief exchange between Rose and the spirit of her grandfather (182-83). Over multiple pages, the panels slowly pan out from the scene at the cemetery until Roland's grave and the little girl beside it are just specks in the universe (179-87). Just as Roland has said goodbye to his family, and they to him, the reader gradually withdraws from a deeply personal yet universal story of life, love, and loss. In contrast, Leavitt's continuous narration in *Tangles* ensures that the reader remains at a distance from the highly individualized experience of her mother's illness throughout the account. Whether we call them graphic pathographies, graphic memoirs, or something else entirely, *Paul à Québec* and *Tangles* both function at the intersection of medicine and literature where the story of an illness is transformed into narrative, not just for the sake of ordering and processing the trauma, but to commemorate the lives forever changed by the experience. At the same time, both authors reveal that one cannot rely on language to capture every nuance and truth of what one sets out to record and describe. As Sarah discovers when she begins saying the mourner's Kaddish for her mother after she passes away, sometimes the language that one uses is not as important as the act and effort of using it, because the meaning of the experience surpasses the meaning of the words: "I didn't care what the words were. I wanted the ritual" (125). Overall, the human experience of illness resists straightforward representation and classification. As Ann Jurecic maintains, "[t]hose who write about illness, an experience that can break a life in two, face the nearly impossible task that confronts all who write about trauma: how to speak the unspeakable. If illness is beyond expression in language, translation of the experience into words misrepresents, even contaminates, the real event" (10). Ultimately, *Paul à Québec* and *Tangles* can be taken as examples of how comics—a medium in which the narrative can continue to unfold even in the absence of words—are perfectly suited to telling stories about the breakdown of verbal and written communication due to illness, and the importance of forging a connection beyond language.

NOTES

1 The diseases affecting Rabagliati's Roland and Leavitt's Midge have very different symptoms vis-à-vis language, and in comparing these two texts, we do not mean to suggest that they are equivalent. The neurodegenerative nature of Midge's Alzheimer's affects directly, and early on, those cognitive functions most closely associated with narrative discourse, language, and self-fashioning. These symptoms differ considerably from those experienced

by Rabagliati's Roland, whose loss of language is not a primary symptom of his terminal pancreatic cancer, and which manifests itself only in the final days of his life.

2 For more on the French *bande dessinée* in general, see Groensteen. For a discussion of the various forms of life storytelling in French comics, see Alary, Corrado, and Mitaine.

3 Rabagliati's mix of fiction and true-to-life storytelling makes his texts difficult to classify using existing labels for autobiographical writing in comics. Rabagliati states that his *Paul* series fits most appropriately within the genre of *autofiction* ("Michel Rabagliati"), "the French term for autobiographical fiction, or fictional narrative in the first-person mode" (Smith and Watson 186).

4 The term "graphic novel" is contentious, with comics scholars and fans alike viewing it as imprecise (Hatfield 5), as a marketing ploy invented to legitimate comics as literature (29-30), and as an arbitrary umbrella term "for a vague new class of cultural artifacts" (El Refaie 5). In describing Rabagliati's semi-fictionalized accounts of his life, however, the descriptor 'autobiographical graphic novel' seems appropriate. Rabagliati himself argues that *Paul* "reads . . . like a novel" ("Michel Rabagliati," translation by the authors). Michel Hardy-Vallée further acknowledges that "for an anglophone, *Paul* reads as a graphic novel" (90) and Rabagliati reads as "heir to the graphic novel movement" (91).

5 All translations of quotations from *Paul à Québec* are taken from the English version of the comic, *The Song of Roland*, translated by Helge Dascher. All other translations, including the following, are done by the authors: "in *Paul à Québec* . . . [Paul] really takes a back seat, so to speak, and observes what's happening around him."

6 "[I]n fact, I'm painting a portrait of a father, a grandfather" ("Michel Rabagliati").

7 "But the family favourite is Scrabble. Roland and Suzanne were in a league of their own. Real sharks" (32).

8 "without Dad, it's not the same…" (136).

9 For a discussion of language and Québécois identity in *Paul à Québec*, see Dardaillon and Meunier ("*Paul à Québec*").

10 "Stuff men their age talk about, I guess. Work, women, their kids and grandkids, memories of their youth" (111).

11 "through this last stage" (153).

12 *Paul à Québec* is listed as a *bande dessinée médicale* on www.bdmedicales.com under "Albums." Ian Williams broadly defines the term as designating "franco-belgian BD's which deal with health matters" ("bandes dessinées").

13 "[n]othing is left out, from the first symptoms of the disease right through its terminal phase" ("*Paul à Québec*" 87).

14 See El Refaie 43-44, 179; Green and Myers 574; Kleinman xii, 50; Charon 10; McMullin 154; Couser, *Signifying Bodies* 15; Frank 110; Jurecic 12; Holmes 157; Hawkins 11; Williams, "Graphic Medicine" 21; Williams, "Autography" 354.

15 "of the transformations that both she and her mother undergo" (Miranda-Morla 257).

16 "Perhaps the key question in *Tangles* is the truth and definition of being"(296).

17 "*Tangles* does not answer this question" (296).

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Sherry Johnson

Fruit as Still Life / Vruchten als stilleven

(Karel Appel, oil on canvas, 1978)

Is fruit ever *not* still?

Life is never still.

A still life isn't still.

Broad, flat flaglines. Blanks
which are greased.
(Interlinear lures.) Propelled
—seeming (as though
behind, a scrim of clear
water was written . . .)
White + turquoise,
they manage
through a kind
of magic to
be neither
foreground nor
background—smash
the jagged
edge of a crown
-shaped
bowl. This Karel
Appel is really
an animal! Likes
his fruit striped. With a hint
of stench in it—liquor
of unwashed
bodies
about it. A colour

between brown
and peach,—somewhat
weepy when squeezed. An after
-Eden aftertaste
trace
remaining on the observer's
eye-tongue (a crown). A lurid
lack. (This impasto
as thick as pasta.)

Back to the Cabin

Angie Abdou
In Case I Go. Arsenal Pulp $17.95

Gillian Wigmore
Glory. Invisible $19.95

Reviewed by Nancy Holmes

In these recent novels from BC, two women writers confront the intersectional problems of colonization, gender, and environmental trouble. Gillian Wigmore's *Glory* takes place in northwestern BC and Angie Abdou's *In Case I Go* in the southeast corner of the province, each place having glorious landscapes and rich, though injured, Indigenous cultures. Both novels begin with an incursion of the urban into remote rural places. In *Glory*, Vancouverites relocate to Fort St. James. In *In Case I Go*, Calgarians move to Coalton—a former mining town, now a recreational resort (a fictional community seemingly based on Fernie, BC). In both novels, the families (non-Indigenous, presumably, in the case of Wigmore's characters) who move into these remote communities are returning to places where they have ancestral settler connections.

Wigmore is a well-known poet in northern BC and *Glory* is her first novel. Renee is a young woman suffering from depression and psychic shock after a long winter with her new husband and infant in her husband's long-abandoned family cabin in the territory of the Dakelh, or Carrier, people. She meets two Indigenous women: Glory, a fierce, independent singer-songwriter, and Crystal, a talented musician who is eclipsed by Glory's vivid personality. At the centre of the community is mighty Lake Stuart, which fulfills the tropes of the literary North: beauty, death, and disappearance. The novel's main action involves the three women and unfolds over a few days when Renee abandons her husband and baby, and Glory, who has given up a daughter, is further robbed of family when her brothers drown in the lake. The book has some first-novel ungainliness: for example, the drowning of the brothers seems staged to create a crisis. However, the novel provides a refreshing view of young and Indigenous women in the North. Rather than portrayed as victims, they are strong, creative, and resilient. They value female friendship as much as romantic relationships. It is no surprise that poet Wigmore's writing can be vivid (her description of Renee's mastitis in the first part of the book is exquisitely excruciating) and she creates a sequence of fine prose poems in the chorus of voices that punctuate the novel.

In Case I Go is Abdou's fifth novel and it shows the skill her record would suggest. Her characters are believable and the plot deftly juggles slippages of consciousness and chronology, especially through the narrator's voice. That narrator, Eli, is ten years old and his family has moved to Ktunaxa, or Kootenay, territory, where his great-great-grandfather worked in the mines. They too move into an inherited cabin. The cabins in both novels function as symbols of settler occupation and past violence, but also of a promise of new relationships. Eli strikes up a friendship with his neighbours—Sam,

who is a Ktunaxa forest ecologist, and his niece. The niece's identity is complex—sometimes she is the niece, and sometimes she is a woman whose English name is Mary but whose true name is hidden. The ghostly dimension where this woman exists draws the boy in, and he becomes burdened with the spirit of his ancestor who, through betrayal, exploitation, and carelessness, caused Mary's death. Eli has to repair this past wrong in order to recover his life. With the help of Sam's wife Tamara (another good-humoured and dynamic Indigenous woman) and another woman, a New Age healer who lives on a secluded goat farm, the boy takes on this task with sweetness and wisdom. The novel is a fine ghost story and it faces tough questions about responsibility for crimes of the past and the complexities of colonial identity (the great-great-grandfather has had to deny his own Muslim heritage) even if Eli's exorcism seems too simplistic. A failing of the novel might be that the ending enacts a denial of the consequences of trauma: the boy went through a harrowing experience yet seems to come out unscathed, a kind of wishful thinking that may be at the heart of our hopes for reconciliation in general.

Read together, these novels present BC as a troubled place. But, they also seem to say, as Indigenous cultures rebound, we'll find a rebellious matriarchal power holding out against the dominant white culture. As Abdou discovered when she became embroiled in issues around permission and consultation, acts of reconciliation that accompany decolonization are difficult. But Abdou offers some thoughts about how to shift storytelling in a colonized country: saying *I don't know* and *Yes, that happened* could be crucial. These two novels are working in the spirit of that reflective language.

Birds and Neutrino Observatories

David Alexander
After the Hatching Oven. Nightwood $18.95

Matthew Tierney
Midday at the Super-Kamiokande.
Coach House $19.95

Reviewed by Neil Surkan

Matthew Tierney's latest poetry collection and David Alexander's full-length debut merge unconventional subject matter with brazen takes on poetic form. In turn, both books take the field of contemporary Canadian poetry for a walk on the wild side.

Tierney's *Midday at the Super-Kamiokande* is a sequence of taut, allusive poems that pun and joke while delivering a strong dose of existential malaise. In a style reminiscent of Michael Robbins' *Alien vs. Predator*, the poems flit between philosophy and pop culture: expect to encounter Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, and Plotinus in very close proximity to Hitchcock, *Star Wars*, and/or a near-death "fat Elvis." However, because Tierney adds in unsettling personal intimations—on fatherhood, most frequently—these poems vibrate in a register all their own. At their best, they combine jolting rhythms, subtle rhymes, and propulsive enjambments with startling descriptions and sage-like aphorisms. Take this section from "People Plan," for example, a poem set in the subway:

> Can't decipher whether
> my fellow commuter, intent on his tablet,
> is a proficient first-person shooter,
> if I'm his equal.
>
> Is there any measure more biblical
> than a stone's throw?
>
> Underground,
> what sunlight there is is refused us.
> I've mixed feelings pointing out the obvious.
> Either you understand my ambivalence
>
> or you do not.
> In the kingdom of conspiracies,
> anyone could be a theorist.

Tierney's speaker repeats, revises, and redirects at breakneck speed. Ecstatically snarky, *Midday at the Super-Kamiokande* alienates and amazes in turn, a futuristic machine that runs on charisma.

Alexander's *After the Hatching Oven* is an entire book of poems about chickens. Equal parts reference companion, PETA-esque manifesto, and concept album, Alexander's collection takes on the lowly chicken from all angles, then renders his findings into a multiplicity of forms: erasures, centos, prose poems, sonnets, even a hybrid villanelle. Intermittently funny, heart-wrenching, clever, and quirky, the book's potpourri of forms is connected by inventive images and consistently exquisite line breaks. In the sonnet "Elegy"—a standout—Alexander stitches together sarcasm, outrage, and caring description as his speaker looks at an oven-ready roasting chicken. The poem beckons us toward an uneasy reckoning with what's for dinner:

> Here she lies, unknown, at rest
> on a bed of rue and rosemary. Tenderly
> trussed before cremation. She loved your
> jokes about bacon, the winking way
> you hawked her hand-drawn corpse. . . .

Since many of the poems in the book respond to the works of other poets, Alexander's own poetic inspirations are clear: Ted Hughes, in particular, haunts the collection, with four of Alexander's poems explicitly referencing or rewriting his. And although a few poems predictably repeat the formula of rewriting another poet's work to make it about chickens—take "After bpNichol": "A / cluck // A / click // A / chick // A / child // A / chill"—others are sure to intrigue: "Why I Am Not a Chicken," written after Frank O'Hara's "Why I Am Not a Painter," captures O'Hara's exuberance but is unmistakably Alexander's.

Indigenous Histories

Kim Anderson, Maria Campbell, and Christi Belcourt, eds.
Keetsahnak: Our Missing and Murdered Indigenous Sisters. U of Alberta P $29.95

Fiona Polack, ed.
Tracing Ochre: Changing Perspectives on the Beothuk. U of Toronto P $36.95

Isabelle St-Amand
Stories of Oka: Land, Film, and Literature. U of Manitoba P $27.95

Reviewed by Margery Fee

Keetsahnak will be a staple resource in future research on violence against Indigenous women and girls. All but two of the contributors are Indigenous women from an array of nations and backgrounds; many have deep and close experience with the violence they analyze. The book is divided into four sections, "All Our Relations," "The Violence of History," "Challenges," and "Action, Always." In the epilogue, some of the contributors discuss what this edited collection lacks—a feature that would be a useful addition for all books in this genre, which generally try to hide the gaps rather than expose them. A central point made by the participants is that we need to be brave enough to speak up when we suffer or witness an injustice. Another is something academics tend to forget—writing books (and life stories and poems and songs) is only a small part of the difficult task of creating social environments that mitigate violence.

The book arose from one such environment that travelled the globe, Walking With Our Sisters, a community-driven and funded exhibition of beaded moccasin vamps (see www.walkingwithoursisters.ca). The book demonstrates how a rigid heteropatriarchal gender binary works to damage people of all genders and sexualities, including queer and trans people and Indigenous men. Although the main focus is, as it should be, on colonial and decolonial

issues, the book also takes up issues of violence, both physical and emotional, within Indigenous families. The contributors resist both mainstream misrepresentations of the violence as well as the commonplace fear of giving ammunition to racist outsiders who want to portray all Indigenous people and communities as intrinsically savage. They deal with such extremely touchy questions of violence within Indigenous communities with care and respect, including questions about cultural renewal. For example, can traditional stories sometimes normalize violence against women? How do some ceremonies—or some ways of conducting ceremonies—work to reinforce the gender binary? One particularly compelling story is about living between the states of missing and murdered—not at all missed by an uncaring family. The phrase "throwaway people" is repeated several times: mainstream society marks some people as better off dead, and some people internalize this perspective. One participant tells of meeting a healer after attempting suicide: his response was "Okay, you're done. You're dead. Give your life to the community. That's all you need to do. You don't want to live your life for yourself—fine. Live it for the community." Her words remind us of the many desperate children and adolescents who did not make it and to be thankful for those who did.

The mournful story of the "last of the Beothuks" still resonates as part of Newfoundland history. The fourteen authors in the wide-ranging collection *Tracing Ochre* assess this story's impact and credibility, including accounts from archaeologists, literary critics, and historians. Ingeborg Marshall's strong position, based on her authoritative *A History and Ethnography of the Beothuk* (1996), that nothing of Beothuk heritage or culture persists, is here rethought in a context that includes Indigenous memory and historical ways of life. Fiona Polack's introduction, "De-islanding the Beothuk," looks at how the notion of islands as discrete and inviolable allows for a European fantasy of total control in Newfoundland, Tasmania, and other "empty" island sites of supposed colonial extermination. When Newfoundland joined Confederation in 1949, no provision was made for Indigenous residents, although Mi'kmaw had lived there since time immemorial. This decision was partly based on the idea that the Beothuk were gone and the Mi'kmaw assimilated. When long years of activism forced the Canadian government to allow people to apply for membership in the Qualipu Mi'kmaq First Nation, a new landless band, thousands of applications were received. The continuing process of deciding who qualifies can charitably be described as a mess. In this collection, Chief Mi'sel Joe of the Miawpukek First Nation talks about the connections between the Mi'kmaw and the Beothuk in Newfoundland dating from before contact. Patrick Brantlinger examines the "myth of prior invasion," which asserts that the Mi'kmaw were the perpetrators of the Beothuk genocide. Maura Hanrahan looks at the related stereotype of "good Beothuk" and "bad Mi'kmaq." These stories combine to let British settlers off the hook. Cynthia Sugars looks at novels involving the Beothuk by Michael Crummey and Bernice Morgan. Bonita Lawrence sets the Beothuk story into a broader history of settler genocide, as she considers how recognition by a colonial government under the Indian Act simultaneously renders those Indigenous people who are not so recognized legally invisible, their land up for grabs.

Stories of Oka is a translated and updated version of *La Crise d'Oka en récits* (Presses de l'Université Laval, 2015), which in turn developed from a PhD thesis (Université du Québec à Montréal, 2012). The cover by Martin Akwiranoron Loft, the foreword by Katsitsén:hawe Linda David Cree,

the blurb by Audra Simpson, as well as St-Amand's acknowledgements, particularly those noting her access to the archives at Kanehsatake and Kahnewake, make clear that her work was closely connected to these two Mohawk communities and supported by several individuals who were active during the crisis. She conducted interviews with those on both sides of the barricades. Although she states that "this book does not reveal new information about Oka," it certainly provides an important synthesis and overview almost thirty years on for those—like the author herself—too young to remember an event that galvanized the country and led to a shift in Indigenous-Canada relations. Because of the length of time that has passed since 1990, St-Amand is able to include information that did not appear (although some of it should have) until long after the event. She is also able to comment on more recent events such as Idle No More and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Further, as this is an interdisciplinary work, rather than solely a history, her analysis of representations of the event by Indigenous and non-Indigenous filmmakers, poets, and novelists adds an important dimension. Finally, her bibliography of English- and French-language resources provides others interested in Oka with a comprehensive resource. Future historians and critics studying Indigenous resistance, both at the barricades and through artistic production, will want this book on their shelves.

Minor Revelations

Cameron Anstee
Book of Annotations. Invisible $16.95

Heather Cadsby
Standing in the Flock of Connections. Brick $20.00

Aaron Giovannone
The Nonnets. Book*hug $18.00

Reviewed by Carl Watts

Book reviewing is a fraught endeavour. Reviewers respond to a text in the present while also envisioning, or just dreading, some future periodization that will make their observations seem laughable. These problems are exacerbated when an author seems to be classifiable as somehow minor—that is, someone like Heather Cadsby, whose reliably inventive poetry has nevertheless flown just below the Canadian Poetry Anthology radar, or like Aaron Giovannone and Cameron Anstee, who deal in the minute, particular, or extremely subtle.

No poet is entirely free of the influence of schools, peers, or the zeitgeist, but Cadsby's work has long avoided any too-obvious resemblance. Her focus on decidedly minor, often mundane yet infrequently foregrounded subject matter (she's co-edited a collection of poems about jealousy, for instance), as opposed to big-ticket topics like identity or place, continues in *Standing in the Flock of Connections*. The book is populated with moments of gentle defamiliarization, as in "This morning, starting out": "I've asked to be alone. I need natural things / like toddlers on the telephone, / like old men walking rhythmically with canes." Cadsby's work has moved gradually towards longer lines and prose forms. This trend continues here with the "Text Steps" section, but the technique is perhaps more compelling in her verse-prose hybrids, like the briefer "Mentionables," the long lines of which blur the distinction between the two while adding a degree of visual organization: "Rope, fly swatter, old telephone,

baster, ratchet tie-down, / boxing glove, satin teddy, piss shoe, garden paraphernalia, / rings, plugs, vibes, beads, *The Garden of Earthly Delights* (centre panel)." Poems like "Hot talk. Not really" obliquely address lots of ideas—science, postmodernism, the Internet, poetics—without being overly beholden to them:

> The conversations range in all directions.
> Now anything is fair game.
> If visual perception in monkeys
> and circumference/diameter ratio are
> meaningful,
> so are comments on oatmeal cookies
> and nasty digs about upstarts.

There's a subtle tension between this quick variety and the strange continuities in Cadsby's work, as with the familiarly disorienting bird imagery that crops up in a poem like "Eats fish and small birds" (in which a drake "blasts a trumpet-tongued honking squawk / like no duck I've ever heard"), or "Out the hospital window I saw a dove. It was a gull," a poem that describes the death of the speaker's mother without ever returning to the fleeting, shape-shifting bird in its title.

Giovannone's work is also quietly innovative. *The Nonnets*, named for the nine-line "sonnets" of which it's composed, extends the unique-but-not-really style of his debut, *The Loneliness Machine*. Like that collection, *The Nonnets* frequently breaks the fourth wall, speaking knowingly to whoever it is who makes up a contemporary Canadian poem's readership. (The opening poem ends, "Reader, you seem extraordinary.") That the book is simply a swath of nonnets—no sections, no table of contents, not even any titles beyond the fact that the first three words of each poem are capitalized—makes for an unselfconscious, seemingly genuine faith in its conceit. Giovannone's tweaking of the form is at once subtler than an augmentation like David McGimpsey's sixteen-line "chubby" variant and yet, due to its brevity, almost unrecognizable as a descendant of the sonnet. The steady sweep of miniature triptychs variously creates syllogisms; shifts the sense of a word or idea; transitions from a lyric treatment of a theme to a discussion of said treatment to addressing a reader; or just tumbles in picaresque disjunction, as when "I Don't Drink Big Gulps" finds itself "At the Art Gallery of Ontario" for the second stanza and then begins the third, "I'm in the Portuguese Wine Club now!" Giovannone is also just really funny. But the consistency of his persona makes it all the more surprising when real darkness or anger seeps through. When "It's Hard to care" ends, "On Facebook, you seem to think / you're having fun, but you're not. / Not without me, you're not," the switch in register requires so little disruption of the goofy, self-effacing tone that the creepiness is off the charts. In "My Phone's GPS paused at a winery," the passive voice, along with the simplicity of Giovannone's form and conceit, brings out the totality of neo-liberal surveillance: "My credit card was charged // ninety-six dollars. / I know how this looks."

Unlike *The Nonnets*, Anstee's *Book of Annotations* cycles through many different iterations of an aesthetic of tininess. It also reads like a meditation on modesty; even the book's measurements—seven by four-and-a-half inches—make it seem like only the humblest of upgrades from Anstee's sometimes tiny chapbook publications. And yet there's a palpable compression, and concretism, lurking within Anstee's minimalist exercises. The influence of Robert Lax is evident at several points. The untitled first poem, which repeats the lines

> in rest
> a pulse
> beside
> the eye

and then ends with the first two, draws attention (in what seems like the most

direct way possible) to the experience of perception at the poem's core. Elsewhere, as in the four-word "Salvage," Anstee wrings multiple interpretations out of incredibly few elements: "each hour comes / apart[.]" The erasure poems in the third section are themselves instances of compounded brevity. Basho's omnipresent haiku is plotted out only with six instances of the letter *o*; Lax's "the air" is reduced to "the," "and," "of," and two punctuation marks. Anstee's notes outline his methods, but the titles and blank spaces of the third section render explanation superfluous. Similarly, the method behind "Dissertation," a list of typos such as "hisotries / amterials / ripture," is almost immediately evident, as if Anstee's version of method-based or found poems exists in elementary particles. His miniature explorations, like Cadsby's and Giovannone's hiding-in-plain-sight topics and techniques, are "minor" in a deliberate, holistic sense. As a result, they're relatively free from self-conscious participation in any school or camp, settling instead for the minutiae of being their own kind of poems.

Narratives of Loss and Mourning

Marianne Apostolides; Catherine Mellinger, illus.
Deep Salt Water. Book*hug $20.00

Carol Matthews
Minerva's Owl: The Bereavement Phase of My Marriage. Oolichan $17.95

Reviewed by Saghar Najafi

Both of the books under review are intimate memoirs whose narratives focus on loss and the mourning of relationships. In *Deep Salt Water*, Marianne Apostolides, with a touch of stream of consciousness, writes about her experiences falling in love, having an abortion, drifting apart from her lover, and eventually rejoining him. Carol Matthews shares the story of her husband's death in *Minerva's Owl*, recounting her struggles with grief and, ultimately, acceptance.

Apostolides' narration focuses on the possible life of a child later named Blythe after her abortion. Among myriad similes, Apostolides compares her female body to an ocean from which the life of the fetus emerges, and the sketches by Catherine Mellinger throughout the book portray an unbreakable connection between the female body and the environment. The narration is further replete with psychedelic imagery that draws a close connection between the writer's body and mother earth. Apostolides offers certain facts, free of any raw scientific terms, about the formation of earth, oceans, single-celled organisms, and the development of human beings, which accompany an underlying story of the embryo's formation and its demise at the hand of mother/earth. The embryo and the mother are compared to a pearl and a clam, to an egg and a fish, and to a unicellular organism and the ocean throughout the book.

The memoir is divided into sections patterned on the trimesters of embryonic development during pregnancy, and focuses on the development and death of the fetus as well as Apostolides' feelings towards it. By posing the ethical question of whether abortion was the right decision for her, Apostolides takes the reader through a journey of self-affliction, pondering, and absolution; she writes, "What is the language to talk of abortion? The language of 'rights' is too limited." Although in the first pages of the book she writes, "I've never come to terms for this [abortion]. Not yet," she will be able to forgive herself at its conclusion. While abortion is a literal subject for Apostolides, its interrelated figurative resonances extend as well to the premature ending of her relationship with her boyfriend.

From another perspective, the book can be read as an elegy in memoriam of a lost child. Fragmented sentences are copious throughout the book's first pages, suggesting

the incapacity of language to express grief. At one point, Apostolides brings up the "elusiveness" of death—the difficulty of grasping it, of getting over the death of her child—and writes, "gone-ness is hard for the mind to conceive." Close to the end of the book, she exclaims "I murdered a fetus" for the first time. But moving beyond forgiveness and confession, Apostolides reminds readers and herself that she is aware of her actions and trying to "bear them."

Matthews, in her thanatography, draws a comparison between Hegel's description of the owl of Minerva, the Greek goddess of wisdom, and her own final acceptance of her husband's demise. Hegel famously observed that Minerva's owl opens its wings only at dusk, asserting that reality can only be understood in hindsight. Matthews struggles to understand her husband's death throughout her narrative until its end, where she, as the owl, accepts the reality and moves forward. The first half of the memoir is mostly narrated in the simple past tense, through which Matthews draws attention to the memories of her acquaintance with her husband, their distant relationship, their life together, and, finally, their marriage. This part of the book is mostly Matthews' recollection of her life and its historicity, in Paul Ricoeur's sense. In the second half Matthews situates herself in what Ricoeur calls the "within-timeness" of the present, and it is only at the end of the book that she mostly adopts the simple present tense to displace herself to the bitter reality of what has happened to her and to gather her strength. The process of being authentic towards death could not be narrated better. From recollection and actuality, she faces a potential future where her (Minerva's) owl could once more open its wings and continue living, yet with a deeper understanding of life and accepting oneself as a mortal being.

The memoir is heartbreaking. Matthews takes readers through different stages of grief, from denial to guilt, anger, acceptance, and mourning, to a final phase she adds called surviving. Death is a challenging subject to portray, but Matthews succeeds at dedicating the whole space of the memoir to her husband, where the presence of his absence is felt; from the epistolary appearance of his words in the poems and letters Matthews reads, to her own subjective descriptions of her husband, Mike is an omnipresent protagonist. Matthews comes to terms with C. S. Lewis' claim that bereavement is a normal phase of marriage. In bereavement she learns how to be herself after being one with her husband, how to be a single noun after being a part of a "compound noun of Carol and Mike" for so many years. And she considers the excruciatingly painful process as a gift to her late husband, who will not experience the bereavement of losing his wife. For Matthews, writing the elegy is a therapeutic way of reckoning with grief and death, whose presence lurks throughout the text until she "finds her life by the losing of it."

Memorializing Canada

Benjamin Authers, Maïté Snauwaert, and Daniel Laforest, eds.
Inhabiting Memory in Canadian Literature/ Habiter la mémoire dans la littérature canadienne. U of Alberta P $49.95

Reviewed by Laurel Ryan

This excellent scholarly collection includes seven essays in English and five in French on various facets of the relationship between space and memory. The introduction and index are presented in both languages, but individual essays are not translated. Readers do not need to be bilingual to appreciate the volume's diversity and coherence of approaches, although it helps. The book will be of interest not only to scholars of Canadian literature, but also to those of postcolonial and diasporic literatures.

As a whole, the collection explores the "space/memory nexus" as a site of

production of cultural ideas about place and nation. The general movement of the collection is from local engagements with urban environments in the "Mapping the City/Cartographier la ville" section, through individual migrant experiences of place in "Diasporic Memories/Mémoires diasporiques" and "Intercultural Spaces/Espaces interculturels," to cultural perceptions of Canada and "the North" in "Towards a New Memory/Vers une mémoire nouvelle." The book builds on several recent studies of place and memory in Canadian literature, such as *Canadian Literature and Cultural Memory* (2014), edited by Cynthia Sugars and Eleanor Ty.

The bilingualism of *Inhabiting/Habiter* is a crucial element of its methodology: it acknowledges that English and French (and, in Sherry Simon's essay, Yiddish) literatures in Canada inhabit overlapping spaces and engage with similar theoretical concerns. Moreover, by putting essays in both languages side by side, this book opens up new approaches in thinking about space and memory by reflecting some of the institutionalized differences between the study of Canadian literature in each language. A particular strength of the essays in French is their diversity of sources: of the five essays, two take nineteenth-century texts as their primary sources, two analyze mid-twentieth-century texts, and one works with twenty-first-century texts. The French essays thus present a long view of memory across time and cultures. For example, Pamela V. Sing shows how Honoré Beaugrand played with time and memory to establish different resonances with late-nineteenth-century Quebec and American audiences. On the other hand, of the seven English-language essays, only one analyzes literature written before 1960 in any significant way—and it is the focus of only half of that essay—though this is less a weakness of the book than it is a product of current trends in English-Canadian literary studies. The English-language essays' collective strength is often the intimacy of their approaches to place: Margaret Mackey's analysis of an app that maps and contextualizes her childhood environment is a prime example. The English-language essays thus approach the topic of memory from a predominantly contemporary perspective: what does it mean to think and write about the past now? In contrast, the temporal diversity of the French sources suggests the question, what has it meant to memorialize the past at various points in Canada's history? Both questions are important, and by juxtaposing these two perspectives, this book serves as a valuable challenge to scholars in both languages to deepen our understanding of Canada's literary past in both ways.

Wartime Ghosts, Alive and Well

Joel Baetz
Battle Lines: Canadian Poetry in English and the First World War. Wilfrid Laurier UP $85.00

Reviewed by Jeffrey Aaron Weingarten

In *Battle Lines: Canadian Poetry in English and the First World War*, Joel Baetz explains the "lofty beauties, exquisite laments, and harsher manners" of poetry from the First World War. In so doing, he gives fresh perspectives on writing that has not, he insists, just been overlooked; it has also been misrepresented as "too patriotic . . . too simple," and of too little influence over later writers. According to the author, these are unfair, surface-deep assessments of a much richer legacy that he aims to illuminate. In most cases, Baetz succeeds in showing the rarely acknowledged complexity of such writing, though his study sometimes feels distractingly defensive and occasionally falls back on overstated arguments for the legacy of these poets and poems. Nonetheless, the book is a fine example of compelling

archival scholarship and skilled close reading, all of which amounts to something of a rallying call for greater investigation into the soldier figure and war poetry.

In each chapter, Baetz challenges clichés or caricatures of war poetry. He offers various and complex interpretations of the heroic soldier and the "dominant image of wartime femininity" in works by Douglas Leader Durkin and Helena Coleman, observes the unresolved despair in works by Rupert Brooke and John McCrae, remarks on the psychologically complex renderings of soldiers in Robert Service's writings, unpacks Frank Prewett's conflicted representations of "alienated and fragmented individuals," and combs W. W. E. Ross' buried archival treasures to help readers better grasp Ross' career trajectory and his "stand against the complacency of comforting ideas" about war. Baetz does an impressive job of digging into archives and bringing to light many unacknowledged or unpublished writings by his chosen writers (especially in the case of Ross, in whose archive Baetz seemed to have camped for months).

While Baetz's skilful reading of archives, poets, and poems will impress readers, he encounters obvious critical challenges when connecting his chosen poets to later modernists. One of Baetz's repeated claims is that war poems (many of which he admits were often little known, editorially buried by modernist anthologists, or simply unpublished) were, to one degree or another, "unconscious[ly] inherit[ed]" by later (often modernist) writers. On the one hand, modernists established many of the harmful stereotypes that hurt these poets' reputations. On the other hand, Baetz believes these writers were challenging the status quo when it came to poeticizing war, and therefore their works offer evidence of their affinity—however slight—for modernism's adversarial attitude. Baetz, in other words, aims to show that these dismissed literatures are, in fact, tightly connected to the very movement that dismissed them. This critical approach is fraught with challenges.

Baetz's study of McCrae's "In Flanders Fields" offers a case in point. He proves that McCrae's poem is more than bland patriotic propaganda, insofar as it breaks wartime conventions by adopting the voice of a dead soldier and by denying its readers an obvious resolution (since the poem ends by pleading that readers should take up the cause lest this soldier die in vain). But does this *very* modest unconventionality signal the poem's "anticipat[ion]" of later "proto-modernist and modernist gestures" up to and including the Montreal forties poets? Baetz argues yes, but the claim feels too swift and unconvincing here and throughout the book. However valuable their poetry may be, the works of McCrae, Service, or Baetz's other authors (with the exception of Ross) hardly resemble the aesthetic shock, poetic difficulty, or philosophical challenges posed by, say, Otto Dix's gruesome wartime sketches, T. S. Eliot's frenetic Prufrock, or Dorothy Livesay's multivocal *Day and Night*. To stress, as Baetz often seems to do, that all signs point to modernism in wartime poetry ironically strengthens the position of the very critical framework on which he intends to put pressure. While reading, I often thought it would be more profitable simply to understand these poets on *their* terms without slotting them into the very movement that rejected them, especially since some of these poets themselves—to one degree or another—rejected that same movement.

While Baetz's nods to modernism are not always successful, the book actually finds a much more compelling and convincing argument elsewhere by proposing that these poets were stymied by their audience's expectations. Widely desired wartime motifs of heroism and unity limited authors' willingness to challenge too forcefully the tastes of their audience, an audience in

evident need of uplifting, motivational, and nationalistic poetic expression. Each writer's implicit or explicit refusal to challenge conventions more forcefully or to publish the unpublishable signals their hesitant acquiescence. This quality of their poems clearly sets them apart from the aesthetic, conceptual, and philosophical shock and difficulty inherent in modernist art, but their acquiescence nevertheless raises important questions. What are the forces that shackle poets? What challenges do they hesitate to pose in moments of cultural crisis? And what can we learn from those hesitations? These are fascinating questions about the nature of publication, self-censorship, and reception that best represent Baetz's achievement in *Battle Lines*.

Suzanne and Victoria

Anaïs Barbeau-Lavalette; Rhonda Mullins, trans.
Suzanne. Coach House $18.95

Catherine Leroux; Lazer Lederhendler, trans.
Madame Victoria. Biblioasis $22.95

Reviewed by Myra Bloom

In this data-driven age, when branches of our family trees are unfurled with a perfunctory mouth swab or Internet search, it is hard to believe that there is anything about our past that can't be known. Nonetheless, genealogical mysteries lie at the heart of two recent books from Quebec, Anaïs Barbeau-Lavalette's *Suzanne* (translated by Rhonda Mullins) and Catherine Leroux's *Madame Victoria* (translated by Lazer Lederhendler). Their concern with history—and in particular, women's history—speaks to a more general trend in contemporary writing from Quebec.

In *Suzanne,* the author goes in search of her grandmother, Suzanne Meloche, the "ghost" who inexplicably abandoned the author's mother in early childhood. Prior to her granddaughter's intervention, Meloche was barely remembered as a bit player in the mid-century avant-garde movement Les Automatistes, a revolutionary group that included towering artists like Paul-Émile Borduas and Jean-Paul Riopelle. Spurred by the personal drive to understand a grandmother's desertion, *Suzanne* simultaneously restores Meloche to the centre of a cultural history from which she has been largely excluded: its most exciting passages take place in the smoky Montreal bars and living rooms where her circle of bohemian artists is literally making history. In the process of telling the story, Barbeau-Lavalette comes to sympathize with this fiercely iconoclastic woman who sacrificed everything for artistic freedom, but whose aspirations were ultimately eclipsed by her male-dominated milieu.

Meloche's peripatetic life is evoked in a series of vignettes, many less than a page in length, that span eighty-five years of history. The other notable formal aspect of *Suzanne* is that it is written entirely in the second person, a dreaded rhetorical choice that, in less capable hands, might have steered the book into melodramatic terrain. Here, however, brisk sentences and an imagistic sparseness avoid sentimentality, while finely honed metaphors and synecdoche conjure details out of the shroud of biographical mystery. Playing a forbidden piano, the eight-year-old Meloche "grab[s] notes by the fistful"; at school, she enjoys "the steep slope of anonymous necks." The economical prose is a fitting match for a woman whose life was characterized by emotional withholding.

Suzanne was a smash success in its original French (one online magazine called it "the literary event of 2015"), and will hopefully receive more attention in English translation since it was a contender in Canada Reads 2019. Anglophone readers will not only benefit from its insight into a culturally transformative period in Quebec,

but will moreover see aesthetic and thematic continuities with other contemporary writers who blur the line between fact and fiction and examine the sacrifices of motherhood (including Sheila Heti, Rachel Cusk, and Elena Ferrante).

Catherine Leroux's *Madame Victoria* is also concerned with a woman whose story has been lost to history, although the answers she finds are wholly derived from her imagination. Inspired by the true case of an unidentified skeleton (dubbed "Madame Victoria") that was found in the woods near Montreal's Royal Victoria Hospital in 2001, Leroux—in a series of twelve sketches or "variations," as she calls them—invents the different lives that might have led to the same grim conclusion. Leroux wields this conceit to great effect: because the end of the story is known, we can only watch idly as the various Victorias hurtle to their demise. In the spirit of Leonard Cohen's "Who By Fire," one wonders at the outset how each precipitating incident—the death of a child, a wayward medical experiment, a time-travel escapade—will lead to Victoria's doom.

The wide range in time period and genre, along with the motifs that recur across stories, have earned *Madame Victoria* comparisons to David Mitchell's *Cloud Atlas.* The problem with *Madame Victoria* is that it sacrifices depth to breadth, both in the book as a whole and within each individual story: where *Cloud Atlas* succeeds because of its meticulous worldbuilding, *Madame Victoria* falters for its narrative thinness. The stories with sci-fi elements are particularly beset by telling over showing; in "Victoria Redacted," where a character is medically transformed into a ghost, we read that the "the following months were divided between grieving and struggling to convince her relations of her existence." The historical and contemporary stories—in particular, "Victoria Drinks" and "Victoria in Love"—are more successfully drawn and offer incisive commentary on structural inequality in Quebec society; this critical dimension is lacking in the speculative fictions.

Suzanne and *Madame Victoria* join a slate of historical engagements with Quebec by francophone writers, including Maxime Raymond Bock (*Atavismes*), Samuel Archibald (*Arvida*), and Kim Thúy (*Ru*). While the renaissance of historical fictions has been much discussed, less attention has been paid to the reclamation of women's narratives in particular. However, the success of books like *Ru, Suzanne,* and *Madame Victoria,* alongside recent academic studies like Patricia Smart's *Writing Herself into Being: Quebec Women's Autobiographical Writings from Marie de l'Incarnation to Nelly Arcan,* speaks to a growing interest in rescuing Quebec's women from anonymity.

Personal Places

Joelle Barron
Ritual Lights. icehouse $19.95

Curtis LeBlanc
Little Wild. Nightwood $18.95

Mallory Tater
This Will Be Good. Book*hug $18.00

Reviewed by Neil Surkan

The debut collections of Joelle Barron, Curtis LeBlanc, and Mallory Tater add their charismatic, compelling voices to contemporary Canadian poetry's flourishing ecosystem. All three books explore the relationship between identity, memory, and place. Reading them is like dropping into a Google Street View of each poet's personal history: by rendering memories into precise, vibrant vignettes, each poet inscribes specific locations with poignant intimations.

Fierce, brave, and vivid, Barron's *Ritual Lights* merges traumatic memories and inventive imagery in a relentless sequence that grieves without giving in, and celebrates renewal without ignoring the past.

Since the speaker warns in the opening poem that "rape yarns are seldom / what they should be," the book twists and turns through snarls of unsettling events without aiming at resolution; rather, powerful recollections of pain and suffering are constellated with fleeting moments of self-discovery and connection. Tinted by a "bitterness" Barron likens to "an oily glaze on the surface / of the water," this book accrues, to borrow one of the poems' titles, "Bright, Heavy Things": sexual assaults are enumerated and described, deaths and miscarriages are memorialized, past lives are relived. Thus, moments of meditative awe are all the more striking when they occur. Take, for instance, Barron's description of sand fleas in "Savary" (a standout poem):

> On the beach, legion sand fleas
> dance. Heads back, mouths open,
> drinking sun
> from my leg hairs. Reverent of the merest
> existence,
> their small bodies turned toward God.

As Barron dramatizes the speaker's hard-earned instants of healing and relief, we readers bear witness. Fittingly, near the end of the collection, Barron offers an illuminating *ars poetica*: "moored by a person who will / never know me; this is poetry." *Ritual Lights* moors us in a deep, exposed bay.

LeBlanc's *Little Wild* also invites us into his speaker's memories, but his poems about dangerous situations, addiction, family dynamics, and the deaths of adolescent friends eschew a tone of sarcasm or acrimony. Instead, these elegiac, conversational poems consistently assemble evocative scenes before the speaker makes a startling, poignant observation or a surprising, brazen assertion. Reading *Little Wild* is like thumbing through a family album where every photograph, when flipped, is labelled differently than expected. As the book proceeds, one can't help but be amazed by LeBlanc's knack for suddenly shifting focus, so that familiar occurrences shine in new and peculiar ways, or chronicled events relay unexpected lessons. Take, for instance, the turn in "Pembina River, August '09" when, after describing his friend Dan tuning his guitar, the speaker remarks how

> Certain noises rest within
> the hollows of my body
> and remind me
> it's been a while
> since I've heard anything
> for the first time.

In "Public Works," after a thirty-five-line stanza describing a construction job the speaker worked at nineteen and the light it shed on his relationship with his father, a tercet follows that shifts the poem from a particular memory to a dictum about the nature of parenthood: "That uncertainty in raising a birch tree, / whose roots could be spreading anywhere, / taking hold of anything, underneath." LeBlanc dares to peer into our human being with an earnestness one can't help but admire.

Tater's *This Will Be Good* portrays her speaker's struggle with an eating disorder in the tumultuous intersections of family, friendship, and adolescent relationships. Every poem in this razor-sharp collection shuts us into a narrow room of fervent feeling. Tater has a gift for swift, curt sentences that, coupled with her riveting eye for detail, crackle on the page like live wires. From the opening sonnet—in which a bag of frozen bagels, "a dozen freezer-burnt fists," gets slammed on the table by the speaker's mother so they burst "like angry stars"—Tater signals her love of striking, brain-wringing images. Her speaker's mother and father, "soured with uncertainty," sit "in the lemon juice light of morning"; her bereaved grandfather ignores a puzzle on his coffee table "for four years," as more and more pieces of "interlocked sky" are "consumed by the exasperated chesterfield"; and she herself tries to

become "the first girl ever / alive who could survive on skim milk, / water and peaches." Though these poems fixate on illness and death, they are brilliantly alive with memorable details. Though her speaker claims she wants to "learn how to love falsely and alone," these poems captivate because of Tater's unabashed honesty.

Through Tamarack Swamps

Brian Bartlett
All Manner of Tackle: Living with Poetry. Palimpsest $19.95

Alden Nowlan; Brian Bartlett, ed.
Collected Poems of Alden Nowlan. icehouse $55.00

Reviewed by Nicholas Bradley

The massive *Collected Poems* is a nearly seven-hundred-page-long testament to Alden Nowlan's genius. He wrote a stupefying number of poems, and he was also a prolific writer of fiction, drama, essays, and local history. Several years passed between two early volumes of verse, *The Things Which Are* (1962) and *Bread, Wine and Salt* (1967), but in the late 1960s and after, he published books with a frequency that rivalled even that of Al Purdy. *The Mysterious Naked Man* (1969) was followed by *Playing the Jesus Game* (1970), *Between Tears and Laughter* (1971), *I'm a Stranger Here Myself* (1974), *Smoked Glass* (1977), and *I Might Not Tell Everybody This* (1982). The *Collected Poems* includes the poetry from Nowlan's chapbooks—*The Rose and the Puritan* (1958), *A Darkness in the Earth* (1959), and *Wind in a Rocky Country* (1960)—and from his mature volumes, which range from *Under the Ice* (1961) to the posthumously issued *An Exchange of Gifts* (1985). Brian Bartlett, the editor of the *Collected Poems* and a capable poet himself, notes that the "[p]oems that appeared only in periodicals or exist only in manuscript" are left to be gathered elsewhere. Thus Nowlan's *Poems* are now *Collected* but not yet *Complete*. Bartlett's volume does not replace the much shorter *Selected Poems* (1996, 2013) edited by Patrick Lane and Lorna Crozier—the books serve different purposes—but it will be the standard edition of Nowlan's poetry for some time to come, and it should both renew appreciation for his achievement and spark scholarly interest.

Although he enjoyed national prominence, the poet from Stanley, Nova Scotia—and later Hartland and Fredericton, New Brunswick—was bound to a specific culture and geography. His works attend to an isolated, impoverished, conservative world that in certain respects was Victorian even in the middle of the twentieth century. Hugh MacLennan wrote in *Seven Rivers of Canada* (1961) that

> [t]he old Maritime Provinces have changed less than any part of North America. What they have lost in prosperity, they have gained in coherence, and on the whole the life there is the quietest and happiest in the country.

Perhaps so, but Nowlan's poems typically furnish a less sanguine view. He was born in 1933, and the Depression remained with him until he died of respiratory failure in 1983. His short life was constrained by poverty, poor health, and alcoholism. He was uneducated and debilitatingly shy. As Bartlett writes, Nowlan was "a great poet of fear. Again and again his poetry recalls the fears found in childhood." The titular phrase *Under the Ice* conveys a psychological interest, while the phrase *Smoked Glass* suggests partial obscurity. Somehow Nowlan transformed severe hardship into art. In "Beginning," from *Under the Ice*, he imagined his own moment of origin, the birth of the poet: "From that they found most lovely, most abhorred, / my parents made me." As Bartlett observes, however, Nowlan also "takes us from nightmarish precincts of fear and loneliness to the embraces of friendship and family." He wrote of love in marriage and fatherly devotion, and expressed enormous sympathy for the salt of the earth.

Although Nowlan was a regionalist of the Maritimes, his poems are rarely maritime in nature. Deeply rooted in New Brunswick's landscapes, and not besotted with seascapes, they depict farms and farmers, forests and millworkers, and sometimes the Saint John River, along which, in MacLennan's words again, "a growing boy can still experience the simple things, and learn without thinking the fabric of a coherent society." In *Under the Ice*, Nowlan drew largely sympathetic (but at times caustic) portraits of local figures: "Jack Stringer," "Rosemary Jensen," "Sheilah Smith," "Andy Shaw," "Warren Pryor," "Patricia Grey." He was not oblivious to the occasional ironies and humour of rural life. In "Alex Duncan," he poked fun at the eponymous farmer's colonial mindset, his desire to return to a prelapsarian world: "Four decades away from home / his Scottish tongue / grows broader every year." In his last interview, as Bartlett mentions in the introduction to the *Collected Poems*, Nowlan listed his influences, many of whom were rural poets:

> I've borrowed from everybody, I suppose. D. H. Lawrence, Thomas Hardy, William Carlos Williams, Sherwood Anderson, Robert Frost, Wordsworth, Chekhov, Robinson Jeffers, Whitman—and most of all, the King James Version of the Bible.

A. E. Housman's *A Shropshire Lad* (1896) is another obvious point of comparison, while such early poems as "About Death They Were Wrong" (from *A Darkness in the Earth*) are conspicuously Audenesque. Nowlan's poetry also calls to mind James Wright, whose first books, *The Green Wall* (1957) and *Saint Judas* (1959), belong to the same milieu as Nowlan's works despite their geographical differences. The Canadian poet and the American were comparably preoccupied by guilt, disgrace, and bursts of rustic beauty.

His poems in their assorted modes—portraits, wry anecdotes, mournful reflections, pastoral and counter-pastoral scenes, childhood recollections, and excoriations of the self—are consistently interesting. Despite its length, the *Collected Poems* is an accessible, highly readable volume. But if Nowlan is an engaging observer, his poetic language is often flat, and its plainness becomes enervating over the long course of the *Collected Poems*. Individual poems are memorable, but rarely phrases thereof. Despite what Sandra Djwa once called "the conversational ripple . . . of his best lines," a general monotony besets the poetry, especially the later writing. Verbal dazzle, compression, verve—these were not Nowlan's virtues. But there are worse fates for a poet than to be compassionate and wise, and Nowlan's particular talents can be admired and understood on their own terms. With the *Collected Poems*, Bartlett has made a substantial contribution to Canadian letters. The edition is a tribute to Nowlan himself and a gift to readers and critics.

The essays in Bartlett's *All Manner of Tackle* have a strong Atlantic bias. The poets they examine include Nowlan, Fred Cogswell, Don Domanski, Robert Gibbs, M. Travis Lane, Ross Leckie, Dorothy Roberts, Joseph Sherman, and Sue Sinclair, as well as others with less palpable or persistent ties to the East Coast, such as Tim Bowling, Tim Lilburn, Don McKay, P. K. Page, and Jan Zwicky. The book brings together studies, reviews, and occasional essays first published between 1993 and 2016. Her connections to Nova Scotia drag Elizabeth Bishop into Bartlett's bailiwick, and although he stops short of claiming her as a Canadian author, he emphasizes her fondness for the province of her early years and later travels. His preferred subjects now represent the old guard of Canadian poetry, but Bartlett reliably shows that the poetry warrants attention. He is a generous reader; in his own terms, an "explorer, appreciator, student, broadcaster of good news." The dog-eared pages in my copy of *All Manner*

of Tackle confirm my appreciation of his criticism, although I must close with a quibble: the book has no index, a frustrating omission for readers keen to return to these astute and passionate essays.

Nostalgia Novels

Andrew Battershill
Marry, Bang, Kill. Goose Lane $22.95

Ray Robertson
1979. Biblioasis $19.95

Reviewed by Geordie Miller

"Always historicize!" Fredric Jameson's critical imperative continues to implicate the present period, which remains "an age that has forgotten how to think historically." But given the current appetite for period dramas like *Stranger Things*, surely shaking down popular culture for evidence of historical consciousness is unnecessary. The past appears to arrive on demand. What Jameson crucially foregrounds, though, is how intensely such contemporary representations of the past are suffused with nostalgia. For Jameson, nostalgia connotes a lack of feeling for the lived historical experience of whatever past is on display. These two "nostalgia novels" might dull historical perspective, yet they are far from dull.

Marry, Bang, Kill is as unflinching as its title, emphasizing throughout the third verb of the eponymous parlour game. The opening chapter introduces Tommy Marlo, who, like Raymond Chandler's Philip Marlowe, has a penchant for getting in too deep and, unlike David Simon's Marlo Stanfield, is too compassionate to do whatever it takes to preserve himself. Tommy robs a teenage girl of her MacBook Pro at knifepoint outside a coffee shop in Victoria, and then robs her father and his murderous biker gang of one hundred dollars from a secret stash point disclosed on the stolen laptop, before escaping to Quadra Island. The opening robbery scene is a microcosm of what follows: witty banter between antagonists—Tommy and the unnamed girl—whose conflict is expressed in generational terms: "'My dad will cut your feet off and throw them in the ocean. Don't you read Twitter?'" He doesn't. Does anyone "*read* Twitter"? It sounds like something from the mouth of Alan Mouse, a retired Chicago cop who befriends Tommy. Mousey's baby-boomer generation emerges as the main antagonist, as becomes explicit in his engaging conversations with Greta, the millennial hit woman sent to kill Tommy. "'Motherfucker, I was born in a Costco,'" Greta chides him. "'Your nostalgia doesn't do shit for me.'" Jeff Bezos is a baby boomer too, and Tommy blames Amazon for his switch in robbery tactics—from cash to computers. Greta is adrift with an MA in Art History when killing comes calling. The novel moves as swiftly as today's path from university to underemployment, with the same biting blend of pathos and bathos.

1979 hardly yearns for the titular year, perched on the precipice of the counter-revolutionary decade to come. The novel conjures the 1970s in ways that demonstrate just how seamlessly historical experience has been ceded to pop. We know it is 1979 because the Ramones' *Leave Home* is on the record player and the Iranian Revolution is on the television. Beyond pop-culture pastiche, how do people in the 1970s perceive their historical moment? Our answer must come from Tom Buzby, the novel's thirteen-year-old paper-boy protagonist. Tom is a superbly imagined guide to his hometown of Chatham, with its "two hockey rinks and one bookstore" and "soon-to-be new mall." The battle to preserve historic Old City Hall from capital's mall ambitions is all too familiar. "*You're* Chatham's future, people," a beloved teacher tells Tom and his classmates in an effort to enlist them to the anti-mall cause. In other words, Mr. Brown believes the children are our future, to paraphrase the opening lyric of a song

originally recorded in 1977. If only Tommy could know what the 1980s had in store for his generation. If only he could have been reading *Marry, Bang, Kill*.

"a bunch of proses"

bpNichol; Derek Beaulieu, ed.
Nights on Prose Mountain: The Fiction of bpNichol. Coach House $24.95

Reviewed by Suzanne Zelazo

By turns feted, revered, and coveted, the poetry of bpNichol has continued, even thirty years after his death, to contribute to Canadian literary experimentation. Yet, despite the fact that Nichol's artistic practice is inherently emergent, erupting out of the margins in the "borderblur" that defines his artistic aims, his prose is much less well known. Indeed, Derek Beaulieu's *Nights on Prose Mountain* collects six distinct prose volumes, from 1968 to 1983, which have long been out of print. Nevertheless, much of what we know of Nichol the poet comes out of his experiments in fiction (not to mention in illustration and screenwriting). In fact, Nichol's uncanny ability to get inside of rhythm in his poetry, to tease apart the nuances of relationality at the level of the line and even the letter, is on full display in this rich and variegated collection. So too is Nichol's palpable luxuriating in the pleasure of the text.

Despite the blur, Nichol's writing is always lucent. These texts are formally sophisticated and yet they never seek to obfuscate. Aided by Beaulieu's judicious arrangement and editorial sensitivity, Nichol's radical experimentalism is remarkably accessible—with its generic disintegration coming into focus at every angle. Consider, for example, "Twins — a history," where the dream-like allegory has elements of a David Lynch script, although only Nichol could mimic the filmic pacing on the page. Nichol's Oedipal drama highlights projection and the fear of sublimation, but also the generative power of influence and connectivity:

> twin women married twin men each of them had a womb in which a man or a woman or both could have grown each of them had a man who was a husband & let a part of him go back inside them to their womb one gave birth to a man & one gave birth to a woman that was the only difference you could see between them the man & the woman were born at the same time on the same day in the same hospital in two different beds where the twin women lay beside each other giving birth to them

This linguistic Möbius strip highlights the capability of narrative to dismantle the repetition compulsion of trauma and, ultimately, to liberate.

Of the many wonders in the collection, I am struck most by the tenderness of Nichol's prose. There is a deep sense of permission here. The lives and voices Nichol writes are unapologetically what they are. Their failure is as eloquent as their uprising. Take for example the novella *Still*, a heartbreaking conversation between an unnamed, genderless, couple. *Still* evokes a space between communion and antagonism, where proximity becomes revolt, where love abandons its own undoing:

> Something about you & the day, the way everything seemed to blend into one feeling of continuity. You told me things no one had ever bothered to tell me. Stupid things. What you didn't like about certain kinds of trees. Why you'd collected string as a kid. Absolutely useless information. And then you'd turn around & start talking to me about someone's death, something that had really torn you apart . . . . I felt a permission from you to be myself, even as you said, with all the contradictions intact.

Throughout Nichol's oeuvre, it is the space between that sings, and Beaulieu's attention to arrangement and design assures we hear every note.

Nonetheless, editorial decisions were made to streamline differences in typographic and material experimentation across the six individual publications, all of which varied in typeface, page breaks, line breaks, even in cut size: forcing them into a unified collection would necessarily result in formatting changes. Despite this challenge, Beaulieu has managed to capture the spirit of Nichol's remarkable innovation.

Nights on Prose Mountain is a gorgeous offering, "a bunch of proses" as Nichol writes in the dedication of *Craft Dinner*. As a collection, it allows us to hear Nichol's progressive tinkering at the seam. Reading the text feels like a private, extended conversation with Nichol, one in which he listens as much as he speaks, ushering the reader to new heights, new levels of exploration: "you turn the page," Nichol writes, "& I am here. . . . we have begun again as we did before so many times."

Tender but Uneasy

Samantha Bernstein
Spit on the Devil. Mansfield $17.00

Mary Corkery
Simultaneous Windows. Inanna $18.95

Basma Kavanagh
Ruba'iyat for the Time of Apricots.
Frontenac $19.95

Reviewed by Jessi MacEachern

Samantha Bernstein, Mary Corkery, and Basma Kavanagh have written three startlingly distinct poetry debuts. Where Bernstein's *Spit on the Devil* bristles against sentimentality, Corkery's *Simultaneous Windows* dares to embrace cliché. When Kavanagh calls for political community in *Ruba'iyat for the Time of Apricots*, Bernstein dallies in an isolated urban landscape. As Corkery fixates on cultural others, Kavanagh discovers the other inside herself.

Bernstein's collection traces the seemingly autobiographical details of the life of a poet who happens to be Irving Layton's daughter. She tackles his legacy in "On the Death of my Father," wherein by passing he has "done / what any good patriarch should: / initiate me into the customs of my tribe." Certainly, Bernstein invokes Judaism here, but the line also cements her place in Canadian poetry. What further embeds this blossoming reputation is the strength of the poems themselves: striking in imagery, experimental in form, and alternately dark and wistful. Consider the poem "Lessons on Optimism," in which the lines present an image of urban dailiness: a panhandler at a changing light, a Tim Hortons in Etobicoke, College Street in moonlight. Domestic life interferes with the city landscape in "2008," when "the daycare babies come bawling." A few poems later, in "The First Month," one of the bawling babies has made its way inside the home. This is the first of several tender portraits exploring the love between mother and child. The lines form an uneasy embrace of this new way of being.

In "Industrial Evolution (A Reprise)," the seven sprawling parts dart across the page and leave gaps in the body of the poem—mirroring the gap left by the poem's young man. After these ghosts leave the "empty stage" of their youth, the collection leads into the aphorism of its title poem: "'Spit on the Devil,' my mother says when I praise / my good fortune." But the speaker refuses to play so loosely with happiness, so she embarks on a pathway separate from that of mother and father both, one that revels in a certain amount of recklessness. In the book's final poem, the apostrophic "Dear Reader," Bernstein crafts an alluring Canadian vignette of liberal desires, insurance ads, and obsession with American news. The result is a dynamic new voice in Canadian literature that is as concerned with the "careful selection of emojis" as with the question: "How shall we give love its definition?"

The title poem of Corkery's *Simultaneous Windows* demonstrates the poet's unique

mastery of form: three tight tercets with a nearly perfect adherence to ten syllables per line, a counting measure akin to the nervy poetry of Marianne Moore. Zigzagging across the landscape of memory are nostalgic recollections of a rural childhood—the book opens on "Why I Can't Sleep," seven prose poems offering snapshots of a child's fears—and exotic portraits of elsewhere. Though Corkery herself, according to her professional biography, has experience with international justice, these travel poems often smack of voyeurism. In describing the ringing gunshots of the West Bank or the violence in Rwanda, Corkery doesn't quite succeed in crossing the emotional or geographical distance. Corkery is most successful during her characteristic final stanzas, which spill across the page in fragmented forms and linger on abstract images: "a slice of sky," "a sparrow," "one infinite moment."

Kavanagh is more successful in weaving together separate times and places. Her collection is a single long poem, crafted according to the *ruba'iyat* (or quatrain). Each stanza is singular, yet inextricable from the others. Each page is followed by a short collection of words written in Arabic and translated into English. Between these two languages, Kavanagh wields poetry as a tool for survival: "Sisters, braid words into your hair, sprinkle words onto food." One focus of this lyric poem is motherhood. Unlike Bernstein, though, it is not an embryo but a poem this speaker gestates: "I trust my poem grows inside me while I scrub the floor / and tend my garden."

Mothers and daughters form one of the three connected threads of this poem; the others are the earth itself and the violence of men. Kavanagh advises women "to birth a new world" and men to "unlace the rigid armour you've come to know as skin"—in order that both factions of the divided earth may "soften" and heal their wounded home. Though the final page of the collection has the speaker admitting "I'm slow to bloom," this collection is already demonstrative of a steady, accomplished hand.

Some Poems and Issues

George Bowering and George Stanley
Some End/West Broadway. New Star $18.00

Michael Dennis
Bad Engine: New and Selected Poems.
Anvil $20.00

Patrick Friesen
Songen. Mother Tongue $19.95

Reviewed by Carl Peters

George Bowering asserts, "If we can experience another's mind in our own, we know that love is possible" ("The Holy Life"). Robin Blaser writes, "a poem is a commotion among things—a search for form—because form is alive—and the poet is, thereby, a *commotor* not a commuter of meaning" ("Letter from a Student—Letter to a Student"). These three books delight in the dialogical performance of poetry. I say *performance* because that is the heart of the poetic act—not readily apparent because the performance resides in the mind of the performer doing the action. Poetry is where we have to conjoin act with performance, making a new performance, a new object, the way these poets do in their books.

Stuart Ross calls Michael Dennis a "populist poet"—and I find that off-putting. His reasoning is that you don't need a PhD to read these poems. I don't think a book needs an intro that tells readers it doesn't need an intro. The catch-all term "populist" can refer to almost anything that contains an appeal to "the people," but what is "the people?" There's a long tradition of folk poetry, ballads, vernacular poetry, dialect poetry, and experimental poetry that reaches out to different forms of language, and these books fit those forms. These are fine poems in plain language and remind one of Allen Ginsberg in *Cosmopolitan Greetings* or John

Clare. Plain language is the most deconstructive. What does *Bad Engine* deconstruct? These poems meet a tradition head-on, from an early ethereal fragment—"curved light"; I hear Emily Dickinson—to the last, the particular, "the red ants / who build giant cities / under the ground." "i am somewhere between"—I said head-on—the poems move from "i" to "I" and that's important. *Bad Engine* conjures up William Carlos Williams—"a poem is a small (or large) machine made of words." These poems have more in common with the films of Stan Brakhage, who made art for everyone other than Fellini. Most everyone. Poems that fragment and find other ends again and again. These poems are eye-myths.

Songen, with its italicized *g* on the cover (harking back to bpNichol's *gIFTS*—the open universe of song) is shaped like a chapbook (that calls to mind a songbook), a term that has its roots in Old English—"barter, business, dealing." Between the first poem, "Babbling," and the rest is a building-up of feeling, one poem at a time, one perception after another—a composting; re-combinative—a poiesis. Time and space and their contemplation approaching love are the book's materials that form into landscapes and words. "Mercy" as fluid as "water"—reaffirming my point about space and time and all the words. Images—"the distance we live in, the reach between." It is a meditation on speechlessness—both a dumbfounding ("winter blindness") and a "babbling"—common to babies and fools, but, with a little effort, poets also. The book is full of moments that encounter/counter consciousness, and in the sudden echo of sight coming into image an interval, a break, or a narrative is formed, developing like a Polaroid or not—"directions are shutting down." Each poem begins and ends with a grammatical period although each sentence begins with lower-case. Shape matters, shifting. That formal experiment stretches time; it causes tensions in between. The book is "always a voice" "and no horizon line"—as the words echo and become other languages.

In *Some End/West Broadway*, writing is as natural a thing as breathing. Here the projective is extended to the dialogic. There are meditations on some poets (there is no eulogizing here). It is a discourse on poetry that any writer has—it is Bowering and Stanley's intimations on mortality and that's clear. "Dichten=condensare," said Pound. It's about reading, and reading as comparison, affinity, correspondences, metaphor, ambivalence, enigmatic underworld of meanings, and basically "attending" to reading. But *Some End* ends up on *West Broadway*; "West Broadway" leads to somewhere—some end—these are appropriate titles for projective-verse poets or, more accurately, poets going further—and they do. Gertrude Stein said that "remarks are not literature," but theirs might be—fraternally.

Poets Telling Stories

Alex Boyd
Army of the Brave and Accidental. Nightwood $19.95

Linda Rogers
Crow Jazz. Mother Tongue $22.95

Reviewed by Michael Roberson

Army of the Brave and Accidental by Alex Boyd and *Crow Jazz* by Linda Rogers represent daring experiments by writers recognized more for their poetry than for their prose.

Army of the Brave and Accidental, Boyd's first novel, invokes Homer's *Odyssey* in a contemporary tale about the mercurial nature of time travel and the challenges that ensue with one man's attempt to change his past to sustain his future. Spanning forty vignettes, the book alternates between a handful of characters, whose voices do not change to reflect the shifting of perspective.

Rather, Boyd maintains an almost dispassionate voice throughout: controlled by a polished poetic sensibility, the book sometimes resembles a travel journal, which might be appropriate since most of the characters traverse a "blended landscape of moments." In fact, the leaps in time and space and the consistent tone preserve classic epic conventions without feeling contrived (there are also other conventional aspects for aficionados). Not unexpectedly, Boyd offers us an allegory, with the hero and his "army" advocating "compassion," "reverence," and "gratefulness" as ultimate ideals. The title not only refers to the coterie of time travellers, but also acknowledges the "wave of people that dig in every day but are sent home drowsy . . . trying to manage a life." Boyd demonstrates how time travel could never be smooth since the moments in our private and public memories, inseparable from the places in which they occur, all exert a shifting psychic gravity. Ultimately, "there isn't any way to cheat time" since we seem to bear the push, the pull, the burden of "the thick history of people" in our hearts and minds.

While Boyd forgoes invoking a muse at the beginning of his novel, Rogers begins *Crow Jazz*, her first book of short stories, with "A Blessing" by "She"—a kind of Spirit Mother with a trickster beneficence and "cosmic lips." As the title implies, the twenty-two pieces that make up the book combine an improvisational gusto and shrewd wit. They overlap theme, character, image, and "*terroir*"; like literary "mud pies" that begin with a basic "recipe" and then riff, these pieces often amalgamate impressions, demonstrating a "mind that travels fast, faster than fastballs and agile tongues." As Rogers writes early on: "I gather life's pleasure and some of its pain and dump it into a big mixing bowl." So while *Crow Jazz* contains some clunky unpolished gems—perhaps lyrical micro-essays rather than stories—the book operates by a grander impulse—to preserve and celebrate the whims of an experienced, artistic temperament at the expense of potential "plot exegesis." Some of Rogers' more cohering moments have didactic intentions, touching on issues like sexual abuse, abortion, neglect, divorce, and dementia. With honesty, pathos, cleverness, and humour, Rogers' pieces teach us about respecting each other and the complexity of identity, respecting our elders and the wisdom of age, and respecting ourselves and the fragility of health and sanity. In a time when "journalism and storytelling are under attack," Rogers offers us a refreshing defence.

All in All

Kate Braid
Elemental. Caitlin $18.00

Caroline Szpak
Slinky Naive. Anvil $18.00

Reviewed by Dani Spinosa

There is a strange pleasure that comes with reading two very unlike books at the same time. And indeed, these two 2018 offerings are very different. Kate Braid's collection is filled with immersive and evocative imagery. Caroline Szpak's boasts strikingly disorienting and defamiliarizing linguistic play. The two collections seem opposing sides of the same coin: Braid's world is all too natural, Szpak's is strange and unnatural.

It is unsurprising that Braid, an established poet with six books of poetry preceding *Elemental*, is also a writer of creative nonfiction. *Elemental* is the work of a poet who has her bearings. It is interested in drawing the reader into the poems' worlds and examining the natural world closely, using earth, air, wood, fire, and water to separate the collection into sections. In these poems, Braid cites her sources and notes her diverse influences, ranging from Emily Carr to Lorna Crozier, from Joseph Campbell to nineteenth-century Japanese woodblock prints.

In *Elemental*, Braid's poems move beautifully through the elements—not observing the natural world, but with the speaker as a clear and distinct (and often feminized) *part* of it. As the book's first poem instructs, this collection is interested most in being "sewn to the earth by such a rain / [being] part of the fabric." The collection is interested throughout in reinvesting human experience in the natural world. Here is a world where statues move with water, where we swim freely, climb quickly, and don't mind the thorns of berry bushes tearing our favourite jeans. In these poems, reader and speaker alike are invited into the elemental fabric.

If *Elemental* is all-natural and invites the reader in, Szpak's debut collection is insanely unnatural and keeps its reader at an interested but puzzled distance. The collection relies on unique and clever aurality that begs the reader to seek out one of Szpak's many readings to hear the work aloud. Though *Slinky Naive* is insightful and often quite humorous, for the most part the poems' meanings take a back seat to sound and strangeness. It is thus fitting that poet Stuart Ross highlights the collection's uniqueness in his blurb on the book's back cover; these poems recall Ross' trademark sound-play and humour throughout, and show us that Szpak is writing uniquely, but within a strong Canadian tradition.

The poems in *Slinky Naive* often hide or obscure something integral to their meanings so the reader is left to meditate on the words and sounds themselves. This is especially the case in the delightful "What Happened in Venice" where we learn nothing about what happened in Venice, but are instead left to think about "How distance is / Venice how it's thicker than an eraser" and "How it's hot / enough that all words sweat through their second meaning." It is quite clear why Szpak's collection has caused such a stir in the poetry community, and has garnered such a following.

Postnational Argonauts

Dionne Brand
The Blue Clerk: Ars Poetica in 59 Versos. McClelland & Stewart $32.95

Nasser Hussain
SKY WRI TEI NGS. Coach House $19.95

Shazia Hafiz Ramji
Port of Being. Invisible $16.95

Reviewed by Gregory Betts

Shifts in Canada, now in the midst of a curious cultural renegotiation, have led to a striking indifference from its authors. It is almost as if the (settler-colonial) nation-state has been taken as a fiction in late capitalism, and Canadian authors have forsworn the identity albatross for a more nuanced sense of place that is instead attentive to cities in their global, neo-liberal context. As Dionne Brand writes in *The Blue Clerk*, "I realized I had already abandoned nation long before I knew myself, the author says. That attachment always seemed like a temporary hook in the shoulder blade. A false feeling, in a false moment." In the three books reviewed here, cities pulse vibrantly, but Canada as a geopolitical construct is nowhere.

So the city instead of the nation becomes the point of contact between the author and the world, valuable for its role as portal and conduit: as Brand writes in her transnational memoirfesto, "The author wants a cosmopolitan city." *The Blue Clerk* has already been hailed as an "instant classic" in the national media, and its premise carefully mapped. Brand tells the story of her unfolding consciousness, using key moments of her life to suggest the various shifts and epiphanies that inform each of her previous works—it is, indeed, her *Ars Poetica*, her attempt to articulate the underlying aesthetic philosophy of her oeuvre. To do this, she divides her consciousness into two personas, the author and the clerk, who investigate and debate the meaning of

the lush details in her life and in her world, such as the impression of clouds or the colour of traffic or the philosophy of lists. The clerk is both a worker and the work that the pulsating author stumbles around. The world, including other artists, people, places, experiences, and violence, impinges upon the author, leading to strict rules about when to read philosophy and natural history (while writing poetry), when to read poetry (while writing fiction), and when to read fiction (only after writing poetry). The clerk, master of inventories and labour and worry, is a construct of the balance sheet of making art in a violent, capitalist world. Brand moves through the world of experiences, trying to serve the needs of the author and the clerk, doing her best to resist such false illusions as nations and happy endings: "The author and the poet always have to leave somewhere, someone, themselves."

Similarly, Shazia Hafiz Ramji's *Port of Being* revels in the mediated landscape of urban spaces, developing an elaborate, insightful conceit of textual landscapes and global shipping routes as intimate expressions of contemporary life. The nation gets evaporated in the weight of capital and techno-mediation. She uses a single point of consciousness but allows the world to crowd in, to collage the sensibility of the speaker. She manages to find a remarkable balance between the passive recipient of forces (the one who receives dick pix, who escapes the simulacra of Gulf War geographies) and the active witness resistant to the turbulent swirl of things that might destroy her. The poems remind me of Marshall McLuhan's notion of the maelstrom in the electric age, where survival depends upon moving with the current (rather than against it), while seeking the safety of counter-environments to survey the danger. Hence, "Our disposition is a filter, one way I can understand . . . In the morning, we consider ghosts," she writes in "Nearness." A delightful voice emerges in the sprawl of systems throughout the poems, a sharp-eyed consciousness that builds momentary, shifting counter-environments through humour and wit, insight and attention. The world is mired in competing ideologies, but even the dead language of grant applications can draw a precarious line between family and friends and advertising copy-text.

While Ramji allows her speaker to emerge from within the language of globalized city-spaces, Nasser Hussain's *SKY WRI TEI NGS* turns the city-spaces into the coordinates of a global language. His method of writing poems exclusively through airport codes from around the world seems a familiar avant-garde mode of defamiliarization, where (as in the title of the book) the language is always not quite exact, and always literally indicating somewhere outside of the text. But the playfulness of discovering hidden alphabets ("ALF AAH BET") in impossible pathways between real places in the world—where, for instance, "AAA BBB CCC" takes you from Anaa in French Polynesia to Benson, Minnesota, to Cayo Coco island, off the coast of Cuba—does more than just decentre the practical value of these codes. The airport codes are, in fact, re-enciphered with new meanings, new insights, and new realities. As with any travel, it is making the connections that determines how far the trip will go. Hussain's surprising leaps remap these banal codes into astonishingly free and funny articulations. Nations simply don't exist in this pataphysical planet (except as fodder for jokes and pokes), where even cities are but footnotes to a debordered poetry.

De la temporalité et des mythes dans les espaces littéraires

Ariane Brun del Re, Isabelle Kirouac Massicotte, et Mathieu Simard, dirs.
L'espace-temps dans les littératures périphériques du Canada. David 34,95 $

Vanessa Courville, Georges Desmeules, et Christiane Lahaie, dirs.
Les territoires imaginaires. Lieu et mythe dans la littérature québécoise. Lévesque 27,00 $

Compte rendu par Dominique Hétu

Les territoires imaginaires. Lieu et mythe dans la littérature québécoise, dirigé par Vanessa Courville, Georges Desmeules et Christiane Lahaie, s'ancre plus précisément dans l'approche géocritique et s'intéresse aux interactions entre l'espace et le mythe comme « révélateurs de l'expérience humaine. » Celui dirigé par Ariane Brun del Re, Isabelle Kirouac Massicotte et Mathieu Simard, *L'espace-temps dans les littératures périphériques du Canada*, situé plus près des théories bakhtiniennes, propose plutôt d'examiner les liens entre spatialité et temporalité dans les « littératures périphériques » du Canada : les littératures autochtones, lesbiennes et de science-fiction sont d'ailleurs mises de l'avant.

Dans l'ouvrage collectif *L'espace-temps dans les littératures périphériques du Canada*, les auteurs et autrices cherchent à comprendre comment l'espace et le temps se répondent et s'influencent dans les littératures dites « périphériques », adjectif qui permettrait « de désigner tant les marges d'un centre que les pratiques d'écriture plus marginales. » Revisitant le concept de « chronotope » et souhaitant lui donner plus de visibilité au Canada francophone, les onze chapitres abordent « l'instabilité des rapports » que l'espace et le temps entretiennent dans ces conditions plutôt qu'ils ne réitèrent leur interdépendance. Par exemple, Elise Lepage suggère que le motif du jardin dans *Racines de neige*, d'Andrée Christensen, met en lumière un jeu poétique entre les plans spatiaux évidents et les temporalités fuyantes de l'endroit en question. Martine Noël propose quant à elle une analyse des figures spatio-temporelles dans la pièce *Le Chien*, du dramaturge Jean-Marc Dalpé, et dirige notre attention sur la temporalité de la nature et la charge mémorielle des lieux caractérisés par un sentiment d'appartenance. Aussi, pour Mariève Maréchale, les stratégies particulières des écritures lesbiennes québécoises offrent une réflexion nouvelle sur le temps par leur utilisation d'un « tiers espace », lequel permettrait de « nouveaux lieux d'autonomie ». Zishad Lak, par l'étude de trois textes écrits respectivement par l'écrivaine innue Naomi Fontaine, l'écrivaine crie Virginia Pésémapéo Bordeleau et l'écrivain innu Michel Jean, met en évidence comment les littératures autochtones répondent aux enjeux historiques et géographiques de la colonialité en imaginant autrement comment « le territoire façonne ainsi le temps et l'espace de la résurgence » et de la survivance.

Dans *Les territoires imaginaires*, onze chapitres investiguent la mythification de lieux comme un processus imaginaire de compréhension d'un monde qui, dans la conclusion, se voit surtout caractérisé « par la dysphorie : faute, exil ou fermeture et repli sur soi. » Cherchant à réfléchir le mythe par l'espace formel, l'espace littéraire et les lieux identitaires, les textes ont comme point commun l'idée selon laquelle la fiction et l'espace se sustentent. Par exemple, Sara Bédard-Goulet explore la dynamique entre structure mythique et « inventivité individuelle » dans l'œuvre de Michel Tremblay, et Christiane Lahaie, dans sa contribution, s'attarde au travail de conteur de Fred Pellerin, par lequel il arriverait « à ériger un petit village québécois au rang de lieu mythique. » Le texte de Stéphanie Chifflet étudie quant à lui l'impact du récit initiatique comme stratégie de réécriture de

l'histoire et de perpétuation de la mémoire dans *Il pleuvait des oiseaux*, de Jocelyne Saucier. De plus, Maude Deschênes-Pradet analyse la figure de la cave chez Anne Legault, Élisabeth Vonarburg et Esther Rochon, afin de montrer comment certains lieux inhospitaliers permettent une « réconcili[ation] des couples de signifiants en apparence opposés : les origines et la mort, la liberté et l'enfermement, la beauté et la laideur, le recueillement et la peur. » À l'image de ces quelques exemples, chacun des chapitres parvient à « cartographier un pan de ce que serait le territoire mythique propre à la littérature québécoise ».

Ces deux ouvrages soulignent encore une fois que l'espace — mythique, local, ordinaire, souterrain, utopique, symbolique — nourrit l'imaginaire et les études littéraires. D'une part, ils poursuivent le développement nécessaire et interdisciplinaire de l'analyse spatiale en littérature, laquelle ne semble pas s'essouffler. D'autre part, ils offrent, chacun à leur manière, un cadre unique pour l'étude d'éléments spécifiques qui révèlent de nouveaux liens entre l'espace, la littérature, la temporalité et la représentation dans les littératures au Québec et au Canada.

In the Belly of the Whale

Carol Bruneau
A Bird on Every Tree. Vagrant $19.95

David Huebert
Peninsula Sinking. Biblioasis $19.95

Reviewed by Zachary Abram

Anyone who has been to Halifax can attest to the fact that there is no quicker way to bring a gathering of Haligonians together than to intone the opening lines of Stan Rogers' "Barrett's Privateers." Whether at the Split Crow Pub or a kitchen party, these lines inevitably prompt a singalong that will only cease when the song is over and that poor fisherman makes his way, like an Odysseus of the Maritimes, back to Halifax. While this ersatz sea shanty became an unofficial anthem of Atlantic Canada by hearkening back to a mythic Maritimes, the reality is that Rogers was from Hamilton, Ontario, and he wrote "Barrett's Privateers" in 1976, a year with distinctly less mythic potential. Two recent collections of short stories, *A Bird on Every Tree* by Carol Bruneau and *Peninsula Sinking* by David Huebert, both centre around the Atlantic provinces and parse Maritime myth from reality. Through mastery of place and idiom, Bruneau and Huebert arrive at a representation of the Maritimes that is both modern and genuine. While Bruneau finds grace in the quotidian, Huebert detects malevolence and horror just below what is visible.

The author of four novels and three collections of stories, Bruneau specializes in depicting the considerable pull of home. While not all of the collection's twelve stories are set in Halifax, the Nova Scotia capital looms large in the characters' psyches. In that regard, this collection is intensely nostalgic, but in the true etymological sense of the word—a Greek compound of *nóstos*, meaning "homecoming," and álgos, meaning "pain." In "The Race," Marion, a war bride from Ireland, follows her new husband back to Halifax only to be met with aloofness from his family, exacerbated by his burgeoning post-traumatic stress disorder. In an act that is part spite and part moxie, Marion competes in a swimming race in the Northwest Arm. Throughout the three-mile swim, Bruneau gives voice to Marion's inner monologue, revealing the confluence of cultural and economic forces that brought her to this place, so far from home. Marion fears drowning but, in her triumph, Bruneau inverts Stevie Smith's most famous line: Marion is not drowning, but waving, flouting convention to assert her personhood and autonomy. As she improbably finishes the race, she is overcome by her own strength: "Words can't begin—."

A Bird on Every Tree is populated with women tapping into deep reservoirs of strength to enact feminist micro-rebellions. In "Doves," a Nigerian nun resolves to bury a bird for a man she's just met: "I will bury this bird in the back yard . . . for the good of all children, the seeds of our mission, whether or not they take root." "Blue Shadows" depicts a nervous new mother whose paranoia appears to stem from her resentment at being thrust into the gendered conventions of motherhood: "How on earth do you ever learn to function without both hands free?" Her anxiety is abated somewhat by allowing a homeless man to hold her baby. Her husband is furious at the gesture, but the new mother is soothed by the dignity she afforded the stranger and is able to see cracks in her husband's facade of certitude. While the homeless man held the baby "like a flower, a delicate flower, that barely lasts a day," the husband is only capable of holding his daughter in that "awkward, slightly despairing way men have—some men, I guess I should say."

At one point in Huebert's *Peninsula Sinking*, a character wonders, "[w]as it possible to be crushed gently, squeezed closer and closer until the self dissolved, sweet and painless, in a cold-blooded embrace?" This image rather accurately depicts the experience of reading Huebert's stories: one does not anticipate being crushed until it is too late. This stunningly assured debut collection is a bestiary where the distinction between human and animal is consistently blurred. Often, Huebert's stories feel like a challenge to himself. Can anything new be wrung from the most clichéd images and metaphors? The first story literally asks the question about what can be done with a dead horse named Enigma: "how to deal with a half-ton cadaver?" This enigma serves as the terrain for a discussion of how humans' relationships to animals can border on aspirational. These animals provide a guide for how to live "a life without friction." While Bruneau's stories espouse the transcendent potential of acknowledging shared humanity, Huebert reverses the dichotomy: dehumanization is not something to be feared, but something to be welcomed. A prison guard, depressed by a psychosexual infatuation with an inmate, longs for death in the embrace of a pet snake: "The mouse is so lucky to die there, in the midst of all that power, in the steady clutch of this beautiful serpent." Snake imagery hasn't been novel since the Bible, but few writers are able to make their readers envy the mouse as it is crushed.

Another well-worn metaphor that Huebert makes new is the whale. The collection's preoccupation with what's under the surface is made literal in its depiction of a mourning submariner named Miles. Miles is grieving his mother, who died from a Botox overdose. Miles' austere German father finds the death to be humiliating, but Miles finds tragedy in his mother's chemical attempts to freeze time. During a 105-day mission, Miles grows increasingly withdrawn. He takes solace in the infamous Kevin Costner bomb *Waterworld* because of its portrayal of a protagonist with gills—part human, part animal. Humpback whales occasionally visit the submarine, singing their love songs. Miles identifies a kindred spirit in these creatures who too are lonely and "looking for connection." In response to the whale song, he can only whisper, not caring if it falls on deaf ears, "I hear you."

Bruneau's collection, with its linguistic agility and steadfast compassion, confirms her status as a writer in command of her craft. Huebert's debut, however, announces the arrival of an exciting new voice that is simultaneously humane and cruel.

Déracinement et enracinement

Sarah Brunet Dragon
Cartographie des vivants. Noroît 27,00 $

Daniel Castillo Durante
Les foires du Pacifique ou Les péripéties d'un guide expulsé du marché. Lévesque 24,00 $

Compte rendu par Liza Bolen

Voici deux ouvrages qui portent à repenser les notions d'appartenance, de déplacement, d'enracinement et de déracinement à l'ère du transnationalisme et de la translocalité.

Dans *Cartographie des vivants*, Sarah Brunet Dragon propose un intéressant exercice de filiation : présentée sous forme de paragraphes qui suivent de façon fluide les pensées de la narratrice, cette grande fresque s'interroge sur les liens qui ont uni — et qui continuent à unir — les êtres vivants. Alors que la doxa prône un discours hyper-individualiste, Brunet Dragon rappelle que l'humain ne peut se contenter d'exister sans constater qu'il appartient à un réseau, à un attachement sans fin au monde qui l'entoure et aux histoires qui constituent l'Histoire. L'auteure invite aussi une responsabilisation collective, une prise de conscience de notre impact, de notre influence et de notre devoir auprès de la communauté des vivants :

> Nous apprenons de moins en moins à être au monde, comme humains auprès de nos parents, de nos grands-parents, de nos enfants. Une telle posture est dangereuse, car en perdant le sentiment d'appartenance qui nous ancre en un lieu précis, dans une certaine culture, une collectivité, nous perdons aussi toute notion de dette ; il faut l'entendre à la fois au sens de dette écologique et de dette entre les individus eux-mêmes.

Certes, elle s'intéresse aux origines mais se questionne aussi très explicitement sur l'héritage et la continuité des liens qu'elle défriche dans cet ouvrage. Ainsi, avec clarté et finesse, Sarah Brunet Dragon ose explorer un monde où chacun semble vivre dans des cases séparées et encourage une rupture de la focalisation purement centrée sur l'individu. Le résultat permet de se repositionner dans un ensemble mouvant, insaisissable et bien vivant, où existent un flux et un partage perpétuels.

Dans une prose joliment pensive et rêveuse, *Les foires du Pacifique ou Les péripéties d'un guide expulsé du marché* de Daniel Castillo Durante explore certaines thématiques auxquelles touche Brunet Dragon : l'appartenance, l'attachement, les liens intergénérationnels et inter-temporels. Ce roman raconte l'histoire du narrateur, Marco, qui quitte d'abord la maison où il réside avec sa mère pour aller vivre avec son père au centre-ville de Lima, au Pérou. Il se voit cependant rapidement expulsé de ce deuxième lieu par son père et sa belle-mère après une soirée de fête organisée sans l'accord de ces derniers. Ces circonstances donneront lieu à une longue errance qui permettra au narrateur de discuter de la réalité latino-américaine et, enfin, de mieux découvrir où réside sa véritable appartenance. Avec lui, on explorera des lieux vivement colorés, pourvus d'images, de parfums et de bruits qui se fondent magnifiquement dans la toile narrative que crée l'auteur :

> La verdure foisonne grimpante sur la terrasse. Les fleurs alvéolées d'une saponaire andine moussent l'eau d'un aquarium aérien. Des lierres proliférants du Pacifique lâchent leurs barbes à crampon sur des balcons en trompe-l'œil. Les poissons, chapelet vivace aux mille couleurs, mêlent leurs rayures frétillantes aux nervures des feuilles.

Employant un ton à la fois réflexif et contemplatif, Durante nous invite à parcourir le Pérou géographiquement et historiquement, en s'assurant de garder un pied ancré dans la tradition et l'autre fermement planté dans la modernité.

Manifestement, ces récits partagent une affection pour les thématiques de la mouvance et du déplacement. Dans *Les foires du Pacifique*, ceci est très apparent à l'intérieur même de la diégèse : on parle d'expulsion, d'errance, de mouvement. La notion est quant à elle plus subtile chez Brunet Dragon, où l'on constante que le déracinement est sans doute l'état qui a mené à l'écriture de cette « cartographie » — déracinement accompagné d'un désir de rapprochement, d'établir des liens à l'intérieur de tout ce que les « vivants » partagent au quotidien, de souligner et d'exposer ces rapports qui nous unissent subtilement, constamment, infiniment.

En jouant ainsi avec les concepts d'ancrage et d'appartenance, Sarah Brunet Dragon et Daniel Castillo Durante proposent des perspectives et des remises en question qui permettront ultimement un plus solide enracinement.

Canvas and Page

Brian Busby
The Dusty Bookcase: A Journey through Canada's Forgotten, Neglected and Suppressed Writing.
Biblioasis $22.95

Michèle Rackham Hall
The Art of P. K. Irwin: observer, other, Gemini.
Porcupine's Quill $22.95

Reviewed by Nicholas Bradley

The poet P. K. Page (1916-2010) and the painter P. K. Irwin were the same person, but Michèle Rackham Hall's fine study of Irwin's art suggests that Page's readers have failed to appreciate the importance of her self-understanding as a visual artist, and the accomplishment of her painting. *The Art of P. K. Irwin* is a short monograph that combines biography and interpretation—an extended essay, in effect, rather than a *catalogue raisonné*. It both draws upon and complements the major biography of Page, Sandra Djwa's *Journey with No Maps* (2012). Hall's book includes a foreword by Zailig Pollock and sixty-five illustrations: Page's drawings and paintings are reproduced, some in colour, as are, for comparison, artworks by Paul Klee and Mark Tobey. Hall's scholarship is admirable, and the publication itself is lovely.

Page's painterly surname was that of her husband, the Canadian diplomat William Arthur Irwin, and her artistic activity was linked to his postings abroad. In Hall's account, the Irwins' Brazilian sojourn, which began in 1957, established P. K.'s dual vocation: "In Brazil, P. K. Page the poet became P. K. Irwin the painter. Something about this place beckoned the Pollux to her Castor, demanded a new identity: one primarily associated with the visual instead of the verbal." In 1964, the Irwins moved from Mexico to Victoria, BC, which Pollock describes (not unfairly) as a "somewhat culturally isolated provincial capital." At first Page suffered from "loneliness and isolation," and from the "fog of depression" that had settled upon her in Mexico, but eventually she was taken up by a community of local artists. Before Brazil, Mexico, and BC, Page lived for a time in Australia, again for diplomatic reasons. Hall does not consider the influence on Irwin of Indigenous Australian art, which Djwa acknowledges in *Journey with No Maps*, but as her deep interest in Sufism attests, Page was attracted to non-Western traditions of belief and expression. ("Bark Drawing," from *Cry Ararat!* [1967], is a relevant poem in this regard.) Hall is also silent on Page's early romantic relationship with F. R. Scott, which is slightly odd given that Scott's wife was the painter Marian Dale Scott, who moved in the same artistic circles as the *Preview* poets, including Page and Scott. Any loose ends do not impugn Hall's excellent book, which is a welcome addition to scholarship on Page, on Canadian literature and the visual arts, and on modernism in Canada; they merely hint at what remains

to be explored of the fascinating double life of Irwin and Page.

Whereas *The Art of P. K. Irwin* is specialized and focused, Brian Busby's *The Dusty Bookcase* is casual and eclectic. It contains brief, breezy reviews and mild defences of ostensibly overlooked works of Canadian literature. The book "is a plea to look beyond the canon," Busby writes. "We should read the forgotten," he proposes, "because previous generations knew them well," and because "[o]ur literature is more interesting, more creative, more diverse, and much greater than the industry behind these things would have you believe." Busby pays particular attention to Grant Allen, Kenneth Millar and Margaret Millar, and Brian Moore. He describes Roger Lemelin's *Les Plouffe* (1948) as "one of the cornerstones in our literature," Edward McCourt's *Fasting Friar* (1963) as "a complex, yet taut, novel written by a sure hand," and André Langevin's *Orphan Street* (1976)—a translation of *Une Chaîne dans le parc*—as "just about the greatest Canadian novel I've ever read." Busby also describes pulp of various persuasions, much of it unquestionably sexist, racist, or both. *De gustibus non est disputandum*, but neither Selena Warfield's *The Whip Angels* (1968), a pornographic novel, nor Nicholas Loupos' *The Happy Hairdresser* (1973), an erotic memoir, seem auspicious subjects for even the most iconoclastic critic. Busby is enthusiastic about his findings, but his descriptions of the volumes on his dusty shelves will make it difficult for many readers to share his excitement.

Something ere the End

Sharon Butala
Zara's Dead: A Mystery. Coteau $24.95

Brett Josef Grubisic
Oldness; or, the Last-Ditch Efforts of Marcus O: A Novel. Now or Never $19.95

Reviewed by Paul Denham

Brett Josef Grubisic and Sharon Butala offer us protagonists facing old age and retirement in contrasting ways. Grubisic's dark vision of the near future in *Oldness* has satirical and dystopian elements; Butala's *Zara's Dead* is a mystery about a forty-year-old murder, and it is also about a quest for self-knowledge.

The unidiomatic stiffness of the term "oldness" in Grubisic's title gives an indication of what is to come: Marcus does not let readers or anyone else into his life easily. The language of Marcus' story is thickly layered with polysyllabic, Latinate terms such as "coruscation," "microaggression," and "encomiastic," normally better suited to the corporate university where Marcus teaches than to narrative fiction. That language is also Marcus', and it reveals—or, more likely, conceals—who he is. Marcus is good at concealing things, particularly from himself. He has no inner life. No wonder he regards his looming retirement with dread.

He has spent his life teaching popular culture in what was once a Department of English but which has recently been reconstituted as "Integrated Humanities." He is contemptuous of his students; he has dutifully published books, but seems indifferent to the demands and pleasures of scholarship. Never married and childless, he has one brother with whom his relationship is distant. He joins an Internet dating site to look for companionship, but the effort leads nowhere. The humanities have not enriched his life; instead, he resorts for guidance to an artificial-intelligence device. When he overhears his departmental enemy Judaea

referring to him as "a fossil," we assume she means he's out of date (he might be better off if he were), but we may also recall that a fossil is once-living tissue that has turned to stone. That's Marcus, all right—turned to stone. His future in retirement will be just as bleak as his fossilized present, and so, we assume, will the future of "Integrated Humanities," the university, and society as a whole.

Butala's novel takes her retirement-age protagonist, Fiona Lychenko, towards self-knowledge and renewed vitality, a direction which Marcus seems unable to take. Fiona, recently widowed and relocated from a Saskatchewan farm to a Calgary condominium, once wrote a book on the unsolved long-ago murder of her high-school friend Zara. In this regard, the story is based on one aspect of Butala's own life; in 2008 she published a book, *The Girl in Saskatoon*, about the murder of her former classmate Alexandra Wiwcharuk in 1962 and her unsuccessful attempt to get to the bottom of it. Fiona, however, has some new evidence mysteriously thrust in her way and resolves to figure out what it means. In the process of the story, she does figure it out, and a lot of other things too. What she discovers is not only the identity of the murderer but also an alternative universe, an alarming, dangerous, corrupt reality that lies just under the ostensibly dull and innocuous surface of rural and small-city Saskatchewan life, a surface which is often mistaken—even by the people who live there, including Fiona herself—for the whole picture. In this regard, the novel has links with the Gothic tradition in fiction.

Fiona learns that the long failure to solve the case is the result of a network of powerful people acting to preserve their own privilege. She also unexpectedly finds out things about her late husband—that he knew things about the case which he never told her when she was doing the research for her book, that he had taken money to conceal what he knew, that he had had adulterous affairs of which she knew nothing. She also acknowledges that she had failed to face things she should have faced. This is the key movement of the book—a discovery, late in life, of something about herself. Having done these things, having penetrated to a previously unsuspected reality, Fiona finds she can affirm her own eagerness to live the rest of her life as fully as possible. Unlike Marcus, she will be no fossil in old age.

Voyages of Desire

Jenna Butler
Magnetic North: Sea Voyage to Svalbard.
U of Alberta P $19.99

William Frame and Laura Walker
James Cook: The Voyages.
McGill-Queen's UP $49.95

Reviewed by Hilary Turner

Between 1768 and 1780, James Cook led three maritime expeditions, all dedicated to the discovery of new lands, routes, and possibilities for trade. As William Frame and Laura Walker observe, Cook's calculations effectively completed the mapping of the earth's oceans. In this achievement, his voyages closely followed or coincided with other events that signal the birth of the modern era: the formation of the Royal Society, John Locke's treatises on government and property, Adam Smith's *The Wealth of Nations*, James Watt's invention of the steam engine. Archivists by training, Frame and Walker do a splendid job of correlating Cook's activities with optimism characteristic of the late-eighteenth century, yet they are sensitive to the long-term consequences of hubris and colonialism on the part of Cook and the British Admiralty, his official bosses and backers. Though the book is essentially a comprehensive collection of "primary sources, including journals, artworks and maps"—and a

beautifully rendered one at that—its objective is not to endorse but to document the views on culture, ethnicity, and colonization that prevailed at the time.

Cook died in a skirmish with a group of Hawaiians in 1780, an event that the reader will find not entirely surprising. Each of the voyages entails encounters with Indigenous populations—of Tahiti, New Zealand, Australia, numerous islands in the South Pacific, and the Alaskan coast. Though trade is usually of interest to all participants, Cook seems continually anxious to prevent cross-cultural ill will, and to prevent infecting newly contacted peoples with disease. On the other hand, he is equally vigilant about the theft of British goods, and orders corporal punishment for those caught pilfering the ship. Altogether, it is an uneasy balance: attuned to the capacity for harm, the expeditions are nonetheless an accessory to the European ambition for dominance through science, technology, economic clout, and gunpowder. Two contemporary paintings of Cook's demise capture the dichotomy nicely. John Webber depicts Cook, rifle slung by his side, raising a hand to halt the fighting—while a bare-chested Hawaiian aims a dagger at his back. John Cleverley, Jr., on the other hand, memorializes Cook in a posture of attack, using his rifle as a bludgeon against a crowd of fairly ferocious warriors.

Visually this book is indeed a treasure. In addition to maps and sounding charts of most of Cook's landing places, it includes detailed botanical drawings by scientist Joseph Banks, landscape sketches and paintings by artists Georg Forster and William Hodges, and a good many portraits of Indigenous men and women by Sydney Parkinson and others. Large portions of Cook's journals are reproduced, as well as letters and notes from others associated with the voyages. As a gathering of materials until now available only in the special collections of the British Library, the National Library of Australia, and other scholarly repositories, this book provides both a resource for academics and an engaging narrative for non-specialists.

An acute observer and a precise and cogent writer, Jenna Butler would have been a valuable addition to Cook's entourage. As it is, coming long after the days in which exploration meant acquisition, her *Sea Voyage to Svalbard* is a journey motivated by curiosity about the north, and a longing for sights to be seen before they disappear forever. Her descriptions of settlements scattered between mainland Norway and the Arctic Circle are evocative: her prose is poetic, and her poems (interspersed in the text) are visual and concrete. The long-term consequences of expeditions such as Cook's are plainly written in the Arctic landscape: "Everywhere we looked we saw human intervention etched onto the land in the form of mine ruins, processing effluent, and piles of whalebones." And yet Butler's theme sympathetically encompasses the human need to extract subsistence from the natural world. Technologies have changed in the nearly 250 years that separate these two explorers, yet Butler's observations convey some of the physical realities of travel by sea that Cook's journals omit. She is seasick on the Greenland Sea, and claustrophobic among "thirty people in six-hundred square feet." At the same time, she conveys the sheer wonder of beholding a strange, self-contained world for the first time. Her voluntary journey to these remote and forgotten places resembles as nearly as now possible the experience of the Europeans who first ventured beyond their comfort zones.

Crisis? What Crisis?

Keith Thor Carlson, John Sutton Lutz, David M. Schaepe, and Naxaxalhts'i (Albert "Sonny" McHalsie), eds.
Towards a New Ethnohistory: Community-Engaged Scholarship among the People of the River. U of Manitoba P $27.95

Reviewed by Madeleine Reddon

Towards a New Ethnohistory is a refreshing departure from the current Canadian literary crisis beleaguering my colleagues. Some scholars have entered a paralytic state in the wake of the exposure of CanLit's ideological motivations. This is not the case with the early-career scholars presented in this uplifting and rigorous volume edited by Keith Thor Carlson, John Sutton Lutz, David M. Schaepe, and Naxaxalhts'i. Settler scholars working on Indigenous anthropology and ethnography have had to reckon with the colonial investments of their fields much earlier than scholars in literary studies. *Towards a New Ethnohistory* is an illustrative example of criticism that demonstrates the complexity and stickiness of wrangling with colonial desire and epistemological difference. It also proves that the rewards for doing so are great. This collection models the ways in which research can provide a way to establish respectful and reciprocal relationships between different cultural communities. In the context of global climate change and resurgent fascisms, the benefits of creating positive and long-lasting relations among Indigenous and settler communities cannot be understated.

This anthology contains ten essays from the New Ethnohistorical school and offers research on Stó:lō naming and memorial practices; boxing, fishing, and logging identities; contested sites of memory within Indigenous territories; language revitalization initiatives; and food preparation and harvesting, as well as a chapter on the inter-tribal communities formed within Indian hospitals. The New Ethnohistorical school is an emerging body of interdisciplinary criticism that traverses literary studies, anthropology, history, political science, and ethnography. Key to this anthology is a comparative method, which understands Western thought to be determined by theology or mythology as much as Indigenous epistemologies are. Grounded in Stó:lō territory, the collection begins with a prologue by Naxaxalhts'i that situates the scholarship in relation to a Stó:lō ethos of humility:

> There are certain kinds of work we can (and should) do ourselves, and then there are the sorts of work where we have to humble ourselves and reach out and ask other respected people to do the work for us. That is an ancient and deeply held tradition in Stó:lō society.

Naxaxalhts'i suggests the centrality of this practice to the Stó:lō through an example: when it comes time to clean their cemeteries, Stó:lō families cannot tend their kin's gravesites. To do so would be to touch a history that is "too close" and "too strong." Instead, they ask someone else to do this task for them. This anthology performs similar labour. Undertaken at the request of the community, it offers careful scholarly engagements with intimate histories and traditions in accordance with Stó:lō teachings, objectives, and aesthetic practices.

The introduction by Carlson, Lutz, and Schaepe provides a wonderful, in-depth account of the Stó:lō's efforts to determine the shape of scholarship on their people through a detailed account of cultural revitalization, research development, and language advocacy efforts in the community. The introduction also patiently attends to those scholars and texts from the early period of West Coast anthropology that can be read as a nascent thread of progressivism in the critical literature. Accounts that overlook or dismiss traces of solidarity in the archive tend to elide both the

particularities of colonial violence and the complexities of the historical record, often erasing Indigenous agency in the process. To hold up Indigenous agency in its many forms, while demonstrating the capacity for settlers to have reparative and respectful relations, is sadly still uncommon in the criticism. For this reason, *Towards a New Ethnohistory* is a significant piece of scholarship that should not be overlooked as mere "regional field study."

To echo the New Ethnohistorians, I note that, for many Indigenous communities, it is not just the end research product that matters. Upholding good knowledge practices is a process of working *with* and *for* others. When this ethic is upheld, a community can come together. When the academy veils its ideological investments—when it masks who and what it works for—the knowledge it produces can neither repair injured relations nor support a community composed of many cultural identities. These scholars have chosen a very different path, which, I think, is open to others to follow. Settler scholars concerned with disciplinary crises need look no further than this excellent anthology for models of respectful intercommunity engagement, radical methodology and pedagogy, and a paradigm for solidarity work that chooses to develop respectful relationships over moribund agonizing.

Mad Studies

Aidan Chafe
Short Histories of Light. McGill-Queens UP $16.95

Carole David; Donald Winkler, trans.
The Year of My Disappearance. Book*hug $18.00

Dian Day
The Madrigal. Inanna $22.95

Reviewed by Rebekah Ludolph

Aidan Chafe's debut poetry collection, *Short Histories of Light*, contains work from two chapbooks, as well as new poems, all divided into five sections. Ranging from a depiction of a child's perspective on his father's mental illness to a poignant satire of the human need to diagnose difference, the first two sections of Chafe's book intersperse lyric and found poems to depict how one family wades through ongoing mental illness. In the following sections, the speaker's focus narrows to his internal struggle with conservative Catholic ideologies in "Calculations for Catholics," and then expands to larger issues of ethnocentrism, economic exploitation, and colonial settlement in the section titled "Unsettlement." The text finally lands in "Sharpest Tooth," comprised of poems from one of Chafe's chapbooks. Although this section was originally composed separately from the rest of the collection, it continues to surround Chafe's study of mental illness with details as intimate as a "scar upon the mind" and as far reaching as "Families [who] swell into airplanes / as home spends Ramadan / in shrapnel showers." The collective impact of Chafe's collection is that of a progression that moves with sharpness and compassion from particular to particular, materially grounding a spectrum of experiences of madness, from mental illness, to fear of one's genetic inheritance, to the uncertainty of life in war zones; this progression suggests that "[m]adness is like gravity all it needs is a little push." Chafe's poetry is primarily lyrical free verse, but also includes experiments with found poems, centos, and Rachel Rose's poetic form the "pas de deluxe" (a pair of polyphonic poems that analyze and debate a subject). While the ideas raised in some of the shorter poems might appear overly simple if read individually, the sum total of *Short Histories of Light* provides one of this collection's strengths: a movement between the proximity of madness—in one's self, in a loved one, in the uncertainty of life—and the social constructions which perpetrate maddening injustice.

In contrast, Donald Winkler's 2018 translation of Carole David's 2015 award-winning long poem *L'année de ma disparition* is intensely introspective; it conjures "extravagant shapes" from the horrific, from the mundane, and from the intimate, as the poem descends into the speaker's wandering mind and strives "[t]o know how to leave what leaves us, without bitterness." The book is divided into three sections. The first section is a meditation on the banal reminders of "a forgotten life"—a song on low, an unmade bed, the alarm clock's pulsing numbers—interspersed with visions of terror—"A man's hiding at the back of the closet," "hair rollers with secret names," being ringed by nuns seen as "black fairies / drawn to the whip and the leash." Rebirth is both a longed-for possibility and "a host to confusion," a process that requires the speaker to "gut [her]self" with a circular saw, even after she has "survived [her] execution" and is "patched back together." The second section is a search for a ceremony to "shed" her skin and to have "sorrows given voice," but no idealized feminist healing is found here. Rather, the speaker asserts in "our never-ending departures . . . we've remained our unhinged selves." In the final section, "Houdini Speaks to Me in My Dreams: An Anthology of Apparitions," Winkler's translation creates moments of painful clarity in the midst of surreal imagery:

> we heard the youngest with us there
> breathe his last. Our palms downturned,
> we empty ourselves of oxygen.
> The tactic of abandonment enchants us.

The speaker ultimately reasserts that "I've had this dream since childhood: / to follow roads on a map," but "I opt for the vicious circle . . . the equation cannot be solved." This ending suggests a movement away from an ideology of cure towards embracing that "all that we dance belongs to us." Drawing on Juliana Schiesari, the text shows how it is in moments of stark clarity that emerge from a sea of mundane and horrific images that David joins the feminist project of honouring women's grief, all the more so as her poetry slips between "mine" and "our," elusively referencing both a multiplicity of self and a collective "hallow[ing of] sorrow."

Dian Day's *The Madrigal* is startlingly realistic in comparison with the other two texts reviewed here. The novel is narrated from the perspective of Frederick Madrigal, the seventh and youngest son in a family with three sets of male identical twins, who is now approaching middle age and caring for a mother with severe vascular dementia. Frederick is also an extraordinary musical talent for whom choral school in Toronto was a ticket out of poverty and small-town eastern Ontario. Day's novel depicts Frederick's search for "connection, comprehension, and community" as he struggles with his loss of faith, with the long-term consequences of aggressive adolescent power-jockeying at a boys' private school, and with attempting to connect with his ever-retreating mother. Day deftly weaves together the intricacies of Frederick's musical genius; she uses musical terminology to describe Frederick's experience of the world around him. (He notices the "crow's atonal talk," or states "I knocked my forehead against the top edge of the fridge—*largamente.*") Furthermore, Frederick's tangents into musical history and philosophizing are both endearing and sufficiently eccentric to give an impression of why Frederick might be struggling to form social connections. However, it is also this first-person narration that at times risks the reader failing to question Day's sympathetic protagonist's assumptions—for example when he suggests he can understand his mother's remaining connection to "the vast quaggy mudpuddle of human emotional experience." That being said, the book's strength emerges from moments of connection of which Day's quirky narrator

seems almost unaware—his begrudging friendship with the overly-friendly next-door neighbour; his ongoing attempt to have a non-patronizing relationship with Luke, who collects bottles on his street; the codependent relationship he has with the elderly owner of the local music shop; and the music he is able to make with his mother perhaps *because of* her condition. These moments stand out in the nearly four hundred pages of *The Madrigal,* and remind me of the haphazard forms of community that are found in Persimmon Blackbridge's *Prozac Highway* or in Margaret Gibson's "Making It." While Day's content is less edgy than that of Blackbridge or Gibson, her depiction of her characters' support for each other is no less necessary a representation of an alternative community of care.

Prises de parole

Denis Combet et Gabriel Dumont
Gabriel Dumont : mémoires et récits de vie.
Blé 14,95 $

Aurélie Lacassagne
Perspectives créoles sur la culture et l'identité franco-ontariennes : Essai sur une prise de parole.
Prise de parole 23,95 $

Compte rendu par Patricia Godbout

« Nous sommes partis à la brunante, le soir du 23 avril [1885]. Notre troupe se composait de deux-cents hommes : Métis, Sauteux, Cris, Sioux et Canadiens. Riel nous accompagnait. Dans les haltes, il nous faisait dire le chapelet. » Lire les *Mémoires et récits de vie* de Gabriel Dumont, c'est se sentir tout proche des événements de la Rébellion du Nord-Ouest dans leur déroulement même, au fil des batailles, des bons coups, des revers, des désertions, des redditions ou fuites vers les États-Unis. On est frappé par l'intelligence tactique de Dumont et par la grande ténacité de ce groupe d'hommes et de femmes que John A. MacDonald appelait avec mépris les « mangeurs de pemmican ». Cette réédition revue, établie et annotée par Denis Combet est bienvenue car elle remet en circulation des textes essentiels à notre compréhension de cette page troublante de l'histoire du Canada. Le lecteur aperçoit notamment Louis Riel à travers les yeux de Gabriel, qui va à sa rencontre au Montana en 1884 pour l'enjoindre de revenir avec lui à Batoche, qui l'aperçoit à cheval au milieu de la bataille, n'ayant pour toute arme qu'un crucifix, et qui le cherchera en vain pendant quatre jours après la défaite, ne pouvant se résoudre à chercher refuge aux États-Unis sans savoir où était son ami, lequel s'était rendu « au camp ennemi ».

Dans un essai polymorphe intitulé *Perspectives créoles sur la culture et l'identité franco-ontariennes*, Aurélie Lacassagne se désole de l'oubli dans lequel sont tombés « les rêves et la sagesse de Dumont » et déplore une certaine négation du métissage, qui est pourtant une donnée de base du passé des Franco-Ontariens et une condition de leur avenir. L'auteure, d'origine française, explique qu'elle a choisi de s'intégrer à la minorité francophone de Sudbury et de placer ce « Nous franco-sudburois » au centre de son essai. Elle rappelle les études de Fernand Dorais, qui a montré comment une identité proprement franco-ontarienne s'est créée au cours des années 1970 dans le contexte de l'implosion de l'identité canadienne-française. Est ainsi retracée dans les grandes lignes l'histoire de la Coopérative des artistes du Nouvel-Ontario (CANO), de la fondation de la maison d'édition Prise de parole (qui publie son essai) et du Théâtre du Nouvel-Ontario. Empruntant des notions tant aux *cultural studies* qu'aux concepts de créolisation d'Édouard Glissant ou à la théorie de Deleuze et Guattari sur les littératures mineures, Lacassagne propose une réflexion sur le rôle de la culture en situation minoritaire, en soulignant le lourd fardeau sur les épaules de ceux qui cherchent à créer un « espace de culture » dans un tel contexte. Une des idées de base

de cet essai est celle du rôle de la littérature comme agent de changement social, idée que l'auteure met en acte en proposant des analyses — qu'elle qualifie elle-même d'hétérodoxes — de poésies franco-ontariennes. Cet essai se lit comme une sorte de bilan, fait par l'auteure, de son engagement envers sa communauté d'adoption, pour laquelle elle prend fait et cause. On a le sentiment qu'elle a voulu lui redonner quelque chose, après avoir été tellement transformée par elle, ce qui l'a poussée vers une forme essayistique délibérément disjonctée — combinant textes de création, réflexions sociopolitiques et analyses littéraires — qui s'accorde avec la disjonction inhérente au sujet dont elle traite.

Le devenir franco-ontarien et métis se construit sur les traces mémorielles et discursives consignées dans des ouvrages comme ceux de Combet et de Lacassagne.

Loss, Retreat, Recovery

Nora Decter
How Far We Go and How Fast. Orca $14.95

Shelley Hrdlitschka
Lost Boy. Orca $14.95

Reviewed by Suzanne James

Both of these YA novels draw readers into extreme, uncomfortable situations. *How Far We Go and How Fast* parachutes us into the disturbing world of a sixteen-year-old girl whose home is regularly overrun with drunks and outcasts brought home by Maggie, one of the most non-maternal literary mothers imaginable, while *Lost Boy* provides a compelling account of the disorienting experiences of a young man who escapes from a polygamous cult in the interior of BC (loosely modelled on the community of Bountiful) only to find himself unequipped for "regular" life.

Instead of revelling in his new-found freedom after escaping the rigidly controlled society of Unity, the first-person narrator of *Lost Boy* sinks into despair as he realizes that he lacks the educational skills and cultural knowledge necessary to succeed beyond the protection of his family and the dictates of the "Prophet." This novel, an offshoot of Shelley Hrdlitschka's bestselling *Sister Wife*, traces Jon's descent from a nervous but cautiously optimistic seventeen-year-old to a high-school dropout who spends his days aimlessly drinking and smoking marijuana, eventually stealing a watch from someone who has gone out of his way to help him. Jon becomes a self-declared failure and loser, reaching the bitter realization that, while "[t]he Prophet was full of shit," in Unity he "was loved and cared for." Jon "had family . . . and even had God, whatever that means." Now he has lost everything and cannot return to his former life. Of course, Jon manages to pull himself out of his despair, finding direction and hope by assisting another escapee—his former girlfriend, who was forced to marry his father. And—as we discover in the epilogue, set five years later—he helps to establish Hope House, a haven for women fleeing the polygamous sect. Yet in spite of an overarching optimism (the novel ends with a parallel between the support for escaping women and the Underground Railroad), Hrdlitschka avoids the easy solution of having Jon and Celestine reignite their former romance. Instead, Jon becomes a backup caregiver for her baby, his aptly named half-sister, Hope. Somewhat surprisingly, the novel includes no discussion of faith outside the absolute claims of the Prophet and of Jon's polygamous father: neither the protagonist nor any of the other escapees maintains beliefs or practices inculcated within the insular community. Hence Unity/Bountiful is presented as little more than a patriarchal, misogynistic cult offering security at the expense of self-respect and human rights.

Nora Decter's *How Far We Go and How Fast* also uses a first-person narrator who

faces challenges and responsibilities atypical of, though not completely implausible for, a teenager. One of the charms of this novel is the protagonist's blunt assessment of the lifestyle of her mother and her mother's friends. In the first chapter, Jolene (named "after a slutty lady in a Dolly Parton song") provides a delightfully satirical description of a motley collection of the bodies of drunken adults, some total strangers, sprawled over the furniture and floor of her living room as she makes her way downstairs to make coffee, take the dog for a walk, and prepare for school. Like so many characters in YA fiction, Jolene is bored and frustrated by her high-school classes, but atypically she finds distraction and stimulation by dropping in on university lectures. In one memorable scene, an English instructor explains how the weather can function as a character in a novel, an effective metanarrative twist as the Winnipeg winter plays such a powerful role in Jolene's day-to-day life. This fast-paced novel includes a few unexpected twists, leading to a convincing yet not overly sentimental resolution as the narrator gains perspective on her own behaviour and a more nuanced understanding of her mother's motivations and needs. The plot's apparent love interest proves untenable and, as in *Lost Boy*, readers are encouraged to look beyond romance for ways to cope with challenges, gain confidence, and find meaningful pursuits. Both *How Far We Go and How Fast* and *Lost Boy* are tightly written and engaging novels with the potential to expand the awareness of YA readers.

Red-Crazed and Ablaze

Rosanna Deerchild, Ariel Gordon, and Tanis MacDonald, eds.
GUSH: Menstrual Manifestos for Our Times.
Frontenac $24.95

Reviewed by Dana Medoro

In between an introductory battle cry (its "Call to Ovaries") and a lyrical envoi about rushing "to the moon, full of gravity," this collection comprises over one hundred works of contemporary poetry and prose, includes a selection of cartoons and comics, and then appends thirty pages of biographical notes about its contributors, all 114 of them. Everything about this book is substantial and generous. It is a first-rate compilation of creative and unique work, skillfully organized and paced. Only a few reprints make their way in; everything else is new. With the exception of maybe three or four poems that fall flat, each selection is breathtaking, one after another. No word of a lie.

Often experimental in form and voice, the poems and stories leap off the pages, distinctly fascinating, even as they generate thematic echoes about stained clothes, bloodied chairs, deep shame, and marked calendars. Some are hilarious, others heartbreaking. While the experience of menstruation forms the collection's leitmotif, it also fades into the background as the editors make room for meditations on ovulation, abortion, menopause, pregnancy, and amenorrhea. Across the chapters, blood's absence brilliantly alternates with the force of its visitation, the pages striving to contain all the ways in which bleeding and not-bleeding come to be known, survived, joked about, turned into silence, made into myth, misunderstood, resented, anticipated, and so on.

Menstrual-hygiene products frequently turn up, of course, centred in instances of mortification and forbearance. Janet Rogers

describes a "bulky panty liner" worn like an "uncomfortable log of cotton stuck to my cooch." Mary Horodyski recalls her purse full of tampons "as if i was expecting a hemorrhage / or even worse / what the teen magazines called an accident." Images of toxic-shock warnings and stuck applicators communicate fear and anger. "I am of the fourteenth gender," announces Shannon Maguire: "I won't shove yr bleach and plastic up, won't cup."

One of the most important moments in the book occurs in Waaseyaa'sin Christine Sy's version of an Ojibway creation story, in which Sy describes the deity Nokomis calling upon all "the womxn who bleed" and "the womxn who don't" to heal the world. Placed in the opening chapter, Sy's tale sets the stage for the editors' political stance on trans rights and menstruation: that this monthly blood neither makes femininity nor unmakes masculinity, that there is nothing metaphysical about its correlation with womanhood under patriarchal systems. "When my boyfriend gets his period," Chandra Mayor writes,

> Because it's estrogen
> . . .
> because the moon and the tides,
> etc.
> and whatever.
> It's not
> a big deal, and it's really
> none of your business.

Rules about bodies change; nature and culture entwine.

Yvette Nolan's personal essay, "Losing My Religion," reflects upon the ceremony of the sweat along these lines, pondering when and how it was decided that menstruation precluded participation in this ritual. "Who is the keeper of culture?" she asks. The bracketed words "(unclean unclean)" break into her sentences throughout the essay, signalling that colonial notions of pollution make their way into an Indigenous practice. Nothing arrives in the present without context and power.

This is an important book about a taboo subject, in which blood and shame often go together—with far-reaching consequences. Many of the poems and tales circulate around experiences of confusion and surprise: at the amount of blood, the shocking cramps, the misdiagnosed endometriosis, the ways in which jokes about "being on the rag" can function as such astonishing forms of oppression. A gush can happen "without warning. Like those little / green measuring worms dropping on you from God knows where"; it can make a person "red-crazed, holding to the day"; or it is "just another word for nothing left / to lose." What this collection offers is respite from the encumbering misogyny that sticks to this bleeding, in a display of creativity that points to where the treasure is, like an X that marks the spot.

Loosed Intensities, Tangible Abstractions

Adebe DeRango-Adem
The Unmooring. Mansfield $17.00

Tiziana La Melia
The Eyelash and the Monochrome.
Talonbooks $19.95

Reviewed by Dale Tracy

The Unmooring comprises two sections: "Nations Float" and "Time is a White Lie, Travel a Veil." These suggestive titles establish DeRango-Adem's interest in moving across distance (whether literally or figuratively), as does the collection's title, especially as "unmooring" evokes the Middle Passage in this collection. Despite the definite article, *The Unmooring* refers to many unmoorings and often to forms of freedom, as when "you extract / all that has destroyed you." Ocean imagery tethers these poems variously to the gentle movement of waves or to deep feeling flooding to the vastness of the mood-setting sea.

Titles for individual poems like "Liberty Shell / I Hear the Ocean," "Déjà Voodoo," and "Black Humour(s)" highlight DeRango-Adem's earnest use of punning: this is not wordplay with a smirk but instead a serious investigation of relationships between ideas. It's an investigation filled with interesting echoes, like "matryoshka" with "martyr-dom" or "phlegm" with "requiem." That these speakers are frequently sirens—as in "Treading Water" and "Odes to Alterity: Or Life Between the Waves"— suggests the sort of enticing calls this collection makes. With noteworthy use of adjective and rhyme, *The Unmooring* indeed calls to be read out loud, and listeners won't want to resist what these poems often name as their song.

A floor plan precedes *The Eyelash and the Monochrome*'s first section. This schematic already abstracts a structure, but, further, text crosses or ignores the boundaries it represents. Outside the lines representing walls, a sentence oriented on the downward diagonal situates the collection "in the space between." The speaker has "wondered how the simple weave of something you stare through every / day might begin to organ-ize the rooms in your mind." *The Eyelash and the Monochrome* refuses only to stare through the weave, using "mesh barrier" and "grid gaps" to filter out "[t]he gross stuff that makes / up a story." What's left is texture and abstraction, and La Melia challenges readers with a unique filtration system—decidedly not designed for puri-fication as these poems engage swamps, scum, swabs, and bathrooms.

In the process of acclimatization, readers may align themselves with an "impatient and feverish" interlocutor whom La Melia's speaker addresses directly: "you asked me: *What* is your subject?" The carefully calibrated repetitions (and meditations on repetition) across the collection respond to this question, though they refuse a direct answer since the speaker is "bothered" by "[a]ssumptions attached to questions," seeking instead "broken-heart abstraction." This collection of text, image, and blank space emphatically rewards rereading after leaving assumptions behind. In "Box," the speaker notes, "There are many sad things, and one of them is having moved / on before understanding each other's interests and disinterests." This collection invites readers to stay scrabbling for understanding in and through the walls between rooms.

Rethinking Hockey

Jenny Ellison and Jennifer Anderson, eds. *Hockey: Challenging Canada's Game/Au-delà du sport national.* U of Ottawa P $49.95

Reviewed by Jamie Dopp

In recent years there has been a modest but steady production of scholarly works in Canada about hockey. *Hockey: Challenging Canada's Game*, edited by Jenny Ellison and Jennifer Anderson, is a worthy addition to this literature. The book is a collection of essays and historical documents that grew out of the Canadian Museum of History's *Hockey* exhibit, co-curated by Ellison and Anderson, which opened in March 2017. The exhibit seeks to combine cultural analysis with images and artifacts from memorable moments in the game—with a special emphasis on hockey's diversity. These goals are reflected in the texts that make up the collection.

The book consists of an introduction, sixteen essays, and seven "documents." The essays are organized into five sections defined by broad themes. The opening section offers three outstanding essays about hockey's origin and history. Of particular note is Andrew C. Holman's account of hockey's history, which manages to be readable and encyclopedic at the same time, and which contains a bibliography that attests to the richness of the critical material available on hockey today.

Other sections are organized around the themes of "Childhood," "Whose Game?," "Reporting Hockey," and "Rethinking the Pros." "Childhood" includes a timely and important essay by Sam McKegney and Trevor J. Phillips on the decolonizing potential of Richard Wagamese's *Indian Horse*. "Whose Game?" contains an account of women's international hockey by Julie Stevens that has the same encyclopedic quality as Holman's opening essay. Of particular note in "Reporting Hockey" is Swedish critic Tobias Stark's account of the representations of Canadian hockey players in the Swedish press.

The seven "documents," I thought, were a notable innovation. They consist of either experiential statements or brief historical materials. Document 1, for example, is a series of accounts of hockey by survivors of the residential school system. Document 2 contains background materials for reading Roch Carrier's "The Hockey Sweater." Document 3 is a personal statement from Hayley Wickenheiser about the path she took to becoming a five-time Olympic medallist.

Two last features of the book are worth noting. One is that the text is printed on glossy heavy-stock paper, which allows a sharp reproduction of many colour photographs, and adds a slightly coffee-table book-like feel—a nice touch for a volume that balances academic and popular concerns. The other is that a few of the texts are in French. This seems especially appropriate given the focus on diversity. I particularly appreciated "Maurice Richard: notre icône," Benoît Melançon's brief study of Rocket Richard (it draws on Melançon's own *Les yeux de Maurice Richard*, one of the great Canadian books of cultural criticism), which makes up Document 6.

Overall, *Hockey: Challenging Canada's Game* is an excellent interdisciplinary resource for people interested in taking hockey seriously as a topic for research.

Trois voix sans chœur

Naomi Fontaine
Manikanetish. Mémoire d'encrier 19,95 $

Catherine Lalonde
La dévoration des fées. Le Quartanier 18,95 $

Catherine Lavarenne
Quelques lieux de Constance. Héliotrope 21,95 $

Compte rendu par Daniel Laforest

On aimerait croire qu'une époque détermine la teneur générale des voix littéraires qui s'y expriment. Trois livres québécois écrits par des femmes et publiés coup sur coup transmettraient ainsi, si ce n'est des thèmes analogues, à tout le moins une *présence au monde* de même ordre et surtout de même intensité. Il n'en est rien avec les récents livres de Naomi Fontaine, Catherine Lalonde et Catherine Lavarenne.

Manikanetish est le second roman de Fontaine, auteure québécoise innue dont la première publication en 2011, *Kuessipan*, a été portée par la vague d'intérêt croissante en littératures canadiennes pour les voix et les imaginaires autochtones. Alors que ce coup d'envoi atteignait à une intimité à la fois fébrile et contenue dans la mise en scène d'une jeune voix féminine tiraillée entre deux origines, deux langues et mille projets de vie, on retrouve ici la même coque mais qui donne l'impression d'avoir été vidée. *Manikanetish* est le nom d'une école secondaire située dans la communauté innue de Uashat sur la Côte-Nord du Québec. La narratrice est née en ce lieu mais l'a quitté toute jeune pour une vie urbaine à Québec. Au début du roman, elle accepte un contrat d'institutrice et abandonne conjoint, amis et certitudes afin de « retourner travailler dans [sa] communauté. De redonner ». S'ensuit un assemblage de vignettes disjointes d'où émergent la mélancolie d'une exilée, le sacerdoce inquiet d'une éducatrice devant ses ouailles difficiles et des atermoiements conjugaux. La déconvenue est grande pour

le lecteur de *Manikanetish* qui trouve à travers cela beaucoup de surface et guère de profondeur. « Nous étions ailleurs, très loin des livres et des bureaux . . . et pourtant nous étions si près. Si près de soi. » La profondeur manque car Fontaine ignore la nature ironique du langage et de l'imagination. Chaque scène est dressée afin de transmettre une seule image. Chaque émotion appelle son interprétation idoine. On ne trouve pas l'écart qui laisserait filtrer une ambiguïté entre le regard et les mots qui le traduisent. Quand la narratrice doute, le texte nous le dit en toutes lettres. L'espoir qu'elle a pour ses élèves, les regrets qu'elle éprouve face à sa vie de couple abandonnée sont exactement ceux que le consensus attend d'une telle aventure. Notre lecture est guidée par cette sentimentalité univoque comme elle le serait dans un livre jeunesse, ce à quoi *Manikanetish* ressemble d'ailleurs à bien des égards.

C'est tout le contraire avec l'étonnant *La dévoration des fées* de la poète et journaliste culturelle Catherine Lalonde. Il s'agit d'un conte, mais d'un conte qui déparle sa langue traditionnelle. N'en subsistent que les inflexions et les mots les plus violents. On y suit la croissance d'une forme féminine depuis la matrice effondrée de sa mère morte en couche jusqu'à la reprise de l'existence campagnarde de ses aïeules dans un âge adulte où « elle redevient arbre, champ, vache, polymorphe dans le paysage. » Lalonde ne concède rien à la facilité dans ce parcours où les personnages, tous féminins, sont esquissés plus que campés dans une langue attentive à la viande, aux fluides et aux pulsations sous les surfaces (« onction de moelle de bœuf, jaunes d'œufs frais, cris de purge »). L'antécédence de la fécondation animale sur la raison langagière est présente de bout en bout, qui témoigne de l'influence de l'œuvre de Pascal Quignard au demeurant assumée par Lalonde. Tout est près de l'os, de la matérialité organique qui nous unit à la terre et à la pesanteur. On lit cela comme un poème en prose, passant rapidement d'un milieu de sensations à l'autre, du laiteux à l'aqueux, du moite au givré. Entre claustration rurale et ville comme « sublime dilution », Lalonde a composé un texte mémorable et très maîtrisé sur l'atavisme et la poussée de la vie en tant qu'elle déforme le corps des êtres en même temps que leur faculté de voir, de sentir et de parler.

Quelques lieux de Constance de Catherine Lavarenne parle aussi de la confusion des générations féminines. Constance est une femme hantée par une enfance fêlée. Négligée par sa mère démissionnaire, elle a été adoptée sous le manteau par la matriarche d'une famille attenante chez qui elle a trouvé quelque équilibre. Mais Constance adulte « a encore des espaces à combler ». Elle n'est pas quitte de son passé. Celui-ci brouille sa vie présente et lui octroie une qualité incertaine, sans arrimage ni direction, que l'écriture de Lavarenne, au détriment de son intrigue, épouse malheureusement de bout en bout. La carrière de musicienne de Constance lui a donné l'occasion d'un vagabondage réel et ontologique qu'on imagine de mise chez ceux dont les origines sont bâties sur du sable et du silence : « Il n'est pas trop tard pour apprendre à distinguer la liberté de l'art de la fuite. » Revenue à Montréal au chevet de sa mère adoptive mourante, elle est confrontée au choix de signer ou non les papiers autorisant l'arrêt des soins palliatifs. Elle retrouve pour l'occasion ses proches laissés derrière. Le panier de crabe familial qui en résulte fait passer l'idée d'une narration cohérente sous celle d'un ensemble de questions et de suppositions dans les esprits de personnages réunis fortuitement par la présence de Constance et qui s'absorbent à tour de rôle dans leurs souvenirs. On sent qu'il y a là, quelque part, une réflexion possible sur l'interchangeabilité du rôle de mère, à moins que ça ne soit une méditation sur l'incompréhension foncière séparant tout un chacun. De fait, Lavarenne en vient

à dire elle-même ce dont son livre est fait : « Constance [doit] regarder en face des images confuses qu'elle évite depuis très longtemps et qui ont fini par aller prendre la poussière dans un coin de sa mémoire. » Or précisément, un tel face à face n'a pas lieu, ni pour Constance ni pour quiconque, et on demeure perplexe en refermant le livre. Rien n'est résolu car on ne sait pas trop ce qui était censé l'être. L'ensemble est d'un impressionnisme laborieux.

Dans les trois livres résumés ici, des voix de femmes narrent l'affrontement d'épreuves individuelles. Leurs différences sont toutefois considérables, et le bonheur littéraire qu'elles prodiguent est à l'avenant.

Écologie du crime

Christian Giguère
La disparition de Kat Vandale. Héliotrope 21,95 $

Marie-Ève Sévigny
Sans terre. Héliotrope 14,95 $

Compte rendu par Alex Bellemare

Constituée déjà d'une dizaine d'ouvrages, la collection « Noir » des éditions Héliotrope entend, de son propre aveu éditorial, « tracer, livre après livre, une carte inédite du territoire québécois dans laquelle le crime se fait arpenteur-géomètre ». C'est bien une géographie du crime, du macabre et de la déviance que dessinent, ensemble mais diversement, *La disparition de Kat Vandale* (2018) de Christian Giguère et *Sans terre* (2016) de Marie-Ève Sévigny. Ces ouvrages, que nous pouvons ranger dans la catégorie des romans policiers ou à suspense, sont construits, malgré la prévisibilité du genre, avec force et intelligence : le crime (et ses pathologies corollaires) est évidemment la donnée de base de ces textes, mais la question du territoire et du lieu apparaît vite à l'avant-plan du projet de ces deux « jeunes » écrivains. Géographique, d'abord, le roman policier se transforme sous leur plume en véritable anthropologie urbaine, en enquête sur le paysage (et sur la faune exotique qui y habite). Jeunes écrivains ensuite, dans la mesure où il s'agit, pour chacun d'eux, d'un premier essai sur le terrain du roman noir.

La disparition de Kat Vandale propose, en creux d'une enquête sur la mystérieuse disparition d'une prostituée, une réflexion sur le centre légitime et la périphérie délinquante, sur la ville et ses banlieues étouffantes. Tout l'univers des bas-fonds est sollicité : la mafia, les gangs de rue, la corruption politique, le proxénétisme sont autant de thématiques déployées par Christian Giguère. La quête de Kat Vandale, étudiante en soins infirmiers le jour et vedette de films pornographiques le soir, est celle d'un affranchissement déçu : elle tente de s'évader de sa vie (austère et désolante) de banlieue, pour gagner le grandiose de la ville, vivifiante mais vite toxique. En effet, Kat Vandale connaîtra rapidement désillusions et dégringolades, jusqu'à l'infâme suprême d'un viol collectif. Un lien (presque) de causalité est alors établi entre le lieu et la criminalité : les quartiers pauvres de la ville induisent et perpétuent la délinquance, de petite à grande échelle.

La représentation de la langue des milieux interlopes est souvent réussie, mais dérange parfois la lecture : l'insertion, typographiquement marquée, de nombreux textos ou courriels, à l'orthographe et à la syntaxe volontairement châtiées, crée moins un effet de réel qu'un décalage trop souligné entre les différents niveaux énonciatifs. Mais le plus grand attrait de *La disparition de Kat Vandale* est sans contredit la meute de personnages les uns plus grotesques et ridicules que les autres. Christian Giguère maîtrise l'art d'ancrer ses personnages dans des personnalités prononcées et immédiatement intelligibles, parfois caricaturales certes, mais toujours carnavalesques et abouties. Les chapitres, généralement courts, sont d'ailleurs tous affublés du nom de l'un de ces nombreux personnages iconoclastes

qui construisent l'intrigue, concrétisant ainsi l'importance des individualités fortes. Plusieurs références à la culture populaire et lettrée sont disséminées au sein du récit : la littérature et surtout le cinéma sont autant de médiations convoquées pour filtrer et complexifier l'intrigue policière, somme toute simpliste (une disparition, une recherche, une découverte). C'est pourtant grâce à la vaporisation de ces multiples renvois cinématographiques que *La disparition de Kat Vandale* se drape de l'esthétique stéréotypée mais opératoire du film noir. À la façon du cinéma, le roman de Giguère prend l'aspect de tableaux, de séquences narratives rapidement entremêlées, qui détaillent et dissèquent le monde des marginaux et des exclus, le monde de l'entre-deux et de l'infect.

Sans terre de Marie-Ève Sévigny est également construit selon une géographie de la transgression. Dans ce polar mettant une « terroriste écologique » en vedette, l'anarchiste et activiste environnementale Gabrielle Rochefort, la question du paysage (ainsi que ses ramifications politiques et sociales) est au cœur de l'intrigue. Plus classique dans sa facture et sa langue, *Sans terre* se situe sur l'Île d'Orléans et détaille les mécanismes retors faisant du territoire le terrain de jeu d'exploiteurs acharnés — qui ne dédaignent pas les méthodes dures pour arriver à leurs fins. C'est un vaste complot politique que tente en somme d'ébruiter l'ardente militante : la pétrolière Cliffline Energy aurait des entrées privilégiées au gouvernement faisant de la destruction du territoire un projet commun, car éminemment profitable. Plus Gabrielle Rochefort s'approche de la vérité (des politiciens corrompus complotent avec de riches pétrolières pour vendre le bien public), plus les dangers affluent, plus sa vie est menacée. L'intérêt de *Sans terre* ne réside pas uniquement dans son intrigue (menée brillamment et aux multiples complications), mais dans les thématiques explorées, peu fréquentes dans le roman noir. Sans toujours éviter les clichés du genre (le lieutenant de police à la retraite, les nombreux renvois à la littérature policière), le roman brille lorsqu'il met en relation dynamiques personnelles et sociales, lorsqu'il met en jeu les logiques de l'appropriation du territoire et de l'apathie quasi généralisée des citoyens qui assistent, presque complices dans leur mutisme, à la destruction du paysage.

Dans *La disparation de Kat Vandale* comme dans *Sans terre*, le crime prend racine dans une géographie spécifique, dans des lieux qui sont tout à la fois objet et sujet de la déviance : le territoire (ses marges, son exploitation sauvage, ses creux) est, en cela, un merveilleux laboratoire du macabre.

From Nightmare into Light

Sky Dancer Louise Bernice Halfe; David Gaertner, ed.
Sôhkêyihta: The Poetry of Sky Dancer Louise Bernice Halfe. Wilfrid Laurier UP $18.99

Reviewed by Renée Jackson-Harper

The Cree word "Sôhkêyihta," explains Sky Dancer Louise Bernice Halfe in the afterword to *Sôhkêyihta: The Poetry of Sky Dancer Louise Bernice Halfe* (2018), a stellar Laurier Poetry Series publication, is a "gentle commanding word used to encourage people to stand strong while they face adversity." It encourages the listener to "Have courage. Be brave. Be strong." Given the flood of disheartening reports in the national media this past year (and every year since the Canadian colonial project began), including the not-guilty verdicts of Gerald Stanley in the death of Colten Boushie and Raymond Cormier in the death of Tina Fontaine, which have dealt emotional and political blows to reconciliation efforts between the Canadian settler state and the Indigenous communities it has long sought to silence and erase, Halfe's counsel—sôhkêyihta, stand strong in the

face of adversity—remains urgent.

In this collection, Halfe's fierce and incandescent poetry and voice, which have resonated with readers since the 1990s, are amplified and (if possible) intensified by her biographical afterword, in which she charts her writing life, her work to address legacies of pain, and a process of "spiritual enlightenment, intellectual observation, and emotional healing." The collection is also made all the more powerful by the foreword by settler scholar David Gaertner. Gaertner illuminates Halfe's integral place in a body of Indigenous writing that is working to push back against and break colonial narratives and structures that have sought to silence Indigenous voices, and foregrounds her work to "bear witness to the violence of residential schools and settler colonialism writ large," while listening attentively to the silence of those who have been rendered voiceless.

Halfe's early poems, including "The Residential School Bus," which speaks of her experiences in the Blue Quills Residential School, and "Valentine Dialogue," which addresses sexual abuse, both bear powerful witness and give voice to harrowing experiences that often evade language or are erased from dominant narratives. The poem that concludes the collection, "God of Nightmares," typifies Halfe's work and broader efforts, which move resolutely into darkness in order to extract spaces of healing. The poem's speaker

> thanks the god of nightmares
> that the acidic fire left blisters on pages
> where her pen rose to meet the spirit
> of answers[.]

Sôhkêyihta is an especially crucial collection for educators, scholars, and readers of Canadian poetry. Halfe offers readers a rich process through which to begin and continue to contend with the horrors and injustices that underpin settler colonialism in Canada.

Pineapples & Apocalypse

Liz Harmer
The Amateurs. Knopf Canada $32.95

Reviewed by Natalie Boldt

"*This is the way the world ends / Not with a bang but a whimper*"—or at least, this is the way it ends in Liz Harmer's *The Amateurs*. The gripping book is Harmer's first novel (though she has won prizes for her short fiction and non-fiction) and her first significant foray into the increasingly popular genre of speculative fiction. A post-apocalyptic story of the near-future variety, *The Amateurs* covers, in its speculative purview, such recognizable terrain as the implications of quickly wrought and unchecked technologies, political and economic collapse, and the challenges of starting over. Like all good speculative fiction, it also hits uncomfortably close to home.

The titular "amateurs" are a group of forty-two people left behind in a relatively urban setting (a loosely disguised Hamilton, Ontario) after the world has been mysteriously emptied. The culprit? *Ports*—the latest (and, incidentally, the last) device engineered by the tech company PINA, a facsimile of the Apple/Google-type megacorp that engineers phones and smart glasses (among other things), and that assumes a shimmering pine*apple* as its logo. Capitalizing on a generalized sense of nostalgia and ennui, PINA releases the Ports, intelligent time machines that can transport you anywhere in time and/or space. As the Ports gain worldwide traction, the earth—once filled to capacity—begins to empty, leaving those left behind to wonder whether people will, or even can, come back.

Juxtaposed with the bewildered amateurs are "the professionals"—the thousand or so employees left behind at PINA's headquarters in Silicon Valley who, following the mass exodus, shut themselves inside their compound and spend their days doing

downward dog under the watchful eye of Albrecht Doors, their charismatic leader. Doors is also the inventor of Ports and, as this part of the plot unfolds, we are encouraged to wonder how much he knows or does not know about the devices' capacities—whether he is malicious, insane, inane, or some combination thereof.

If the subject matter seems a bit too familiar (unwitting and/or greedy scientists unleash technology that ushers in apocalypse), Harmer's take on the near future is unexpectedly refreshing. For while the novel is marketed with references to Margaret Atwood's *The Year of the Flood*, Dave Eggers' *The Circle*, and *The Walking Dead*, it is hardly as dark as any of these (though *The Year of the Flood* is a fairly apt comparison). Harmer's post-apocalyptic landscape is comparatively empty, but it's hardly desolate. Nor is it truly dystopian. The communities left behind do not dissolve into chaos or violence—there are no "good guys" or "bad guys" depicted here. Instead, Harmer celebrates what she calls the "lunatic amateurishness" of human beings who are variously neighbourly, inventive, faithful, and optimistic as well as pessimistic, unsupportive, ignorant, and hapless. (Incidentally, several of these adjectives appear in Harmer's chapter titles.) Contemplative and unobtrusively intertextual (Harmer nods to T. S. Eliot now and again, for example), the book is also funny and well paced—hardly the work of an amateur.

Two BC Landscapes

Cole Harris
Ranch in the Slocan: A Biography of a Kootenay Farm, 1896-2017. Harbour $24.95

Daniel Marshall
Claiming the Land: British Columbia and the Making of a New El Dorado. Ronsdale $24.95

Reviewed by R. J. (Ron) Welwood

Cole Harris' grandfather, Joseph (Joe) Colebrook Harris (1871-1951), had no head for business and was deemed unsuited for the family's pork-curing enterprise in Calne, Wiltshire. At the age of eighteen, Joe was sent to Ontario Agricultural College in Guelph, and then made the trip westward where he laboured as a pioneer farmer in the Cowichan Valley on Vancouver Island. On the advice of "a pair of eccentric British intellectuals," he visited the Kootenay region of BC and in 1896 purchased 245 acres (~100 ha) of mountainous land overlooking Slocan Lake. Unfortunately, the 1890s mining boom in the Silvery Slocan was on the wane and his dream of an inexhaustible market for locally grown vegetables and fruit was not guaranteed. In reality, the Harris Ranch (a.k.a. Bosun Ranch) became little more than a subsistence farm: "Even in its prime, the ranch consumed money and work while yielding little product," Cole Harris writes in *Ranch in the Slocan*. Over the years the property supported a silver-lead mine (Bosun Mine, 1898-1930), elderly Japanese Canadian male internees in the 1940s, and counterculturalists (war resisters, a.k.a. draft dodgers) during the 1970s. In the 1920s, the ranch's failing orchard operation was replaced by dairying. Although farming was Joe Harris' avocation, socialism and Fabian ideals were in his DNA—"his was an English Fabian voice emanating from a Kootenay mountainside." Convinced that society was divided between useful and useless people, he created the Useful People's Party, which garnered three votes in the provincial election.

Ranch in the Slocan is a charming and engaging book that weaves together excerpts from J. C. Harris' memoir plus diaries, letters, family recollections, and personal anecdotes including an admission that there was turmoil within the family concerning J. C. Harris' "awkward will," which was finally probated in 1964. Many photographs from the Harris family's collection complement the text. *Ranch in the Slocan* definitely captures the spirit of three Harris generations who have occupied a seductive and challenging property for over 120 years. For the author, a noted historical geographer, the ranch was the "geographical centre" of his life, and "[w]hatever else, the ranch produced well-lived lives."

Claiming the Land focuses on the Fraser River corridor and the 1858 Gold Rush. Daniel Marshall's expansive tome chronicles how Indigenous people were the first to discover gold on this river. Exaggerated American news stories about the thriving gold trade between Indigenous people and the Hudson's Bay Company heralded this new El Dorado—the Fraser River Gold Rush. Since the California bonanza of 1849 was over, the newspapers now had a new auriferous story to promote. Their inflated reports enticed thousands of American fortune hunters to migrate north either by ship or overland in search of that elusive lucky strike. Consequently, the landscape was dramatically altered and scarred by placer mining that destroyed ancestral fisheries and damaged spawning channels. This invasion inevitably led to a gold-salmon conflict. British law and order was overwhelmed and often supplanted by US vigilante justice determined to "exterminate the red man." In the wake of these foreign interlopers, many Americanisms supplanted the land's Indigenous place names—e.g., American Bar, Texas Bar, Boston Bar, etc.

Marshall's lucid script documents the complexities of the 1858 Gold Rush and the various confrontations between Indigenous people and gold-seeking immigrants. Antagonistic biases were targeted not only against Indigenous people, but also against other ethnic minorities. Fortunately, the Fraser River War skirmishes (16-25 August 1858) culminated in the signing of peace treaties. As Marshall states, "[t]he year 1858 was a year of chaos unlike any other in British Columbia and American Pacific Northwest history." Within the span of one year, foreign gold-seekers followed by colonial settlers overran traditional Indigenous territories. This was the beginning of the province's ongoing conundrum of unresolved land claims. According to Marshall, the 1858 Gold Rush also spurred Canada to expand as a transcontinental nation: "The story of the Fraser River gold rush presented here is decidedly different from accounts previously written."

Both Harris and Marshall have impressive academic credentials, but their respective publications are far from pedantic. Marshall provides several useful maps and six appendices, including an expansive and fascinating list of "Fraser River Gold Rush Bar Names, 1858-59." Marshall's eighty-three pages of notes are particularly impressive, and so is his extensive bibliography (more than forty pages). Both books also include useful indices. These two titles are recommended—Harris' unique, regional biography of a BC landscape and Marshall's revisionist history concerning an often-overlooked topic.

Buried Treasures

Marilyn James and Taress Alexis; Tyler Toews, illus.
Not Extinct: Keeping the Sinixt Way. Maa $30.00

Tess Liem
Obits.. Coach House $19.95

David Turgeon; Pablo Strauss, trans.
The Supreme Orchestra. Coach House $19.95

Reviewed by Nathaniel G. Moore

Examining the "mortal coil," to crib from Shakespeare, is an impossible task to say the least. Or to put it in more contemporary terms from my childhood: "Life's a bitch and then you die." Thankfully, Tess Liem's debut poetry collection, *Obits.*, never reads like a carpetbagger's manifesto, showing up to morbidly juggle funereal vernacular in clever ways. Instead, the poet deftly balances her own personal memory mine and her use of source material, blending them into a highly engaging voice.

Early in the collection, in "Dead Theories," we see the poet looking back on what we can assume to be her callow youth, when she dyed her hair blonde. Without acrobatics or disturbing line breaks, the poet describes her affection for a female high-school friend with natural blonde hair: "All the boys who had crushes on her / would make out with me at parties / then offer to give her a ride home." Later the stanza ends with "All we all wanted was her sandy attention." What materializes for the reader is a living obituary for the poet's own adolescence. This self-focus is only temporary, however, and quickly vanishes as the poem rolls out a list of dead blondes and the objects of clothing they used to own.

I got an Anne Carson vibe to the scholarly tone and dreg-like atmosphere of some of the pieces, such as "After Baudelaire" with its litany of malice towards a certain dead poet, which gleefully ends with "a light in your awfulness." And the linguistic acuity of *Obits.* is so pared down at times that you can almost see the bone: "One written & not published / is a non-notice, / is anon."

Like *Obits.*, David Turgeon's novel *The Supreme Orchestra* (translated by Pablo Strauss) is full of diverging nuance reassembled for a larger scope. Jewelry heists, erotic artists, subliminal messages in dance music, and temporary marriages converge in a distracting blitz of genre and tone. What do these variables all have in common? They're each components of life in constant movement and add to the novel's intrigue as everyone races towards the titular prize: a giant diamond worth millions called The Supreme Orchestra. While not a thief in the literal sense, Émilien Surville is a minor nobleman working to broker the purchase of the diamond on behalf of the Prince. He seems corrupt, yet is also a meticulous and patient individual. The writing here exudes a neatness and tidiness befitting such a character: "The transaction would take place on the wedding day, early in the morning, in a discreet location to be determined. The diamond would be in a small black case." These exacting details written in another style might drag down the fun for the reader, but Pablo Strauss' translation of David Turgeon's writing keeps the novel aligned with a well-choreographed heist film or, more fittingly, reminiscent of Evelyn Waugh's convivial 1930 novel *Vile Bodies*.

Not Extinct: Keeping the Sinixt Way is a beautiful hybrid of story and art (its rectangular shape will for some harken back to those illustrated primary school books). Marilyn James and Taress Alexis and the Blood of Life Collective have collected First Nations stories which are enhanced with illuminating artwork. In "Swaråk'xn, Frog Mountain," Alexis tells the story learned from Eva Orr about an elder in the village who prayed for the drought to end and a little frog, Swaraåk'xn, who appeared and promised that if the people dug caves they would survive. And so they did. After the snow melted, the drought ended and one

of the tiny frogs grew into the Swaraåk'xn mountain, a symbol of love the frogs showed for the Sinixt people.

Not Extinct acts as a reminder of the need to respect not only fellow humans, but the environment we share, grow, and often, unfortunately, destroy. In stories such as "Coyote Juggles His Eyes," Alexis tells of animals and humans working together to create a just society. In just a few short sentences, the world is revealed in new light. Countless animals and species we may take for granted in daily life are given wonderful backstories, such as the mosquito who bites in order to remember the dead.

Another Nationalism

Jim Johnstone, ed.
The Next Wave: An Anthology of 21st Century Canadian Poetry. Palimpsest $24.99

Reviewed by Ryan Fitzpatrick

Anthologies make arguments. Any anthology worth its salt takes a critical stance on which writers deserve attention and why. In the process, they can reify dominant canonical understandings, map emergent tendencies, and remediate forgotten literary groups and coteries. They can work at scales from the local to the national to the transnational. They can do a little or a lot, but what is important when reading any anthology is asking what precisely a collection's argument is.

In *The Next Wave: An Anthology of 21st Century Canadian Poetry*, editor and poet Jim Johnstone seems unsure about the stance he wants to take. At a glance, his book proposes the kind of generational bet-placing that characterizes past anthologies like Al Purdy's *Storm Warning*, Lorna Crozier and Patrick Lane's *Breathing Fire*, Carmine Starnino's *The New Canon*, and derek beaulieu, Jason Christie, and angela rawlings' *Shift & Switch*. Like those collections, *The Next Wave* corrals a group of emerging-ish poets who provide evidence, according to the back cover copy, of a "reinvigorated national literature." If *The Next Wave* seems custom-built for complaint, it's because of the way its picture of a reinvigorated literature is necessarily incomplete. Why, for instance, does Johnstone fail to recognize the wealth of sharply political poetry coming from Vancouver (Cecily Nicholson, Mercedes Eng, Danielle LaFrance, Anahita Jamali Rad) or the more intimate work congregating around Montreal's Metatron Press? Why such a narrow frame on a national literature? Or why a national literature at all?

Despite the excellent quality of the collected poetry, I think it's completely necessary to take a critical stance toward *The Next Wave*, beginning with its hedging assertion that the anthology isn't definitive, but rather represents a "personal canon." Here, Johnstone acknowledges the incompleteness of his collection. Rather than merely acting as a way to deflect criticism, this invocation of personal taste might provide a reach around the book's nationalist vibes, opening up the question of what exactly Johnstone maps through his choices. The list of contributors largely corresponds to Johnstone's publishing work with Anstruther Press and the communities he circulates in. In particular, he collects from a cohort of poets invested in the possibilities of the lyric and holding tight to a vision of Canadian poetry driven by prize culture and fuelled by the growth of MFA programs. Bracketing off concerns about the canon, this tight focus, however incidental, is a strength of the anthology because it provides a useful constellation of contemporary lyric work in (and around) Canada. It's from this more anchored position that we can dialogue critically with Johnstone's choices, making sense of not only the inclusions and omissions but also the networks and geographies of the work in a way that isn't determined by a nationalist frame.

Rewilding Poetry

Natasha Kanapé Fontaine; Howard Scott, trans.
Blueberries and Apricots. Mawenzi $19.95

Penn Kemp
Fox Haunts. Aeolus $20.00

Reviewed by Sunny Chan

Both Penn Kemp's *Fox Haunts* and Natasha Kanapé Fontaine's *Blueberries and Apricots* ask readers to re-envision how they place themselves in worlds both natural and of their own making. *Fox Haunts* uses foxes to navigate a multitude of ideas, as the "fox is both metaphor lurking behind conscious mind and a living creature reclaiming, rewilding our suburbs." There are many types of foxes haunting this work: a cultural symbol, a folkloric trickster, a hero, and a villain, but also a living creature with a life totally separate from humans no matter what we project onto them, a reminder of the wilderness we have fooled ourselves into thinking we have removed ourselves from. One of Kemp's key questions is whether we can respect the Other without forcing it into being something we can relate to, just honouring it as something fundamentally different from us. On the fox as a symbol: "You are no metonymy for the real." Just as the fox is a figure that dances across the interstitial spaces between urban/rural and folklore/reality, the speaker traverses back and forth between fox as autonomous creature and fox as metaphor, for it does serve aptly as metaphor too. In the third section of the book, "Little Literary Foxes," poetry itself is imagined as fox-like. "May you be translated. And remain / entirely your own," the speaker says to the fox, but also as a kind of invocation of poets' wishes.

The concept of "rewilding," which recurs so much in *Fox Haunts*, is also relevant to Kanapé Fontaine's *Blueberries and Apricots*, where the word is never used but fantasies of restoring the land abound. Kanapé Fontaine is Innu of the Pessamit community and writes in French, but Howard Scott's English translation still conveys the significance of Kanapé Fontaine's gendered, racialized position. In these poems, the body is equated with the land, and the body is female. Powerful "I" statements proliferate, yet instead of evoking the speaker as a singular individual, they are a continual reminder of her service as the voice of communities. Throughout *Blueberries and Apricots*, Kanapé Fontaine calls out the names of peoples in other continents, as well as refugees and those without nations, in solidarity with oppressed peoples around the world. In "The Reserve," a vivid fantasy of the future collapse of the dominant society, the speaker leads women, migrants, and "the peoples without lands" in triumphant revolt so that "all those walls erected between nations / all those boatloads of slaves / those oppressors will have won nothing." The coalescence of the speaker and the spoken as body and land at once is exemplified in the final poem, "Migration," where the speaker swears "on the language of Africa," "on the arm of Asia," "on the leg of Siberia," "on the foot of Oceania," and "on the watery body of America." This collection says important things in this era of truth and reconciliation, but it also says them in conceptually interesting ways, with dexterous poetic moves.

Wounds to Heal

Donna Kane
Summer of the Horse. Harbour $19.95

Reviewed by Richard Pickard

There are always many reasons to find yourself at home in a book, and Donna Kane's poetic memoir *Summer of the Horse* offers at least four.

For those who already appreciate Kane's verse, this book will be a delight. At times her reach for metaphors can be intrusive, as if she can't quite accept that she's writing prose, but only rarely. Much more often the pleasure she finds in language enlivens her subject, as with a group of rocks at the top of Bevin Pass: "[S]hale shards jutting up like . . . shark fins, the tips pocked with crinoline blooms of lichen that ever so slowly grind the rock down."

For those familiar with Canadian wilderness writing and ecological art, the book's setting in the Muskwa-Kechika is itself something to conjure with. Don McKay's *Muskwa Assemblage* (growing from a 2006 retreat co-organized by Kane); site-specific workshops led by greats like Betsy Warland; cameos in the book by Brian Jungen and Jan Zwicky and Tim Lilburn: Kane and her husband, Wayne Sawchuk, have been patiently making this region essential for certain schools of Canadian writing. Kane tours us around backstage through the praxis and the philosophy of separate and overlapping artistic and environmental missions—hers and Sawchuk's—and it's invaluable.

Speaking of Sawchuk, this memoir is also a love story and a tale of mid-life course correction, haltingly but potently told. Kane shares glimpses into the collapse of her deeply rooted marriage, as well as into what seems to her and Sawchuk to have been an inevitable new relationship: "[C]hoice, as Wayne said, was not part of the equation." Marital frailty, admittedly, has come up occasionally in other writers' memoirs, but Kane's delicate handling feels fresh.

But you're here for the horse, aren't you?

The central story, around which the longer ones flash and eddy, is Kane's obligation to spend a summer caring for a horse recovering from a severe injury. More specifically, through inattention and frustration with her husband, Kane is largely responsible for Sawchuk's horse Comet ending up with a terrible bleeding wound in his shoulder, "a hollow so deep that if I lifted the hide to fully expose it, I think I could stick my head inside." Over the course of the summer, Kane's twice-daily job is to irrigate and medicate the wound, an intensely intimate relation across species.

Before coming together with Sawchuk, Kane was far from being a horse person, and in caring for Comet, she has to confront once again her fitness for this new life. Kane shares many delights and travails from her decade with Sawchuk, and some readers will object that the chapters in *Summer of the Horse* aren't linked clearly enough. I don't entirely disagree, but as I say, there are always good reasons to find yourself at home in a book. A generous reader will find a ready home in *Summer of the Horse* and the many kinds of healing that Kane portrays.

"There's so much more to be seen . . ."

Chelene Knight
Dear Current Occupant. Book*hug $20.00

Al Rempel
Undiscovered Country. Mother Tongue $19.95

Reviewed by Evangeline Holtz Schramek

Chelene Knight's second tome *Dear Current Occupant* and Al Rempel's third collection of poetry *Undiscovered Country* investigate physical and emotional vacancies in the Canadian west. For Knight, these vacancies correlate to a nomadic childhood in

Vancouver's Downtown Eastside neighbourhood—they are vacancies of fixed locations, and dispossessions of homes, objects, securities, and routines that make a child feel safe, grounded, and connected to a place and to others. For Rempel, the undiscovered country of his text is a vacancy beyond earthly knowing: What is on the other side of this life, he asks, and how do those left behind come to grips with the unknown locales from which their deceased loved ones have departed?

Winner of the 2018 City of Vancouver Book Award, Knight's *Dear Current Occupant* joins a vital compendium of Canadian literary texts (including Maria Campbell's *Halfbreed* and Sachiko Murakami's *The Invisibility Exhibit*) that explore one of the nation's poorest and most socially complex postal codes, V6A. *Dear Current Occupant* is a scavenger hunt of items hidden in pockets, of homemade forts, and of other imaginatively recreated temporary encampments, realized through the affective force of trauma: through fractures, shards, and semblances of the autobiographical speaker's childhood self. Unlike Knight's first text, a collection of poetry, *Dear Current Occupant* is a work of creative non-fiction that fuses epistolary forms, photographs, short essays, and free verse poetics. In the text's endnotes, Knight writes, "I have two photos of myself when I was young. Two." Thus, the multiple forms Knight marshals intimate the spectres of trauma: trying to reassemble a narrative from disconnected, painful, and out-of-reach moments through the visitation of formerly inhabited rooming houses, apartments, tenements, streets, and shelters in East Van. Knight's speaker moves mercurially between child and adult perceptions, demonstrating the incredible survival skills of the former: "when all else fails," she tells us in the poem "Neighbour, this is for your daughter," "build a fort." *Dear Current Occupant* presents a textual fort, forged from memories; this text, like the self-excavation Knight has performed, will not go unremembered.

In *Undiscovered Country*, Rempel's free verse entrances, switchbacking between the ubiquitous and the ethereal. Rempel's speaker seeks the lost selves of relatives who have departed the landscapes he reveres in his collection: Rempel currently resides in Prince George but hails from Abbotsford, with close ties to the Gulf Islands. This collection tends to employ a present tense marked by the deep roots of loss, of the realities of passing time. In "Occasional Poem for a Birthday," the force behind Rempel's work crystallizes: "what I think is this: we can't hold / all our love inside our hearts, some of it / always spills over." Rempel's text is what spills over, full of love for the living and his cherished British Columbian locales, and longing for those who have passed from its bucolic yet quotidian days.

Semblable clef de voûte

Dany Laferrière
Autoportrait de Paris avec chat. Boréal 32,95 $

Vincent Lambert et Jacques Paquin, dirs.
Sensorielles : Autour de Paul Chanel Malenfant. Noroît 25,00 $

Compte rendu par Nathalie Warren

Tel que l'annonce le titre, ces livres partagent une clef de voûte, soit celle de l'enfance, laquelle est reconnue par Laferrière et Malenfant comme le fondement de leur affectivité et de leur sensibilité, s'accordant à admettre, tel Barthes qu' « [a]u fond, il n'est pays que de l'enfance ». Mais, outre cela, nous pourrions trouver d'autres points communs à leurs pages dont l'importance accordée aux souvenirs familiaux et au territoire.

Autoportrait de Paris avec chat, le premier livre d'académicien de Laferrière, est un journal illustré dans lequel l'écrivain, préoccupé par l'écriture de son discours

à l'Académie qui doit faire l'éloge de son prédécesseur, Hector Bianciotti, nous invite à le suivre dans les lieux qui ont marqué son imaginaire d'une part, c'est-à-dire Petit-Goâve, Montréal et Paris puis, d'autre part, à faire avec lui la rencontre d'auteurs et d'artistes dont Balzac, Sartre, Villon, Hemingway, Rigaud Benoit, etc. L'auteur réalise ici un rêve d'adolescence, soit celui d'entrer en contact avec de grandes figures du monde de l'art et ce, tout en laissant libre cours au plaisir de faire ce qui, de son propre aveu, il ne sait pas faire, c'est-à-dire dessiner. Dans ce foisonnement d'images et de couleurs, Laferrière s'amuse et son lecteur aussi! Or cette joie n'est pas que ludique, elle nous questionne. Dans un Occident héritier de la culture judéo-chrétienne où l'on fait l'apologie de la douleur Laferrière tend la main à Basquiat et lui promet qu' « un jour le chant heureux reviendra et [il] n'aura plus besoin d'angoisse pour créer » opposant au legs des notions de péché et d'enfer une culture de l'allégresse : « ce qui est étonnant dans la peinture haïtienne c'est qu'elle soit si joyeuse. C'est le dernier peuple à savoir vivre. Ils ne s'intéressent pas à la réalité, ils la réinventent ». On comprend dès lors combien vivifiant et nécessaire a pu être le voyage dans l'atmosphère et les paysages de sa jeunesse quand l'auteur, revêtu de son titre d'Immortel, choisit de rentrer à Port-au-Prince pour se recentrer. Il avait déjà fait allusion avant à la baignoire rose de son premier appartement de Montréal qui lui rappelait le ventre de sa mère quand, enceinte de lui, elle lisait, sa « première petite bibliothèque audio » écrit-il. Nous le suivons maintenant au « 88 rue de Lamarre . . . adresse universelle de l'enfance heureuse » dans une région où dieux vaudous et paysans se côtoient. Univers onirique, presque, qui contribua à irriguer une créativité sur laquelle une vaste culture générale est venue se greffer sans que rien ne soit perdu du rire sonore de l'enfant.

Sensorielles : Autour de Paul Chanel Malenfant est, quant à lui, un collectif qui explore l'œuvre du poète à travers ses thématiques et son style. Proustien, ce dernier a fouillé les motifs du temps et de la mémoire, mais une mémoire qu'il reconnait comme souple, sujette aux divagations mais aussi à la création volontaire car, comme l'a relevé entre autres Élise Lepage, Malenfant revendique le droit d'interagir avec le passé et de remodeler ses souvenirs. Ainsi écrit-il : « J'aime que l'invention de ces tenaces souvenirs d'enfance fassent partie de ma vérité d'homme ». Or, bien qu'enluminés par le langage, ceux-ci n'en demeurent pas moins sombres, les thèmes récurrents étant ceux de l'inceste; de la famille et, plus spécifiquement, de ses étouffants secrets; du deuil et du corps, lequel, tout en étant le lieu de la sensation et du contact avec le monde extérieur est également celui de la souffrance qu'il s'agisse de la maladie, telle qu'évoquée dans *Des ombres portées,* un tombeau pour son amie Lise Guèvremont, de la mort de son jeune frère atteint de la tuberculose, de celle de sa mère dans *La petite mariée de Chagall* ou encore de la violence faite au corps, dans le cas du frère aîné qui, à vingt ans, s'est défenestré.

Or, bien que l'œuvre du poète relève de son expérience et qu'elle s'y enracine, elle ne s'y arrête pas. En effet, Malenfant est poète, certes, mais sa visée est aussi philosophique. Il garde envers le monde une capacité d'étonnement, est attentif tant aux subtilités des secousses intérieures qu'aux désordres du siècle et ses histoires familiales sont contigües à l'Histoire comme telle. Aussi, s'il compare lui-même sa poésie au murmure d'une musique de chambre, il ne faudrait pas pour autant croire qu'elle n'est que sensation et repli sur soi, Malenfant ne faisant ni dans l'autoréférentiel, ni dans l'abstraction. Au contraire, comme l'affirme Évelyne Gagnon : « [sa] posture mélancolique s'inscrit dans un constant effort pour demeurer en lien avec la concrétude du

"réel" ». Toutefois, au-dessus du gris et du barbare, la langue voltige et, aérienne, fait contrepoids à l'éboulement des faits, prend des airs de fête, joue habilement de tous ses atours, dont celui de sa polysémie. Un seul accroc, cette poésie intimiste, voire écrite pour être lue et comprise, est sujette dans ce livre à quelques analyses trop hermétiques mais fort heureusement il en est d'autres, et c'est la majorité, qui touchent à l'essentiel.

Expatriate Alienation Refined

Norman Levine
I Don't Want to Know Anyone Too Well: Collected Stories. Biblioasis $24.95

Reviewed by Emily Ballantyne

Norman Levine, celebrated for his craft as a lean and lonely modernist short story writer, has been somewhat overlooked for his contributions in Canadian literature, perhaps in part because of his long-time commitment to living as an expatriate in England, and in part because of his decidedly unappreciated critique of Canada in his 1958 travel memoir, *Canada Made Me*. As a result, he is infrequently considered alongside his contemporaries—many of whom also spent significant time abroad in their writing careers—including Mordecai Richler, Margaret Laurence, Mavis Gallant, and Leonard Cohen. The posthumous collection, *I Don't Want to Know Anyone Too Well,* brings together forty-two of Levine's stories, bookended with an introduction and afterword-memoir by John Metcalf. Metcalf makes a strong case for a reconsideration of Levine as a writer's writer, beloved because of his commitment to refining his craft and staying true to his style: spare autobiographical prose about the imperfect nature of human connection. *I Don't Want to Know Anyone Too Well* offers a detailed, circular reflection on alienation, loss, and compassion that refracts within and across each story in the collection.

Levine is doggedly committed to his style and his subject. He writes personal, reflective fiction that features male first-person writers who share many features of his own experience: growing up Jewish in Ottawa, serving in World War II as a pilot, attending McGill, moving to England to write his first novel, moving frequently around rural England to escape poverty, living in artist communities in off-season resorts, working as a writer in residence, and, in all circumstances, sacrificing for his art and chasing his next paycheque through various hustles. The stark alienation of his protagonists is disarming. They are observers who relish in the richness of transitory relationships that are remembered for a lifetime. Though the protagonists frequently have only fleeting connections with those around them, those connections are deeply felt, and remind us of our profound capacity for affiliation and human bonds.

Most of the protagonists in these stories are hard up for money and live hand-to-mouth. As a result, the narrators are often reliant upon the compassion of others, including strangers. In "I'll Bring You Back Something Nice," a series of vignettes describes a husband and wife who separately leave home to escape their poverty. "Gifts" tells two parallel stories seventeen years apart, wherein the narrator experiences compassionate giving in two scenes. In the first, he meets and assists bank robbers who redistribute their stolen wealth in $40 increments to houses in the surrounding area; years earlier, he reflects upon a time he anonymously received a smoked salmon when he had run out of food to feed his family. Brief interactions overcome alienation and slake the thirst of lonely souls.

Distance and alienation are also explored through reflections on death and grief. Gravestones are all that remain of a Jewish settlement in "Continuity," and yet the

most fascinating aspect of the story is the protagonist's interaction with a researcher and professor of Hebrew at Cambridge, who brings these places to life with his rich knowledge of their history. However, late in the collection, we encounter a narrator who is concerned about the power of observation to build a human connection. In "The Man with the Notebook," the protagonist discovers that he can somehow cause death when the people he profiles seem to die without explanation. Though this seems dire, perhaps the difference in this story is that observation does not end with connection; the observations he records only really matter to him when he makes the connection to death.

Overall, Levine is at his best when he shows how even the loneliest and most desperate of situations can result in goodness and shared human experience. Levine uses his short fiction to explore his own autobiographical narrative; he returns to and sharpens his own past by recollecting on the small relationships that have illuminated his life.

After reading the collection, I remain ambivalent about Levine's position in the broader field of CanLit. One thing I know for certain: it is inexcusable if his absence is justified primarily because of a *faux pas* from the late 1950s. The reasons for Levine's absence in Canadian literature frequently circle around a particularly bad experience with McClelland & Stewart. His bleak, critical portrayal of Canada in his memoir *Canada Made Me* effectively lost him a Canadian audience. As Metcalf recounts twice, in both his introduction and the concluding memoir, titled *"Kaddish,"* when Putman agreed to publish the book in England, McClelland & Stewart sold a contractually agreed-upon five hundred copies in Canada, but refused to place the book under their own imprint or to order more copies once they ran out. After this fiasco, Levine was somewhat blacklisted in Canada, and was out of print in the country for seventeen years. I am glad to see Biblioasis revisit Levine's work, if only to offer new readers an opportunity to read his work as part of the Canadian modernist canon that sometimes forgets authors who chose to see the value in remaining self-imposed exiles from Canada.

A Way around Death

Jeanette Lynes
The Small Things that End the World.
Coteau $24.95

Gilmour Walker
Provoked by Gilgamesh: The Search for a Way around Death. Ronsdale $18.95

Reviewed by Nicole Birch-Bayley

Fiction has the incredible power to shed new light on contemporary life by reanimating stories of forgotten worlds. Gilmour Walker and Jeanette Lynes present us with characters who have complex relationships to the past and who journey to find a way around death.

In his epistolary collection *Provoked by Gilgamesh*, Walker turns to *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, the four-thousand-year-old Sumerian epic of King Gilgamesh's journey to discover eternal life after the death of his companion Enkidu—the same epic that inspired Michael Ondaatje's novel *In the Skin of a Lion*. Throughout his letters, Walker contemplates his fear of death, specifically spiritual death caused by "the daily round, the sanctuary of ordered life, the numbing promise of the pension." Prompted by the death of a close friend, Walker sets out from his home in rural Nova Scotia to visit Las Vegas, to see if he can "live frugally" along the Vegas strip and "exorcize his demons." Walker addresses each of his letters not to Gilgamesh, but to Gilgamesh's mother, Ninsun, an "old meddler" who has apparently "tampered" with his life by "playing fast and loose with the portents." With a paranoid Oedipal tone,

the collection flows as a series of reflections directed at the haunting Ninsun, but never quite in the narrative voice that we expect from a mother-son relationship. Instead, Walker slips into a philosophical, academic discourse to discuss the originality of his writing as well as his approach to life. The epic intertext is complemented by other literary allusions to death, ranging from Dante's *Inferno* to Melville's *Moby-Dick*, which frustrate the original editor of Walker's manuscript, referred to as "Ed," who in the footnotes seeks to rationalize the significance of each allusion. The Publisher's Preface justifies the inclusion of these footnotes as an opportunity for readers to engage in a humorous but caustic textual commentary. Ed proves to be the most compelling voice throughout the collection precisely because his passionate response to Walker's digressions actually proves his deep emotional investment in the collection as a whole. Yet Ed is right to suggest that we cannot entirely trust Walker's sincerity; as Walker admits, "I am practically incapable of valuable reflection, of self-generated insight." Whereas Gilgamesh, who wanders the wilderness, grief-stricken, "in the skin of a lion," provides us with a raw spiritual journey, Walker is much more distant and philosophical. However, Walker does offer a creative, universal discourse on the nature of life and literature, one that does not offer easy answers.

Lynes' novel confronts death through the gradual comfort of a makeshift family. The novel spans three generations and two natural disasters fifty years apart: Hurricane Hazel, which unexpectedly hit Toronto in 1954, and Hurricane Katrina, which devastated New Orleans in 2004. Lynes' story resembles Eric Walters' 2009 novel *Safe as Houses*, which depicts a young babysitter faced with the sudden arrival of Hazel in the wealthy suburb of Weston. But Lynes takes her story further: the initial drama of the sudden flooding of Humber Green Drive lasts a mere fifty pages, shifting to the slow development of the mired relationship between Sadie and the orphaned Faith, the baby she fought to protect on her first and only night as babysitter. The novel's central tension is Faith's discovery, eighteen years later, that her five-year-old brother and parents were killed during the storm, and that Sadie is not her biological mother. Fleeing Sadie's family farm and not returning until thirty years later to claim her runaway daughter Amber, Faith finally forgives Sadie and promises to help salvage the farm from financial ruin; the three women conveniently reunite during the final pages as Hurricane Katrina wipes out Faith and Amber's home in New Orleans. The novel's strength is the sincerity of narrative voices: Sadie's sense of duty early on is commendable, albeit naive, and the various divisions between the three women are occasionally frustrating but justified. Most importantly, Lynes explores a unique moral about the relationship between these women, who must learn to become a true family over time: "Some people you *do* just love right away . . . Others take *much longer* to love—they take a *lifetime*." Lynes reminds her readers that the world may appear to end when an act of God destroys the most impressive house in an illustrious neighbourhood, but people will band together during moments of struggle to forge new families.

Poesis and Translation

Émile Nelligan; Marc di Saverio, trans. *Ship of Gold: The Essential Poems of Émile Nelligan.* Signal $19.95

Pierre Nepveu; Donald Winkler, trans. *The Hardness of Matter and Water.* Signal $17.95

Reviewed by Kenneth Meadwell

The deeply personal poetry of Émile Nelligan (1879-1941), rooted in the Symbolist movement, reveals the poetic aspirations and profound longings of a

young man destined for greatness. His *Poésies complètes (1896-1899)* encapsulates the fervour and power of his creativity, from before he was institutionalized in his twentieth year until his death, due to what was in all probability bipolar disorder. "Ship of Gold," the eponymous first poem in *Ship of Gold: The Essential Poems of Émile Nelligan*, begins: "She was a massive ship, hewn in heavy gold, / with masts that fingered heaven, on seas unknown." Running aground on a huge reef "in waters where the Siren sings," then descending into "Dream's abyss," this sinking image, with its "diaphanous flanks" and treasures disputed by "Spite," "Nausea," and "Madness," is the unmistakable metaphor for the young poet's identity. "Castles in Spain" reflects the poet's idealistic but doomed quest for supreme self-affirmation and love. Like a dictator "[s]torming the towers of bronze and gold," or a regal bird soaring "on wings of glory singed by the sun, / trying to steal heaven's treasure," he dreams of "that hundred-walled eternal Troy," but like candles and the wings of Icarus, the wings melt. Ultimately, although Nelligan's conception of the poet is romantic and tragic, it is neither facile nor a caricature. A trope characteristic of nineteenth-century French literature, this figure strikes a resolutely personal pose in Nelligan's work: "I'm just a slaving dreamer passing by, / a sail-white soul that speaks eternally, / bearing, inside me, the spring dawn day."

In the afterword, Marc di Saverio offers a compelling and moving perspective on the presciently confessional nature of Nelligan's poetry, and on his own personal attachment to its vitality and vulnerability. The mid-section is marred, however, by regrettable copy-editing that allowed inconsistent use of French accents, misplaced words and punctuation marks, and two references to "Le [*sic*] Romance du Vin."

Poet, novelist, essayist, and professeur émérite at l'Université de Montréal, Pierre Nepveu is a stalwart supporter of Québécois literature, and in particular of poetry, most notably as indefatigable biographer and pre-eminent specialist of Gaston Miron. *The Hardness of Matter and Water* presents an evocative and sensual walk among urban landscapes, outdoor art, memories, longing, and history, with the St. Lawrence River omnipresent, through a series of four prose poems: "Meditations by the River," "Short Winter Journeys," "Lachine Stations," and "Endings." Donald Winkler's elegant translation captures Nepveu's skilful use of language, alluring tempo, and introspective imagery: "Spare us time turned inside out, running backwards like a crazed steed, windswept time that topples fences and leaves behind only dust and ash in our meadows and yards." This present-day *flâneur* wanders through nostalgic scenes where melancholy and emptiness prevail: "The lone bird overflies the dark water. The book is closed, all that's left is the sky's ignorance and the riverbank's indolence. The way is marked only by grey trees, emptied of life, drained of memory." Nepveu's wanderings and musings wrap us in a cloak of respectful wonderment.

Nelligan and Nepveu bestow upon us profoundly sensitive and human stories. That their poetry is available in English is indeed a gift to the larger literary world.

Lueurs aveuglantes

Michel Ouellette
Trompeuses lumières. Prise de Parole 19,95 $

Aurélie Resch
Sous le soleil de midi. Prise de Parole 17,95 $

Compte rendu par Kinga Zawada

Le champ lexical de la lumière est la notion qui unit les titres de Ouellette et de Resch et éclaire la réflexion suscitée par *Trompeuses lumières* (Prix de littérature éclairée du Nord) et *Sous le soleil de midi* (Prix littéraire Trillium).

Écrivain prolifique franco-ontarien, Michel Ouellette nous invite à revisiter son village natal de Smooth Rock Falls dans son remarquable troisième roman hybride, composé de sept poèmes inédits, de fragments de « La laitière et le pot au lait » de Lafontaine, de citations de *Réflexions sur la puissance motrice du feu et sur les machines propres à développer cette puissance (1824)* de Sadi Carnot, de brefs paragraphes descriptifs locaux, ainsi que d'une trame romanesque qui débute par un phénomène irrésolu : un inconnu mystérieux, aphasique et amnésique surgit au cimetière le même soir qu'un cercueil est profané. Mis à part la couleur des yeux, le revenant qu'on surnommera Lazarus et le défunt dont on ne retrouve pas la dépouille se ressemblent comme deux gouttes d'eau. Mais comment croire à l'incroyable?

Fort heureusement, nul besoin de trancher entre le réel et l'imaginaire grâce à la note de la 4e de couverture qui situe ce roman captivant « à la frontière de la réalité et de l'onirisme » et qui laissera aux destinataires le loisir de renouer avec un thème clé de l'œuvre de l'auteur : la quête identitaire d'un personnage muet, dont l'histoire sera retracée par d'autres que lui. Comme souligné par Hotte, les assidus de Ouellette se réjouiront du changement de perspective du particulier vers l'universel et s'interrogeront aux côtés des personnages sur « l'existence même des choses et des événements. » Les diverses lumières (lune, étoiles, cadran, gyrophare, lampadaire, néons), parfois métaphoriques (police, science, littérature), provoqueront une réflexion « métaphysique » sans pour autant élucider l'énigme, ni fournir de réponse définitive à l'enquête.

Si chez Ouellette les lumières semblent mystificatrices ou trompeuses, le soleil brûlant de midi s'avère encore plus dangereux chez Resch. Dans son splendide recueil de dix-huit nouvelles, l'auteure et journaliste torontoise dépeint superbement les effets de chaleur extrême sur le comportement humain. Se manifestant sous diverses formes — flammes, rayons solaires, fièvre, suffocation, feu, canicule, ou ménopause — la chaleur se conjugue avec la tombée des masques dans un univers de plus en plus policé. « C'est un comportement que souvent on essaie d'écraser, de tenir enfermé, parce que ce n'est pas politiquement correct », précise l'auteure. Lorsque la température corporelle monte, les instincts et les passions risquent de se déchainer dans un délire pernicieux.

Les lecteurs seront appelés à porter un nouveau regard sur les faits divers ou les nouvelles rapportées par les médias : une mère abandonnant son enfant dans une voiture embrasée, un éboueur étouffé et broyé, la déconcentration d'athlètes sous un soleil accablant, le calme avant le feu des mitraillettes, etc. L'écriture tempérée mais savamment persillée de subtiles références littéraires déclenchera un réseau intertextuel évoquant *La nausée*, *Les mouches* ou le mythe d'Icare. À avaler d'un coup avec un verre d'eau bien glacée!

Les rives du chaos

Claudine Potvin
Le sexe de Fidel. Lévesque 25,00 $

Compte rendu par Véronique Trottier

Louise et Marc partent à Cuba en 1967 pour se frotter aux rêves et aux désillusions d'un pays en pleine ébullition, tels les idéaux qu'ils portent. Alors que Marc s'intéresse surtout à la politique et à la dimension intellectuelle de l'endroit, dont il se nourrit, c'est une faim différente qui tenaille Louise, une irrépressible envie de faire corps avec l'île, corolaire d'un vide intérieur à combler. C'est ainsi que nous serons entraînés par la narratrice dans le tourbillon des sensations tantôt fugaces tantôt pérennes qui moduleront sa vie.

L'incursion au cœur de l'île de Cuba des années 1960 s'étoffe de nombreuses

références historiques et littéraires qui ponctuent l'expérience et les réflexions de Louise. À travers le récit de ses émois et de ses tergiversations, elle évoque le charisme de Castro, la puissance de son verbe, son pouvoir d'attraction, en même temps qu'elle formule des réflexions sur la situation sociopolitique et l'intransigeance révolutionnaire. Aux considérations sur la réalité cubaine s'enchevêtrent également des aspirations québécoises auxquelles Louise n'est pas étrangère : la volonté d'affirmation nationale de la Révolution tranquille, la redéfinition d'une province qui s'essaie, tout comme Cuba, à sa nouveauté.

Au fil des jours, l'adolescence du personnage central se prolonge, goûte Cuba, s'en laisse imprégner, est infidèle. Le couple que Louise forme avec Marc se désunit pendant que Louise, elle, s'unit au vent, au sable, à Pablo, surtout, dans une passion empreinte de poésie qui les consumera par-delà l'absence et le temps. Louise raconte, quarante ans plus tard, Cuba et ses paradoxes, la décrivant comme le pays « de l'exubérance et de l'excès », à l'image de son histoire d'amour avec Pablo.

En traversant la mer, Louise traversera aussi la *mère* : la mère qu'elle n'est pas devenue pour son fils, la mère qu'elle voulait devenir (et qu'elle deviendra) pour une fille, la mère alcoolique qui est la sienne, la mère adoptive qu'elle trouve sur l'île. Elle éprouvera que les distances géographiques ne séparent qu'artificiellement le passé du présent et ne pallient que temporairement ou superficiellement les vides, le présent se superposant au passé sans jamais l'occulter. Le retour aux sources du souvenir montre les couches successives de traces indélébiles laissées sur le cœur du personnage principal.

L'écriture sensuelle de Claudine Potvin donne une dimension singulière à son univers romanesque. Elle rend audible la frénésie d'un moment, palpable la texture d'un souvenir, tangible le relief d'un désir ; elle matérialise l'effervescence d'un lieu, la brûlure d'un regret, la fraîcheur de la pluie. De la même façon, elle peint la frénésie de la succession des pensées diffuses dans l'esprit de son personnage par l'accumulation de fragments de pensées, de sentiments, de jouissances. La voix de Louise est aussi plurielle, la narration à la troisième personne alternant avec les relations épistolaires et la narration à la deuxième personne pour s'adresser à un proche. L'impression de désordre qui se dégage d'une telle structure peut être déroutante, cependant la forme du récit est en adéquation avec le chaos affectif sur les rives duquel la narratrice se tient en permanence.

La vie malgré tout

François Ricard
La littérature malgré tout. Boréal, 24,95 $

Tracey Lindberg; Catherine Ego, trad.
Birdie. Boréal, 29,95 $

Compte rendu par Jean-Sébastien Ménard

Lire François Ricard, c'est écouter la voix du professeur, s'en empreigner, s'en inspirer et réfléchir avec lui. Dans *La littérature malgré tout*, recueil d'essais écrits au fil des ans, Ricard témoigne de sa sensibilité de lecteur et propose au monde de voir la littérature comme « un art de vivre, une manière de préserver et d'approfondir en nous le petit espace d'humanité et de liberté qui nous reste. »

Dans ses essais, Ricard se remémore son passage à *Liberté*, cette revue à laquelle il a collaboré où « il n'y avait pas ou guère de positions communes [. . . mais ce qu'il appellerait] une communauté d'échanges, de recherche, un dialogue et, très certainement, une amitié. » Il parle aussi de l'humilité du silence et s'intéresse aux notions de lecture et d'écriture, notamment comme moyen de formuler et d'organiser sa pensée, tout en réfléchissant à l'utilité de la littérature, à sa valeur et à son bien-fondé.

Pour Ricard, la littérature sert à comprendre le monde, à l'habiter et à entrer en contact avec lui, que ce soit par l'écriture ou la lecture d'une œuvre, tout en étant une méthode; c'est-à-dire une « certaine manière pour l'esprit de considérer et d'approcher ce qui se trouve au-devant, autour et dedans lui. » Ricard s'intéresse aussi à l'art de la critique et invite ses artisans à entrer en dialogue avec les œuvres, à être à leur écoute, « non pour y trouver—ou y retrouver—ses thèses ou celles de ses confrères, mais pour entendre ce [qu'elles ont] à dire, avec [leurs] mots et [leur] intelligence à [elles]. » Lire devient l'occasion de se lier aux œuvres, de se laisser habiter et façonner par elles. Cette proposition, Ricard la fait sienne dans la section « Lectures au grand air » où il visite des œuvres de plusieurs auteurs, dont Kafka, Georges Séféris, Yannis Kiourtsakis, Philippe Muray, Gabrielle Roy et Cuzio Malaparte; œuvres qu'il aborde non pas pour comprendre une époque, un lieu ou une culture, mais pour entrer en dialogue avec elles, parce qu'il continue « de faire confiance à la littérature, malgré tout. »

De son côté, Tracey Lindberg, retrace, dans *Birdie*, le parcours tumultueux de Bernice Meetoos, alias Birdie, une Amérindienne originaire du nord de l'Alberta qui a vécu son lot d'atrocité, de souffrance et d'abus tant physiques que psychologiques, et qui chemine vers une certaine guérison tout en « cherchant un refuge où sa mémoire [pourra] vivre en paix avec son corps. »

À travers l'écriture fine de Lindberg, qui signe ici un premier roman abouti où elle cherche « à libérer une vie, pas à l'enfermer », le lecteur découvre donc Bernice, cette jeune femme, marquée par la vie, dans ses souvenirs, son présent et ses préoccupations. Avec une belle sensibilité, l'auteure nous fait vivre les difficultés que doit surmonter cette dernière pour survivre à ses multiples blessures et guérir. Ce faisant, Lindberg nous livre ses pensées et ses secrets et nous fait connaître son univers ainsi que celui de son entourage, où la vie semble très loin d'une partie de plaisir, tant pour Bernice que pour les autres femmes, « sa famille de femmes », qui l'entourent. Au fil des pages, le lecteur retrouve une Bernice qui, malgré tout, s'accroche à la vie et trouve la force, entre le rêve, le souvenir et la réalité, de cheminer vers une possible guérison. S'inscrivant dans la mouvance du mouvement « me too », ce roman expose au grand jour comment Bernice se sent et ce qu'elle doit traverser pour survivre aux multiples abus subis et surmonter les traumatismes passés. En découvrant la voix de Bernice, le lecteur prend conscience des situations difficiles que vivent des Autochtones.

Lindberg, par sa plume, rappelle celles d'auteures comme Naomi Fontaine et Natasha Kanapé Fontaine qui, par leurs mots, font émerger la beauté, la force, la persévérance et la réalité de communautés et d'humains qui ne courbent pas l'échine devant l'adversité, et cela, malgré les torrents, les tempêtes et les atrocités qu'ils subissent et traversent. *Birdie* est un roman d'une rare force et d'une rare beauté qui apporte de l'espoir.

The West and Its Genres

Katherine Ann Roberts
West/Border/Road: Nation and Genre in Contemporary Canadian Narrative. McGill-Queen's UP $95.00

Reviewed by Joel Deshaye

In *West/Border/Road*, Katherine Ann Roberts demonstrates a comprehensive knowledge of North American cultural criticism, especially from Canada, that she describes as "critical nation theory . . . a practice that remains critical yet allows for the emotional appeal of national identity constructs." She applies this practice to a manageably large set of close readings of

Canadian and American literature, television, and film. The interpretations are diligently explanatory. Although Sitting Bull's name appears incorrectly, I am otherwise impressed with *West/Border/Road*; my copy is almost uselessly dog-eared as I prepare to quote it liberally in my own related book on the genre of the Western. The contribution of *West/Border/Road* is that Roberts' chosen texts are not merely *representations* of a trans/national situation; they are also examples of *genres* evolving transnationally from American models that are economically incentivized (thus inevitable) but also subject to critique.

These associated genres are the Western, the border fiction, and the road story—narratives moving toward frontiers or across borders. The book also draws the attention of border studies away from its typical focus on Mexico and the US toward Canada, which is often invisible and sometimes equated with Mexico in the American imagination. It then moves to Quebec to view on screen the province's interplay of "the will to remember" and its emerging "citizen-of-the-worldness." Helpfully broad, the scope is intra-provincial, interprovincial, international, and transnational in a North American context.

The book is also intermedial, including both

> fiction and film, a practice common in the study of North American border narratives . . . [and] in keeping with one of the main concerns of this study: to reflect on the cross-pollination of genres as they travel [intermedially].

So, giving priority to Guy Vanderhaeghe's Western trilogy and Aritha van Herk's most Western novels and stories, Roberts then analyzes CBC TV's *Intelligence* (2005-2007) and *The Border* (2008-2010). These post-9/11 dramas segue into recent border-fixated American literature and film, including Richard Ford's 2012 novel *Canada*. In the final section, *West/Border/Road* examines a Quebec filmography of road movies, such as Louis Bélanger's *Route 132* (2010), which dwell on regional travel and spatial identifications. It concludes with the Canadian road movie generally, especially Michael McGowan's *One Week* (2008) and Matthew Bissonnette's *Passenger Side* (2009). In method and content, it is very contemporary.

Finishing this review as the City of Victoria removes a statue of John A. Macdonald that was deemed an impediment to Canadian-Indigenous reconciliation, I note that Roberts suggests that (or Vanderhaeghe suggests that) the little-known historical figure and Métis guide Jerry Potts can be understood as "the forgotten or unacknowledged father of the Canadian nation." For Roberts, "the Canadian nation" depends on the diversity, mobility, and even the invisibility that Potts symbolizes. *West/Border/Road* is a welcome and significant addition to the scholarly body of work that Roberts synthesizes and expands.

Traductions et autonomisation de la pensée autochtone

Leanne Betasamosake Simpson; Anne-Marie Regimbald, trad.
Danser sur le dos de notre tortue : La nouvelle émergence des Nishnaabeg. Varia 24,95 $

Glen Sean Coulthard; Arianne Des Rochers et Alex Gauthier, trads.
Peau rouge, masques blancs : Contre la politique coloniale de la reconnaissance. Lux 29,95 $

Compte-rendu par Marie-Eve Bradette

Alors que la pensée autochtone trouve son espace d'expression critique dans le domaine anglophone depuis de nombreuses années, l'espace éditorial francophone canadien tarde à donner voix aux intellectuels autochtones. La traduction, toutefois, permet de remplir ce manque et donne à lire des écrits autrement inaccessibles et avec eux l'autonomisation d'une pensée intellectuelle autochtone dans un contexte

où le colonialisme de peuplement ne doit pas être envisagé comme un événement historique à reléguer au passé, mais comme une structure et un processus dont les conséquences se donnent à voir encore aujourd'hui. Dans cette perspective, Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, avec *Danser sur le dos de notre tortue* et Glen Sean Coulthard, avec *Peau rouge, masques blancs* proposent une alternative à la théorie critique occidentale. Plutôt que de focaliser sur la politique coloniale de la reconnaissance dans un Canada post-Commission de Vérité et de Réconciliation, Coulthard développe des arguments en faveur d'une résurgence intellectuelle autochtone en critiquant, entre autres, l'aspect exclusivement temporel de la pensée marxiste. Simpson, quant à elle, met en place, en prenant au sérieux les récits de création de sa communauté en tant que cadre théorique non seulement pertinent, mais essentiel, les termes d'une résurgence Nishnaabeg. En conclusion de son livre, Coulthard s'appuie d'ailleurs sur la version anglaise de l'ouvrage de Simpson qui compte parmi les premières à avoir développé le concept de *résurgence*, qui deviendra fondamental aux études autochtones actuelles.

De manière à arriver à la résurgence et à son application aux contextes politiques autochtones, le politicologue Déné Glen Coulthard critique et adapte les modèles marxistes et postcoloniaux à la pensée autochtone. Des travaux de Marx, l'auteur déplace la notion de « capital » vers celle de « colonial » afin d'exposer la structure du colonialisme pour prendre en compte la composante relationnelle de la pensée autochtone, notamment la relation réciproque au territoire. Coulthard propose ainsi de réfléchir en termes de « normativité ancrée ». Puis, en reprenant le concept de reconnaissance à Fanon, Coulthard poursuit son développement théorique en appuyant son propos sur l'échec de la dialectique hégélienne du maître et de l'esclave, donc la dialectique de la reconnaissance, en arguant que la relation coloniale demeure depuis les premiers contacts et qu'il est impossible de penser la réciprocité dans ce contexte. Ayant mis en place ce cadre théorique par l'adaptation des travaux de Marx et Fanon, Coulthard en propose une application à plusieurs études de cas et conclut en proposant que le militantisme autochtone qui se fait insistant depuis la publication du *Livre Blanc* et qui culmine avec le mouvement Idle No More inauguré en 2012 en réaction à l'application de la loi C-45, est un exemple manifeste de la résurgence autochtone, comme modèle théorique, mais surtout comme pratique intellectuelle et politique qui sied à l'étude des relations de pouvoir dans un contexte colonial.

Le projet de Leanne Betasamosake Simpson dans *Danser sur le dos de notre tortue*, bien qu'il s'ancre dans l'élaboration du même concept de résurgence, plus précisément de ce qu'elle nomme, à partir du concept de *biskaabiiyang*, une « nouvelle émergence », n'en reste pas moins différent dans son développement. En effet, le travail essayistique de Simpson doit être lu de concert avec sa pratique littéraire en ce sens qu'il participe d'une expérience personnelle du savoir, d'un rapport individualisé à ce savoir, qui s'ancre néanmoins dans une relation au collectif. C'est, selon l'autrice, en puisant les significations des récits traditionnels que l'on peut parvenir à une meilleure compréhension du monde contemporain, apprendre à vivre en Nishnaabeg et ainsi envisager une résurgence culturelle collective. À travers l'exploration des concepts mobilisés par les récits, l'argumentation de l'autrice se construit de chapitre en chapitre de sorte à décrire ce qu'il en est de cette *biskaabiiyang*, de cette résurgence propre à la pensée Nishnaabeg. Le terme *biskaabiiyang*, qui signifie tantôt « regarder en arrière », tantôt « retour sur nous-mêmes » informe la pensée théorique de Simpson qui conçoit ainsi

la résurgence comme une mobilisation et une résistance, localisée culturellement, qui prend racine dans les savoirs précoloniaux contenus dans les récits transmis à travers les générations pour se réinterpréter dans le monde contemporain, à travers l'interprétation de chaque individu, et ainsi réinscrire la présence autochtone dans un monde où la colonisation travaille constamment à l'effacement de cette présence.

En somme, les textes de Coulthard et de Simpson se rencontrent en divers points et témoignent, tous deux, de l'urgence de la création d'espaces de pensée autochtones et souverains ancrés dans des épistémologies propres aux cultures des Premiers Peuples et notamment dans une relation réciproque avec les êtres humains et non humains de même qu'avec le territoire. Dans ce contexte, la traduction de ces textes joue un rôle fondamental de rétablissement des relations au-delà des barrières linguistiques coloniales.

Writing for Readers

Dani Spinosa
Anarchists in the Academy: Machines and Free Readers in Experimental Poetry.
U of Alberta P $24.95

Reviewed by Weldon Hunter

Dani Spinosa, in the introduction to her debut book, describes her intention "to demonstrate how postanarchism offers a useful theoretical context for poetry that is not explicitly political" and also to "propose . . . a postanarchist literary theory that reframes the reading and writing of experimental poetry as activist practice." Spinosa replaces the idea of experimental poetry as vanguard work with a view favouring "a more egalitarian relationship between the reader and writer"—with a special focus on how the role of the author can be complicated through the use of machines or chance operations in the writing process.

The first chapter looks at writers "whose machine-writing practices function retrospectively as precursors" to the digital and electronic poetry experiments of later chapters. Spinosa's discussion of Jackson Mac Low and John Cage acknowledges the matter of authorial choice within the chance-based compositional procedures these two writers are famous for. Spinosa also investigates Craig Dworkin's concept of the "illegible," or texts which feature non-semantic communication: for example, an experimental work like Mac Low's *The Stein Poems* is described as a playful and "politically effective anarchist-activist text in that it acts as an analogy of a free community rather than offering a description of one." It is Spinosa's project to seek how experimental, machine-produced texts can, perhaps paradoxically, create greater reader engagement, producing the "free readers" of the book's subtitle.

The second chapter investigates the possibilities of reader freedom and the subversion of authorial intention in the machine-written feminist texts of Susan Howe, Juliana Spahr, Erín Moure, and Harryette Mullen. Foregrounded is "the author's refusal to entirely deny her subjectivity" and the possibility of a postanarchist subjectivity "that does not oppose 'selfhood,' but rather proposes more useful ideas of selves bound in interdependence." Of particular interest is Spinosa's discussion of Mullen's intervention in the constraint-based methods of the Oulipo, the oddly exclusive bastion of white European male writers who explore "potential literature."

The following two chapters continue to look at increasing the potential for free readers in the genres of conceptualist and digital writing. Spinosa's critique of conceptualists such as Kenneth Goldsmith, Vanessa Place, and Christian Bök is the most polemical and exciting section of the study. Discussing Goldsmith's concept of "uncreative writing" in his work *Soliloquy* (a

record of every word he uttered in a week), Spinosa writes that, while the premise once seemed radical and challenging, "it has become the norm for people to approach digital text in much the same automatic, uncritical way that Goldsmith recommends for his writing." Instead, she argues, what is now needed "is to open up new pathways to radical reader agency," and she considers some contemporary pioneers, including Jim Andrews, in the final chapter. *Anarchists in the Academy* is required reading for anyone in the field of contemporary and experimental poetry and the digital humanities.

Vancouver Gothic

Timothy Taylor
The Rule of Stephens. Doubleday $22.95

Reviewed by Joel Baetz

The Rule of Stephens is Timothy Taylor's venture into popular genre fiction. The story is captivating. While in the midst of a thrilling breakthrough in wearable technology, Catherine Bach survives a plane crash off the coast of Ireland. In the aftermath, she struggles to maintain control of her digital start-up—and starts to have a foreboding "sense of something alive in the world, tracking her and betting against." After a phone call from the only other survivor, Catherine is haunted by nightmarish visions and threatening doppelgängers, even one who seems to lead a charge against her company. Occasionally reminiscent of Michael Redhill's *Bellevue Square* or anything by Andrew Pyper, *The Rule of Stephens* is dreadful (in the best way possible) and stands on a foundation of popular Gothic tropes, using them to conceptualize the psychic fragmentation inherent in a grief-stricken/tech-addled world that demands that we be in at least two places at once.

The novel is driven by two impulses—to reveal the world's mysteries (*Stephen* King) or confirm its realities (*Stephen* Hawking)—and the determination to live by these rules is to the novel's benefit and detriment. As the novel flirts with the conventions of popular Gothic (even recalling at times Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, James Hogg's *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner*, or Chuck Palahniuk's *Fight Club*, to name the most obvious), it seems only to fall short of those standards. The result is that, at times, Taylor's novel seems more grounded in the contemporary moment, and more trustworthy in making pronouncements about the shape and weight of grief, the sublimity of data, or the predatory nature of venture capital. At other times, it seems more tepid than comparable works, less thrilling, less willing to deliver on the promise of its generic investments, less willing to reveal the world to be full of mysterious threats and terrible ghosts and hardened psychic splits.

I'm also struck by the main character's generally myopic version of Vancouver. The novel begins with Catherine practising street medicine in the Downtown Eastside, but that is quickly forgotten. "What about my social justice causes?" she asks; they disappear. She spends most of her time in pricey apartments, tony lawyers' offices, and the moneyed (if harried) offices of a start-up. She is generally untroubled by the inequities of her city. Catherine is more Karen Whitney from Phyllis Brett Young's *The Torontonians* than, say, Patrick Lewis from Michael Ondaatje's *In the Skin of a Lion*. She sustains the limits of her city rather than traversing them.

Beasts and Spirits

Dania Tomlinson
Our Animal Hearts. Anchor $24.95

Reviewed by Jenny Kerber

Dania Tomlinson's debut novel *Our Animal Hearts* explores the harmonies and dissonances among humans and other species in the Okanagan Valley during the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, a time of transition that included Indigenous displacement, colonial settlement, the arrival of Japanese and other labourers, and the turmoil of World War I. The central character is Iris, a young woman living on a peach farm who is trying to find her way between two parental paths. Her wealthy father is loving but often absent, viewing British Columbia as a temporary place to exercise his bohemian inclinations before returning his family to England. Meanwhile, Iris' enigmatic mother, Llewelyna, has developed a deep attachment to the Okanagan, one nurtured by her friendship with a local Indigenous man and her own rootedness in Welsh oral traditions wherein human, animal, and spirit worlds readily overlap. Yet with attachment to locale comes awareness of the shadow sides of places, people, and things—whether as a result of cultural tensions, repressed memories, or humanity's treatment of nature. As the novel progresses, Iris dives deeper into these shadow worlds, and their real-life consequences become tangible when her brother is attacked by a mysterious lake creature. He survives, but the encounter sets up a key conflict between those who hold to older, more reciprocal, land-based modes of belief, and those who demand conformity to Christianity and Western science. Although the idea of a "lake monster" in the Okanagan might call to mind cartoonish cryptozoology, in Tomlinson's hands the story of Ogopogo or Naitaka becomes a nuanced metaphor for the haunting secrets of human desire, unseen natural forces, and the limits of what we are meant to know. In the end, Tomlinson's rendering of this figure also strikes an environmentalist note, exploring what the treatment of nature reveals about human (in)capacities to reckon with our own demons.

Readers familiar with the works of Sheila Watson and Gail Anderson-Dargatz will hear familiar echoes in the novel's interweaving of local Indigenous and European mythologies in the BC Interior. Yet where Watson's style in *The Double Hook* is spare, Tomlinson's is lush, with detailed descriptions of flora, fauna, and people of the Okanagan, and her plot is rollicking, with more twists and turns than a mountainside highway. *Our Animal Hearts* will have no trouble sustaining readers' attention as the betrayals and countermoves pile up, though it also illustrates a few of the perils of a first novel: the number of subplots could be trimmed, for instance, and some of the characters seem to be given odd quirks for quirks' sake. Still, one of the strengths of the book is the fact that none of its characters are purely likeable or "good"; Iris herself is not immune to sins of omission and commission, but nor are her motivations impenetrable. Overall, this debut shows epic range in storytelling nicely balanced with detailed attention to place.

Sisterhood Illuminated

Michel Tremblay; Sheila Fischman, trans.
A Crossing of Hearts. Talonbooks $16.95

Reviewed by Dominique Hétu

The third novel in a series of nine, Michel Tremblay's *A Crossing of Hearts* further weaves the past and present of the Desrosiers family by taking sisters Maria, Tititte, and Teena on an emotionally demanding vacation out of Montreal to Duhamel, in the Laurentians. In need of a break from their urban responsibilities

and worries, the sisters hope to do nothing but gossip, overeat, and brave the ice-cold water of the lake. The novel contains four parts. The first, "Darkness," introduces the sisterhood dynamic in the city and, more precisely, the complicated relationship between Maria and her daughter Rhéauna—Tremblay's famous Nana. The latter, having grown up in Saskatchewan with her two sisters and grandparents, struggles to adapt to her life in Montreal and pleads with her mother to take her and her younger brother Théo to Duhamel. The young woman's coming-of-age journey to the country triggers memories she had buried deep and revives a longing for the Saskatchewan family and lifestyle.

Deciding as a group to set aside their criticisms and worries to thoroughly enjoy their vacation, the Desrosiers sisters arrive in Duhamel and are welcomed by family members who have been taking care of Teena's house and son since she moved to the city. Uncomfortable at first, the group quickly relaxes and enjoys togetherness, sunbathing, and swimming. Typical of Tremblay's writing, those glimpses of light (the second part of the novel is titled "A Little Sunlight" and the third "A Lot of Light") bring nuance and optimism to the women's world, which otherwise is marked by guilt, shame, poverty, and a haunting past.

Sheila Fischman finely translates the novel. She renders Tremblay's historical accuracy, intertextuality, and female solidarity beautifully, with Rhéauna's love of books and genealogy delicately intertwined with her mother's and aunts' struggle to come to terms with their past and present decisions, and with their displaced sense of home and belonging, which is fuelled by family secrets. Humour, care, and interdependence offset such displacement, such a feeling of "hereditary failing," which, although represented clearly and abundantly throughout the text, does not prevent these women from helping one another and attempting to appropriate private and public spaces on their own terms.

Tremblay once again beautifully and skillfully depicts the nuances and overlaps between urban and rural experiences, the weight of intergenerational struggles, and the sometimes tricky negotiations between the yearnings of the individual and those of family—if not more importantly between women's agency and patriarchal expectations. The novel is textured with details of working-class living conditions, typical foods, urban proximity, and women's emancipation in the city. As such, it tests and transgresses the social conventions of motherhood, girlhood, and sexuality, celebrating the strength of togetherness and solidarity without romanticizing or shying away from the difficulties of such strong relational, emotional, and material attachments and responsibilities for women. Tremblay's steadfast love and careful depiction of women—women who explore, go out, laugh out loud, and challenge stereotypically gendered spaces and roles—provide credible, valuable agency for his female characters, and leave them the freedom to make their own choices.

Sudden Flashes of Light

Aaron Tucker
Y: Oppenheimer, Horseman of Los Alamos. Coach House $19.95

Alison Watt
Dazzle Patterns. Freehand $21.95

Reviewed by Catherine Rainwater

Dazzle Patterns forecasts two characters' future through a "sudden flash of sunlight," and *Y: Oppenheimer, Horseman of Los Alamos* represents birth as a "bright shock." Both Aaron Tucker's and Alison Watt's novels deftly manage tropes of light signifying a fundamentally creative-destructive principle of the universe. These first-rate premier novels might be described in

similar figurative terms. Both are mature, formally impeccable works of historical fiction that illuminate major events of the past century.

Tucker's Jamesian narrator maintains an objective distance from Robert Oppenheimer even while seeming to reveal the man's mind from the inside. The chapter progression puts us in mind of a countdown. Each chapter grows shorter as we approach, first, the atomic bomb test at Trinity Site, and next, the detonation of Little Boy and Fat Man over Hiroshima and Nagasaki, respectively. We witness Oppenheimer's internal moral crisis over what he is creating as, paradoxically, he joyfully anticipates the personal glory that his role as hero-scientist in Project Y will bring. Tucker's Oppenheimer is both a genius and a deplorable egoist who has trouble deciding whether to be a humanitarian or a "soldier" of war and scientific progress. The humanitarian recites from memory the poetry of Donne and Herbert that limns his moral crisis; the humanitarian learns from the Bhagavad-Gita what it will mean to "become Death, the destroyer of worlds." The egoist in a fit of jealousy attempts to poison one of his teachers, values two women who love him primarily as mirrors reflecting him back to himself, and tries to give away his infant daughter when his wife is ill because he has no time for her. Depicting such contradictory and "constant motion around" Oppenheimer's "conflicted centre," *Y* is rich in metaphors drawn from atomic science. Opposing selves and memories "collide," and after the bombs drop, Oppenheimer's speech "decays" as he feels a "crater" opening within himself.

Another explosion in an earlier war—one that destroyed the Richmond district of Halifax on December 6, 1917—is the subject of Watt's narrative. The explosion centres the plot of *Dazzle Patterns*. Two ships, one Norwegian and one homebound for France and loaded with explosives, collided in the harbour. Energy equivalent to nearly three kilotons of TNT was released, killing two thousand people outright, injuring nine thousand, and devastating the remainder. Watt's young protagonist, Clare, loses one eye to a fragment of glass. Fred, a German immigrant, long-time Canadian resident, and glass artist, loses his livelihood while detained as an alleged German spy. Both struggle to reassemble post-explosion and post-war fragments of themselves—Clare in pursuit of a future as a painter despite partial blindness, and Fred in hopes of overcoming anti-German prejudice to become a glass designer. The painter-author's adept management of narrative design is anticipated in the title, *Dazzle Patterns*, which conjoins her concerns with visual artistry and war-inflicted trauma to a World War I method for camouflaging warships. "Dazzle painting" involves breaking up the perspectival plane on a painted surface, creating an illusion of fracture and thus rendering ships difficult to perceive accurately from afar. Watt's shattered characters present psychological dazzle patterns as they strain to recognize themselves again, and to piece disjunctive fragments of themselves back together. Though Clare and Fred are fictional, Watt's narrative also includes real individuals who played important parts in the true story that unfolded in the aftermath of the Halifax Explosion.

Tucker's and Watt's novels emerge as bright spots on the literary scene. They not only present fascinating tales spun around actual historical events and people, but also rise to an aesthetic level beyond merely good storytelling through carefully managed style, narrative strategies, and formal literary features.

Vigorous Collisions in Future Times

Michael Turner
9x11: and other poems like Bird, Nine, x, and Eleven. New Star $18.00

Paul Vermeersch
Self-Defence for the Brave and Happy. ECW $18.95

Reviewed by Catherine Owen

Where poetry and prose collide, enhance, water down, diminish, or transform each other is always an interesting intersection to query. Some writers' books seem to exist almost solely to question the validity of such distinctions in genre. In Canada, I think of rob mclennan, say, or the writer at hand, Michael Turner, whose latest publication, *9x11,* often enacts itself neither wholly poetically nor prosaically, leaving it to the reader to determine whether this lack of generic distinction leads to a sense of dissatisfaction or jubilation. Turner, although not an official "member," has long echoed the ethos and aesthetics of Vancouver's Kootenay School of Writing, a mode of composition that seeks to attain the abstract architectonic, the desensorized, the erasure of categories—an "anti-writing" writing in which content is flattened out by avant-garde approaches to the materiality of language. As one line in Turner's book admits: "Not the story of a bird but its form." And there are a range of structures (as I would prefer to call them) in this collection: numbered triptychs on living in small spaces (a definite Vancouver dilemma), skinny bottom-of-the-page lines à la Nicole Brossard, unabashed prose pieces on the politics of real estate and Baudelaire, a few typical lyrics, meditations on the letter "O," and vague slices of words jarred asleep by rhymes and inversions ("carved is art").

Although important commentary on our global and fearful times rivers beneath these pieces, the boredom factor runs high. Very little compels in a literary sense, to wit, aurality, energy, diction, and unforgettable narrations. Yet, the initial sequence's reductions to the numerical in relation to the housing crisis in my hometown is sadly relatable stuff: "We have been notified that our rent is going up. . . . Nine times eleven is ninety-nine, ninety-nine times four is what I once paid in rent." And the prose poems (or mini-essays) with the titles "Directions" and "Skyscrapers" actually evoke sensory details to vivify their stances/stories: "cereal eaten with rice milk and berries," "a hybrid whose exterior is happily romantic but whose interior is rational, modern," or "the poem's margins, filling them with birdsong, confetti, or / more recently, bodies from a burning tower." These are powerful moments, but their instances, in sum, are all too rare. However, Turner does end with a punchy colloquial burst—"OMG! A heart that is large and getting larger!"—that gives this reader the hope that perhaps he is heading (back?) in a direction that more memorably fuses his vital post-9/11 concerns with a more reckless intensity of language.

Paul Vermeersch's *Self-Defence for the Brave and Happy* is fortunately, mostly, from a very different campground in the CanPo national park. Vermeersch is a poet who calls upon myth, robotics, space travel, nursery rhymes, pop culture, and other detrital allusiveness to construct his visual formalities, which teem with innovative envisionings. Intelligent poetry, yes, made even smarter by its adherence to recognizable grammatical structures, solid forms, and vivid imagery, and never thus veering into the incomprehensible. Looking ahead to the brave new apocalypse of the Third Millennium, Vermeersch, as in his startling collection *The Reinvention of the Human Hand* from 2010, uses cut-up poetic pastiches, erasures, artworks, and, most potently, his facility with a future-thinking imagination that, at its finest, moves and stirs the desire to preserve.

Lines that etched a particular path through my dystopian heart include: "A life has its borders. If we need to, we can cross them / behind closed eyes: to the Peach Tree, to the Blood. / But first we must invent the wheel or the saddle or the nation" (from "Without Transportation"); "It could be that you have the wrong hands, or the wrong face. / It is not your imagination. You do" ("On Being Wrong"); and "But great proliferator / I am rare. Blue so. I visit you in traps . . . I bring you flakes, epithelia / from the island" ("Blue Lobster"). The phenomenal piece "Extinction Schedule" pairs the loss of species with certain human events, from the invention of the rodeo to the formation of The Beatles, and contains the gut-wrenching loveliness of these lines:

> Within a generation, they will take their place
> among the sumacs and moonseeds,
>
> . . . . . .
>
> And further down the road, the little octopodes
> will inhabit crude shelters above the tide line,
> aggregate of stones and paste of algae

The elided nursery rhymes and chopped-up modernisms in other sections of this collection are merely asides, to my mind, when set against such vigorous resistances as these lyrics, whose weird euphonies are crafted to be recited in both end and forever times.

Writing Illness

Kathleen Venema
Bird-Bent Grass: A Memoir, in Pieces.
Wilfrid Laurier UP $24.99

Reviewed by Olivia Pellegrino

Kathleen Venema's *Bird-Bent Grass: A Memoir, in Pieces* offers a poignant and personal account of age-related illness. The memoir documents Venema's relationship with her mother, Geeske, across time and space, first as they write to one another in the late 1980s and later as they revisit those letters following Geeske's Alzheimer's diagnosis. Through letters, journal entries, blog posts, and other mediums, Venema chronicles the years she spends teaching in Uganda, her mother's declining memory, and the time between these defining experiences in her family's history. In gathering, sharing, and narrating correspondence, Venema explores the role of memory and communication in regard to examining and representing an ethics of care. Venema's epistolary approach to recollection effectively creates a sense of fragmentation that allows the reader to experience, in some way, the detachment she feels when living away from her family. The stories Venema shares unfold in pieces that move fluidly through time, their fractured structure also recreating the complexities that are a constituent element of caregiving and caretaking positions. These positions include those of a daughter caring for her mother and parents caring for their ailing child, in the case of her nephew Harry; but Venema also explores care in the context of colonialism and how, in this context, care positions might be inequitable and exploitative. Her letters on this subject express ambivalence about her role as a teacher in Uganda and her practice of "presence"—that is, forming relationships with those in the community in which she seeks to belong.

In this way, Venema's memoir adroitly exposes and ruminates on contradictions surrounding "presence and absence" in the context of colonialism and illness. It is through writing on illness that Venema explores how conceptualizations of time, both historical and personal, can become unsettled. She grounds her exploration of familial and personal history in the critical, the literary, and the pedagogical so that each unique story is, in some way, connected to all the others. What makes Venema's text so exceptional is that she grants her mother a degree of agency that tends to be absent from works of care, especially those that are narrativized. The effects of her storytelling are not uneven; she recounts her tale, but so too does the reader get a strong sense of Geeske in the letters she has crafted to her daughter, especially in the cases where Venema's authorial interjections are sparse. *Bird-Bent Grass* is a compelling memoir that offers a thoughtful and evocative engagement with questions of identity, memory, and the relationships that help to shape and define a person.

Surrealism, Spoonerism, Lyric

Steve Venright
The Least You Can Do Is Be Magnificent: Selected & New Writings. Anvil $20.00

Reviewed by James Gifford

If Steve Venright gave only the minimum, it would still be magnificent. This collection not only recollects the past but is "a light from the highest floor . . . out toward the future," and in his "Foretext" Venright promises the magnificence of what is yet to come. So, a "selected works" seems utopian and premature—yet very welcome. "Transvocations" opens in a tone replete with contradictions, juxtapositions, and puns. Subverting vocations marks the collection as equal parts radical social critique and spoonerism. "Mesmermaids are hypnotically entrancing female servants" seems to double as a poetic reinvention of a Xanth novel by Piers Anthony and revolutionary subversion. "Transvocations Two" tickles the uncomfortable edges of "Conquistadorks," "Atrocity Planners," and "Obliterary agents." There's delight and discomfort in the contradictions Venright makes visible, like some emerging class consciousness chafing against the reification of the book itself.

This exercise in contradictions occupies Alessandro Porco's afterword. He follows Clint Burnham's attention to small-press production in *Allegories of Publishing* (1991) by retracing Venright's production history. This intrigues deeply. Where Burnham postulates a utopianism in the small press, so much like Sisley Huddleston's "published by us as well as written by us and read by us" of the modernist little magazines, Porco points to the fetishized textual object with collector value and rarity that eventually becomes "literary ephemera that's difficult to find and expensive to buy." This edition is the radical break via Venright "owning his own labour" in the neoliberal age, hence making this affordable edition possible. Yet contradictions persist. My copy is stamped "NOT FOR RESALE" to restrict its freedom of movement and participation in capitalist exchange. Precisely these contradictions give Venright's work its vitality.

Where Porco (and Venright) point to the material history of the poetic corpus, there is also a distinctly personal gesture. "Ode to Joy" and "Scenes from Childhood" seem to voice a personal relationship to Schiller and Schumann, both disrupting with humour while reflecting on the intensely unique stream of one's own childhood experiences. Likewise, where Porco traces out the fiscal constraints on small-press production in the Tortoiseshell & Black Press (based on its reliance on grants and the gift economy), these conditions of production are

equally entangled with the intimate lives of the individuals. Perhaps the most enticing gesture comes through Venright's connections to surrealism. Where Porco points to Mervyn Peake and Maurice Sendak, a different post-surrealist tradition trembles near the surface. Peake's prose confessed itself Romantic, and it's impossible not to compare Porco's work collecting Venright's *Straunge Wunder; Or, The Metalirious Pleasures of Neuralchemy* and the dual texts of "Manta Ray Jack and the Crew of the *Spooner: An Unsignified Detour*" to Peter Loeffler and Jack Stewart's *Michael Bullock: Selected Works*, or even to insist less on flarf and more on an echo of the neo-surrealism of Murray Morton in *Limbo: A Paraliterary Journal of Survivalism*—all surrealisms that kept faith with the Romantic lyric.

The least of this book revels in magnificence.

Talk Is Hope(less)

George F. Walker
After Class: Two Plays: Parents Night and The Bigger Issue. Talonbooks $19.95

Reviewed by Scott Duchesne

Since *Criminals in Love* (1984), George F. Walker has taken on, in his plays, issues that affect the North American working class and working poor, advocating for a "push to consciousness" through the filter of his idiosyncratic aesthetic. On his riotous stage there is no subtext; nor are there moments for pause or intense reflection. Characters kick at the edges of the immovable darkness of their circumstances with irresistible force, cracking open a gap of light, a space for debate. Fundamental to his characters is a seething sense of injustice that hisses and detonates in sharp slashes of dialogue and extended, cathartic monologues that intertwine in waves. In Walker's fractured dialectic, both sides know something is wrong, especially with themselves; the griever's righteousness is plagued by self-doubt, and the figures of authority lack nearly all conviction, yet they know a solution is necessary. Conventional narrative resolutions are exchanged with lights gently fading on a continuing conversation; above all else, in Walker's universe, talk is hope and the medium of our potential social awakening.

In the two disappointing one-act plays collected in *After Class—Parents Night* and *The Bigger Issue*—the setting of the conflict is the classroom. The plays examine two of the primary and primal issues of Western culture: children and education. Both plays focus on the ideological opposition of teacher/principal and parent; the social, cultural, and political nature of their respective obligations; how they fail to live up to them; and how they might do better. *After Class* cleverly suggests the liminal period in which the discord occurs—when the seats are empty and the halls of the school echo, allowing the adults to battle honestly over their roles and their agency in this crucial stage of their children's development. *Parents Night* examines familiar territory, pitting a seeming alpha male (John) and a typically Walkeresque formidable female (Rosie) against a worn-out teacher (Nicole) over issues of bullying and intelligence that are intertwined with class, race, and gender. *The Bigger Issue* leans more on Walker's earlier penchant for laying bare the fundamental absurdity of received social structures through an acutely bent mirror, taking a macro view while *Parents Night* takes a microscopic view. Walker asks what necessary material conditions constitute a "good" home, family, and parents, and what right the state has to impose its opinion in its institutions.

It's clear in these plays that Walker's moral fire—what director Wesley Berger defines, in his introduction to *After Class*, as Walker's "radical empathy"—still burns bright. However, it is also clear that his renowned faculty for novelty in dialogue

and narrative, which arguably reached its peak in his *Suburban Motel* cycle, has given way to one-dimensional didactic conceits largely expressed in staid diatribes by sketchy characters contained in repetitive plot points (both plays, for example, feature someone injured in a car accident). Overall, the plays of *After Class* lack the creative energy to match Walker's principled anger; as a result, the talk in these plays seems to elicit only hopelessness.

A Boom in Oil Studies

Sheena Wilson, Adam Carlson, and Imre Szeman, eds.
Petrocultures: Oil, Politics, Culture.
McGill-Queen's UP $37.95

Reviewed by Bart H. Welling

For the past several years, high-carbon oil from the bitumen deposits of northern Alberta has been one of Canada's top export commodities. The bitumen industry has brought thousands of high-paying jobs to the boreal forest, but at a terrible long-term cost. As numerous commentators have argued, this cost must be measured both in terms of regional and national concerns—e.g., massive pollution, cancer deaths, violations of Indigenous rights, lost biodiversity, and widespread economic exposure of Canadian governments and citizens to the volatility of the oil market—*and* with an eye to the impacts that burning so much carbon-rich petroleum, not to mention using vast amounts of energy to transform tarry bitumen into commodifiable oil in the first place, will have on global warming. The leading climate scientist James Hansen has singled out Alberta's bitumen sands as a potential source of atmospheric carbon so huge that continuing to exploit the sands could make the "climate problem . . . unsolvable."

Fortunately, Canadian academics troubled by the social and ecological costs of petroleum seem to have been just as busy of late as the hydrocarbons industry. Canadian scholars in the liberal arts and social sciences have dramatically boosted global "exports" of brilliant analyses of the often-hidden costs, meanings, and socio-political influences of petroleum dependency in modern societies, and they have rapidly mobilized an international network of "petrocritics," most of whom seem dedicated not just to producing scholarship about fossil fuels but also to theorizing how oil-dependent societies can transition to renewable energy sources—and, potentially, become more equitable and fulfilling cultures in the process. The strong and wide-ranging collection *Petrocultures: Oil, Politics, Culture*, which is based on presentations delivered in 2012 at the inaugural Petrocultures conference at the University of Alberta, will provide readers interested in the development of the "energy humanities" a snapshot of this swiftly evolving field as it was first coalescing. But the book also offers a wealth of still-relevant insights into how oil shapes every aspect of the modern world, and how scholars in disciplines that have heretofore not occupied seats at the energy/climate table can join in the crucial work of rethinking modern humanity's ways of powering our lives.

The claim encoded in the neologism *petrocultures* and articulated by the volume's contributors is brilliantly summarized in the book's cover image, Marco Verch's *New York Skyline*. It shows white skyscrapers in silhouette against a black sky. On the left side of the cover, the blackness comprises a harmless, two-dimensional negative space. This space takes on a decidedly more menacing form on the right side, however, where the blackness gathers into seemingly three-dimensional *trompe l'oeil* rivulets of oil that drizzle down out of the background into the foreground, partially obscuring the title and threatening to erase the white city . . . and maybe to get all over readers' hands. The transformation of negative space into

oozing muck reveals that the supposed emptiness (air) between the buildings is actually a presence (not just petroleum but, perhaps, carbon from burned fossil fuels), a presence that reveals modern civilization's abject dependence on, and vulnerability to, its repressed energy Others. What *petrocultures* means is that a substance that most residents of the developed world have been trained to think of (or, more accurately, *not* think of) as a minor background "issue"—one that only becomes interesting or worrisome when it costs too much or too little, or escapes the structures we have built to "safely" process it and deliver it where it supposedly belongs in internal combustion engines, plastics, and petrochemicals—has actually *constituted* modern life as we know it, and currently has the potential to destroy civilization and most non-human life on the planet.

All of the chapters in *Petrocultures* deal to some extent with problems involved in foregrounding aspects of oil that modern societies work hard to keep in the background (speaking economically, politically, and culturally as well as ecologically). But none of them indulge in what contributor Brenda Longfellow calls "the simple rhetoric of denunciation or declamation," merely shaming eco-villains in the oil industry and championing non-existent easy solutions to petro-dependency. Longfellow, a filmmaker, describes the challenges associated with creating projects that simultaneously call out petro-capitalists and manage to factor in everyone else's "toxic dependency on oil," "implicat[ing] the viewer" in such seldom-represented forms of extractivism as offshore drilling. Graeme Macdonald shows how photographs of pipelines, and pipelines themselves, conceal the tremendous violence of petroleum extraction in places like Nigeria, but can also reveal a "fundamental dependency" on a system that is "enabling" as well as disastrous. Darin Barney and Mark Simpson deftly eviscerate arguments made in support of bitumen sands and pipeline development. Nevertheless, while Simpson's and Barney's essays, like standard environmentalist exposés of oil industry malfeasance, are committed to spotlighting pro-oil rhetoric's contradictions and deceptions, they do not merely demonize the industry and those who support it; rather, they model the kind of even-handed, patient sifting of evidence that people in every oil-dependent country should be engaged in. Janine MacLeod's fascinating and beautifully written contribution likewise avoids demonizing industry, but then takes a further step that I think is crucial in the study of petrocultures in an age when, as Bruno Latour has argued, we need to learn how to "love [our] monsters"—i.e., care for the unexpected and undesirable by-products of technological advancement. A meditation on the deeply problematic relationships between water/life on one hand and the myriad hydrophobic ("water-hating") substances derived from fossil fuels on the other, MacLeod's chapter ends by asking how we could treat discarded plastics, petrochemical toxins, and other easy-to-hate remains of Hydrocarbon World "more hospitably." After all, as both MacLeod and Michael Truscello observe, these "monsters," or unwanted guests whom we have unwittingly invited into our bodies and life-places, are going to be with us forever.

MacLeod's essay is one of many eminently readable/teachable parts of *Petrocultures*, including the editors' introductions and the chapters mentioned above, along with those by Michael Malouf, Cecily Devereux, Glenn Willmott, Joshua Schuster, David McDermott Hughes, Georgiana Banita, and others. The collection features some welcome comic relief in the form of Geo Takach's mock radio transcript (from "Radio Petro's *A Scary Home Companion*"), and ends on a hopeful note with Allison Rowe's account of effectively

exposing ordinary people to "uncomfortable knowledge" about the oil industry in a non-alienating "comfortable space": a "mobile museum" that she calls *The Tar Sands Exploration Station*, which is based in her 1982 camper van. Perhaps inevitably, given that many of the contributors to *Petrocultures* are English professors and the collection focuses on incredibly thorny problems, some of the chapters bog down in unresolvable paradoxes and tangles of jargon that non-academics will find off-putting. But, as a participant in three of the four Petrocultures conferences convened thus far (including the latest, which was held not in Canada but in Scotland, a country that is making huge strides towards carbon neutrality), I am happy to report that the field inaugurated by the contributors to *Petrocultures* is not advancing in the direction of hyperspecialization and ivory-tower-ism. Rather, it is moving towards greater public engagement, more robust interdisciplinarity, more inclusive internationalism, and more urgent attentiveness to the climate-wrecking impacts of fossil-fuel-powered life. Any scholar interested in making a difference in our overheating world would do well to get involved in the conversation, and studying *Petrocultures* would be an excellent way to start.

Bangles & Lobster Traps

Sheri-D Wilson
The Book of Sensations. U of Calgary P $18.95

Chris Bailey
What Your Hands Have Done. Nightwood $18.95

Reviewed by Tim Conley

The latest collection by Sheri-D Wilson could just as well be titled *The Sensation of Books*, since so much of it is given to ecstatic proclamations (and variations thereof) of her love of books. But her true love is synonymy. A reader's arrival at the end of a good book is "a eucatastrophe / or a dyscatastrophe"; the smell of old books provides "exotic intoxication / biblical-stench blooms" in their "volumes of folio olfaction"; the compulsive case is diagnosed as that of "bibliophilic bibliobibuli / a bibliophagist bookworm / bibliophile literarian."

In an age of conspicuous fetishism, this showy sort of mania is the equivalent of a streaker running through a strip bar. Wilson's unapologetic commitment to rhapsody, which means having no fear of embarrassment or redundancy, makes me wonder what kind of Facebook user Walt Whitman might have been. From its title onwards, a poem like "Drones Kill" demonstrates how the message stays at the centre and the "poetics" is the elaboration, the repetition, the rhymes and wordplay that keep it there:

> I guard the deep ID of my inner id
> amid invisible lines on a neon grid
> buzzing overhead, severing the sky
> aerial robots with the bloodshot eye
> of Sauron, of so long, of no long
> good-byes
> of another apple-less piece of Miss
> American pie

The Tolkien invocation is indicative of the book's enthusiasm for witchcraft, blended to no great surprise with "Scandalous Women" and "Forest Bathing" (two other titles). Behind the repeated call "back to the fire within" may be heard a tambourine and perhaps the backfiring of a magic bus.

Altogether less ethereal is Chris Bailey's first book, *What Your Hands Have Done*. These are narrative poems, many of them told in the second person, which is always a risk and is here symptomatic of a general effort to efface the lyrical "I." "A Slow Process," the book's longest poem, which recounts the death and funeral of "Grammie" in twenty-three vignettes, does have a first-person narrator, if only because the miniature epiphanies need him. Here he is at the coffin: "Someone says, / *She looks so good*. Dad agrees. I look at her once /

more. It's the lips. They never get the lips right." And here he is at the poem's end, interrupted by a three-year-old girl: "Then she wants a hug. / I don't want to let her go." Pathos, curtain.

The ostensibly lapidary, even workingman's sense of language in these poems (which can be enjoyably ironic: "*I even shave sometimes*") is sometimes punctuated by hesitation. In "Bachelor Party Blues," the thesaurus takes the wheel as the narrator tries to "get a hooker / to dance for the groom-to-be" but he finds himself unable to "*procure an escort*" (italicized because this is the foreign language of negotiation) and so complains: "in a city / of thousands and nary a harlot to be had." If "dance" thereafter seems all that much more a euphemism, the tonal differences between those nouns seem curiously obscured.

And sure, it's clear sailing to melancholy prose from here.

Leonard Cohen and the Neo-Baroque Perspective

Tereza Virginia de Almeida

As a non-Canadian reader, working in the field of Brazilian literature, I was introduced to Leonard Cohen's songs in the 1990s when I lived in Toronto, and my attraction to his work was immediate. His novels and poetry seduced me as well, and the identification was not with something totally unfamiliar. There was in Cohen's work an artistic pulse that I could recognize. My initial attraction as both a reader and listener led to an academic curiosity that made me realize that Cohen's work has a lot to do with an aesthetics that is somehow foundational for Latin America: the Baroque. As a Brazilian literary scholar, I understand how the Baroque shaped the culture in which I was raised and how it may lead to a specific way of reading other cultures and their artifacts. Having emerged as a Portuguese colony in the sixteenth century, Brazil delineated its existence throughout the seventeenth century and beyond upon the coexistence of contradictions and contrasts such as the amalgam of the sacred and the profane in colonial life, due to the very miscegenation between European, Indigenous, and African people. It is understandable that the baroque aesthetics had found in this context a favourable environment to develop, with its appeal to the senses, its challenge to the harmonic classic beauty, and its emphasis on tension and instability.

Although the word *postmodern* has been used largely to define the contemporary world, some critics, such as Omar Calabrese, have found in the term *Neo-Baroque* a much more precise way to define the present social and cultural contexts. In *Neo-Baroque: a Sign of the Times* (1992), Calabrese defines the term as "a search for, and valorization of, forms that display a loss of entirety, totality, and system in favor of instability, polydimensionality and change" (xii). In other words, the Neo-Baroque presents, in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, features that can be related to the historical Baroque. However, the Baroque traces appear in such renewed manners that it is not possible to say that the Neo-Baroque is a return to the Baroque.

In January 2018, I visited *A Crack in Everything*, the exhibition at the Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal in homage to the work of Leonard Cohen, on exhibit between November 2017 and April 2018. In the show, several artists presented different ways of interacting with the poet's work and with the theme of crack and light. The antithesis in the title of the exhibition is present in the chorus of Cohen's song "Anthem," one of the tracks from his most apocalyptic album, *The Future*. "There is a crack, a crack in everything / That's how the light gets in": those lines, among the poet's most famous, synthesize very well a Baroque drive that seems to be paradigmatic of Cohen's poetry. *Crack* and *light* are terms taken from opposed semantic fields that are featured by Cohen in a relation of codependence that allows him to design a powerful allegory and alludes at once to several ideas according to its reception: high and low, imperfect and perfect, material and spiritual, sacred and

profane, human and divine. All these oppositions are inscribed in Cohen's poetic device and lead to a synthesis in which the opposed terms cannot be separated.

Although the song clearly thematizes the impossibility of peace, the verses do not have a fixed reference and can be appropriated to numerous situations. This is because there is an operation through which the poet constructs his allegory: it takes the place of what is offered as an ellipse, the signifiers that remain unsaid and which will be substituted by other signifiers according to the different contexts of reception. The Cuban writer Severo Sarduy reads in the poetry of Góngora a trope that turns out to be paradigmatic to the understanding of the literary Baroque: the ellipse. The trope is the literary analogue to darkening in painting. If darkening stimulates the gaze, ellipsis enhances the process of decoding of the poetic resources, such as metaphor and allegory, that take place around the elided words (Sarduy 1232). The opposition between light and darkness, sacred and profane, is strongly present in Leonard Cohen's poetic universe. His last album, released one month before his death, is called *You Want It Darker* (2016) and features songs in which the identity of his addressee is unstable: a woman, God, the cultural industry, or the listener?

In the third millennium, many countries like my own are witnessing a disturbing turn to their more violent roots, to instability and despair. In this sense, the Neo-Baroque can be not only a privileged social label, but also a perspective, a way of reading, a productive form of systematization of artistic corpus, like Cohen's, in which asymmetries, contrasts, paradoxes seem to respond to the very uncertainties of our times.

The word *baroque* derives originally from the Spanish term meaning "irregular pearl." This irregularity seems to be translated in architectural terms in the excess of ornaments and curves. In literature, as Sarduy points out, both the Baroque and the Neo-Baroque are manifested through a process of artificialization, in operations in which the signifiers seem to be densified. Sarduy understands that the Baroque artifice may happen through three types of processes: substitution, proliferation, and condensation. If in substitution the signifier is elided and substituted by another, in proliferation the non-said is replaced by a stream of signifiers. Condensation, though, is an operation in the very materiality of the signifier.

Sarduy observes that the abundance and excess of the Neo-Baroque is an elaboration around the lost object (the non-said), and functions as a parody of the very human reproduction leading to an inevitable eroticism (1401-02). In this sense, it is totally possible to understand the work with language in Cohen's *Beautiful Losers* (1966) as proliferation around the very sacred figure of Catherine Tekakwitha, an Indigenous saint from the seventeenth century who is the narrator's addressee, around whom the narrator proliferates his obsessions, and through whom the novel delineates its mixture of the sacred and the profane.

Proliferation has a lot to do with the conception of the infinite fold in Gilles Deleuze's seminal work entitled *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque* (1993). The philosopher takes from Leibniz a fascinating allegory to explain the Baroque conception of the world: the Baroque house which has two levels. On the first level is the world of matter and its pleats. On the second level, the immaterial world, the souls and their folds. Those two levels are connected inside the house. However, only on the first level are there windows to the outside world. Only the world of matter communicates with the outside world. The level of immateriality is a closed chamber, but, in communicating with the first level, it reaches the outside world through matter. "There are souls down below," writes Deleuze, "sensitive, animal; and there even exists a lower level in the souls" (4). If there are souls in the

material world, spirituality and materiality are not totally opposed to each other.

This idea of a world where the minimal element is the *fold* challenges both the dichotomy between body and mind and the notions of identity and singularity, since all elements of the universe are connected to each other through the infinite fold. In other words, every element or every being is related to its alterity. The inscription of alterity is central to Cohen's literary corpus and has been evident since his first book. Published in 1956, *Let Us Compare Mythologies* gained attention from critics for featuring

> the comparison of various mythologies—Jewish, Christian, Hellenic, and so on—as the major thematic unifying force of the collection and as a much needed Canadian touch of exoticism, though it was clear that it was Cohen's Jewish background that was central to his vision,

as Linda Hutcheon points out (6). Keeping in mind the centrality of his Jewish identity, Cohen's first book makes a very interesting move not only by inscribing other mythologies, but in naming his own religion as a mythology itself.

Throughout his life, religion and spirituality remained important for Cohen. He had been involved with Buddhism for more than ten years when in 1994, after touring his album *The Future*, he decided to spend some time in a monastery. This decision relates to the 1992 album's theme and its apocalyptic tone. Through Buddhism, Cohen seems to have been trying to resolve on a personal level the disenchantment he felt for the world that found in *The Future* its perfect artistic expression. "Get ready for the future: it's murder" is definitely a strong verse.

Cohen was ordained as a monk, travelled to India, and after a certain time he considered that he had finally overcome the depression he had dealt with since his father's death during his childhood. After years in the monastery, which he left in 1999, Cohen presented to the world an artistic production that expressed the sensitivity of a mature man who would transform the awareness of his aging process in both the matter and the style of his poetry, music, and stage performances, in which the coexistence of the sacred and the profane would be more observable.

Book of Longing was published in 2006 and was the result of artistic experimentations that took place largely during Cohen's time in the monastery. The book includes poems, prose, and many drawings, most of them self-portraits. This hybridity of forms is a precise stylistic move. Instead of the complex allegories from his former books, Cohen seems to have incorporated a certain lightness taken from music. However, his Baroque soul is still there, but expressed in a very different manner. It is now through intratextuality, another resource used by the Neo-Baroque, as Sarduy points out (1399-1400).

It is not only that the constant rhymes in the book correspond to another texture in which musicality takes place, but that the illustrations are both ornamental and functional at once, especially the self-portraits that work as mirrors in which the poet projects representations of himself. Besides, the drawings are mainly accompanied by paratexts, brief subtitles: descriptions, explanations, or readings of the drawings. However, the drawings have a primitive, rustic quality that demands attention, and they all show a representation of a serious and mature Cohen, since the traces tend to stress the marks of time in his face. In most subtitles, Cohen describes himself in the third person in a style that works as a subjective unfolding: there are the representations in the figures, there are the readings of the viewer/reader, there are Cohen's readings of his own representation of himself. There is also the role that self-irony takes in this Neo-Baroque scene, since irony is by definition a trope that deals with the non-said.

Book of Longing is among other things a book about desire. If the profane and the

sacred are found throughout Cohen's work, in this book the poems capture a body whose small desires defy Buddhist detachment. Irony is still present, but the book overcomes the acidity of previous works. It is no longer a question of distancing oneself from the horror, but of approaching oneself in almost childlike rhymes that dwell in the present body that survives. The simplicity of the verses centred on simple actions of daily existence makes the poems into streams of light through the shadows, which allow the book to be approached as a Neo-Baroque composition.

Book of Longing surpasses the atrocity of the themes of Cohen's first books and offers its reader lightness interspersed with drawings that revisit something of the infantile world, but now to express the complexity of the "third act" of life. Mostly written in the monastery, the book seems to incorporate a certain folk tone in which simplicity contrasts with the complexity inscribed in the poetic prose of *Book of Mercy*, published in 1984, for example. Cohen's last work seems to overcome the dichotomy between song and poem. Its poems aspire to clarity and music. Many address the daily life of someone whose worldly needs resist the spirituality that is desired within the monastery. There is in the colloquial tone of the poems something that even touches antipoetry. The simplicity is, however, only apparent. A second glance reveals unexpected complexities.

Another noteworthy aspect of *Book of Longing* is that Cohen includes in the volume some pieces from past decades, writings left aside; and this inscription calls attention to the aesthetic character of the gesture of recollecting. It also inscribes in the book another type of fold. The paratext that reveals the original years indicates to the reader that there are two poets being presented in a mirroring process very similar to what happens with the self-portraits. The reader is not being presented to the poem, but to the poet presenting a poem taken from his past. The process allows different times to communicate with each other, since those verses dated from past decades are like flashes of memories in an elderly mind. This is exactly the Neo-Baroque polydimensionality mentioned above.

While it was the last book Cohen published in life, *Book of Longing* was not his only artistic realization after the period in the monastery. There were his albums and there was his voice, and everything he could still do with it despite the fact that in the early years of his career he did not have a clear intention to perform. It was Judy Collins who, after recording some of his songs, convinced him to do so. "Collins encouraged Cohen's first major singing performance, on April 30, 1967," writes Ira Nadel:

> Cohen walked out and played a few bars of 'Suzanne,' but then froze and walked off stage, a combination of stage fright and the fact that his Spanish guitar had gone out of tune. . . . However, the audience shouted for him to come back and, with Collins encouraging him, he returned to finish the song (151).

In those early years, Cohen's performances, like those of many other pop singers, were in that frontier where flaws and limitations are transformed into signs of uniqueness and authenticity. Over the years, though, Cohen's voice changed and he seemed more comfortable singing in a lower register in which he sounded dark, deep, and very masculine. I would say that by *I'm Your Man,* his eighth studio album, released in 1988, Cohen was a performer who had finally found his voice. However, in the self-reflexive "The Tower of Song" from that album, this same dark voice announced a man who was already very aware of his aging process.

In this sense, it should be noted, with Italian philosopher Adriana Cavarero, that the voice is a singular, unique instance that inscribes in itself the marks of the body and

its finitude and "stands in contrast to the various ontologies of fictitious entities that the philosophical tradition, over the course of its historical development, designates with names like 'man,' 'subject,' 'individual'" (173). In the case of Cohen, a smoker for most of his life, the weaker his voice became, the more he acquired a dark quality that addressed the listener as if he wanted to share secrets, thus producing an effect of intimacy. At the end of his life, the fragility of the poet's voice made it allude to something spiritual that moved crowds to his concerts.

In his performances on stage during his last long tour, Cohen addressed his condition as an old man, and the long history of his relationship with his audience was part of the show. Unlike other pop stars, who tend to desire the appearance of eternal youth, Cohen was a man who apparently aged without doing anything to hide the marks of time, and who tended to refer on stage to the generosity of the audience towards an elderly man. On his last tour, both his physical condition and his voice betrayed the fragility of a man in his seventies. However, it was the contrast between this fragility and the incredible strength of the words he pronounced that seemed to shape the emotional response of the audience. If Cohen had throughout his artistic career addressed God or a spiritual force, his fragile body was now able to present a proximity to death that no one could deny.

Cohen was one of those rare artists who could really embody his art. At the end of his life, the Baroque drive that moved his wandering poetic mind was present in the fragile and dark voice of his last album. The oppositions presented in the verses of the eponymous song "You Want It Darker" seem to be mediated by a mind that has decided upon darkness, but who does so with the same breath necessary for the voice that carries his last words: "You want it darker / We kill the flame." The song that opens Cohen's last album is one of the most perfect ones: it is about the acceptance of death, a respectful and conscious acceptance of finitude that few will be able to experience.

I wonder now how many people across the planet are reading Leonard Cohen's *The Flame*, his posthumous collection of poetry released October 2018. Its title seems to respond to—to unfold—the title of his last album. Cohen's readers and listeners seem not to have predicted the proportion that the feeling of *loss* would take with his death in November 2016, one week after Donald Trump was elected President of the country in which the poet had found in Buddhism a personal and aesthetic turnpoint. Reading Cohen from Brazil in a Neo-Baroque perspective in 2019 allows the perception that his poetry and voice respond to the contemporary context in a transnational mode in which the sacred plays a main role. Who knows how much light *The Flame* may still offer to a planet immersed in so many uncertainties?

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Articles & Opinions and Notes

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Ana María **Fraile-Marcos** is Associate Professor at the University of Salamanca, where she teaches English Canadian and Postcolonial literatures. She is the Director of the USAL Master's in Creative Writing and the Head of the English Department. Her publications include *Global Narratives of Resilience* (Routledge, 2020), *Literature and the Glocal City: Reshaping the English Canadian Imaginary* (Routledge, 2014), *Planteamientos estéticos y políticos en la obra de Zora Neale Hurston* (U de Valencia, 2003), *Richard Wright's* Native Son (Rodopi, 2007), and numerous chapters and articles in peer-reviewed journals. She is the Principal Investigator of the research project "Narratives of Resilience" (FFI2015-63895-C2-2-R).

Kristiana **Karathanassis** is former Associate of Huron University College's Centre for Undergraduate Research Learning (CURL). Her work has appeared in *Liberated Arts: A Journal for Undergraduate Research* at Huron, and in the 2017 Undergraduate Awards series of Scholarship@Western. She is a recipient of the SSHRC Joseph-Armand Bombardier Canada Graduate Scholarship (Master's), and is pursuing a Master's degree in English at the University of Western Ontario.

Andrea **King** is Associate Professor of French at Huron University College in London, Ontario, where she teaches language, literature, and comics. Her articles on Canadian and Quebec fiction have appeared in journals such as *Canadian Literature*, *Les Cahiers Anne Hébert*, and *Atlantis*. She has a particular interest in mentoring undergraduate researchers and is a founding Associate of Huron's Centre for Undergraduate Research Learning (CURL).

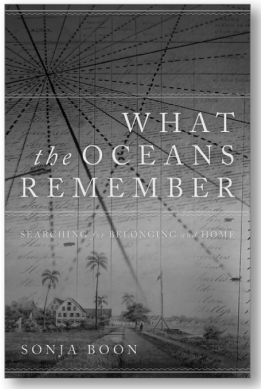
Hsiu-chuan **Lee** is Professor in the Department of English at National Taiwan Normal University, where she teaches Asian American studies, American literature, psychoanalysis, and film theories. Her essays have appeared in *Mosaic*, *Amerasia Journal*, *Ariel*, *Concentric: Literary and Cultural Studies*, *Chung-wai Literary Quarterly*, and *Review of English and American Literature*. She co-edited with Cathy J. Schlund-Vials and Guy Beauregard *The Subject(s) of Human Rights: Crises, Violations, and Asian/American Critique* (Temple UP, 2019).

Poems

John **Donlan** lives in Godfrey, Ontario. Chris **Johnson** lives in Ottawa, Ontario. Sherry **Johnson** lives in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan. Jake **Kennedy** lives in Kelowna, BC. Shane **Neilson** lives in Oakville, Ontario. Catherine **Owen** lives in Edmonton, Alberta.

Reviews

Zachary **Abram** and Jean-Sébastian **Ménard** teach at McGill University. Joel **Baetz** teaches at Trent University, Ontario. Emily **Ballantyne** teaches at Dalhousie University, Nova Scotia. Alex **Bellemare**, Marie Eve **Bradette**, and Jessi **MacEachern** live in Montreal, Quebec. Gregory **Betts** and Tim **Conley** teach at Brock University, Ontario. Nicole **Birch-Bayley,** Myra **Bloom,** and Olivia **Pellegrino** live in Toronto, Ontario. Natalie **Boldt**, Nicholas **Bradley**, Jamie **Dopp**, and Richard **Pickard** teach at University of Victoria. Liza **Bolen** and Maddie **Reddon** live in Vancouver. Margery **Fee,** Nancy **Holmes**, Weldon **Hunter,** and Suzanne **James** teach at University of British Columbia. Sunny **Chan,** Evangeline **Holtz Schramek**, Kinga A. **Zawada**, and Suzanne **Zelazo** teach at Ryerson University, Ontario. Paul **Denham** teaches at University of Saskatchewan. Joel **Deshaye** teaches at Memorial University, Newfoundland. Scott **Duchesne** teaches at University of Guelph, Ontario. Ryan **Fitzpatrick** teaches at University of Toronto Scarborough. James **Gifford** teaches at Fairleigh Dickinson University, BC. Patricia **Godbout** and Saghar **Najafi** teach at Université de Sherbrooke, Quebec. Dominique **Hétu** and Daniel **Laforest** teach at University of Alberta. Renée **Jackson-Harper** teaches at Selkirk College, BC. Jenny **Kerber** and Rebekah **Ludolph** live in Waterloo, Ontario. Kenneth **Meadwell** teaches at University of Winnipeg, Manitoba. Dana **Medoro** teaches at University of Manitoba. Geordie **Miller** teaches at Mount Allison University, New Brunswick. Nathaniel G. **Moore** lives in Fredericton, New Brunswick. Catherine **Owen** teaches at Simon Fraser University, BC. Carl **Peters** and Hilary **Turner** teach at University of the Fraser Valley, BC. Catherine **Rainwater** teaches at St. Edward's University, Texas. Michael **Roberson** and Neil **Surkan** live in Calgary, Alberta. Laurel **Ryan** teaches at University of Louisiana at Lafayette. Dani **Spinosa** teaches at York University, Ontario. Dale **Tracy** teaches at Royal Military College of Canada, Ontario. Véronique **Trottier** lives in Alma, Quebec. Nathalie **Warren** lives in Rimouski, Quebec. Carl **Watts** teaches at Huazhong University of Science and Technology, Hubei. Jeffrey Aaron **Weingarten** teaches at Fanshawe College, Ontario. Bart **Welling** teaches at University of North Florida. Ron **Welwood** lives in Nelson, BC.



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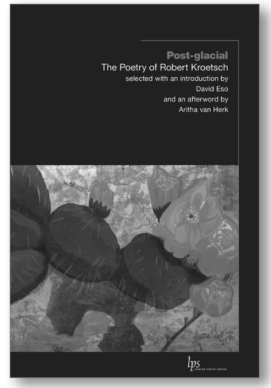

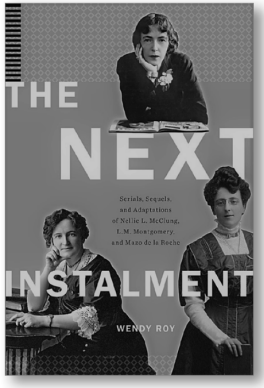

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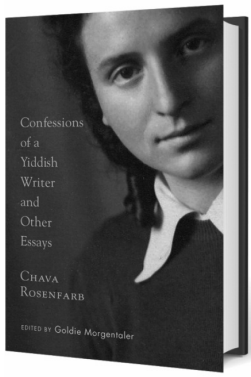

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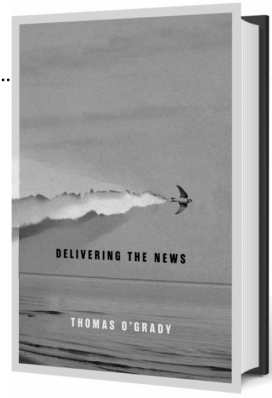

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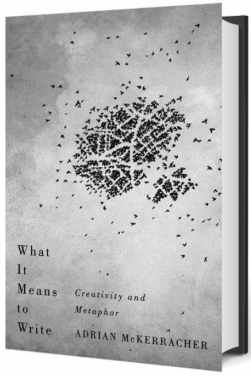

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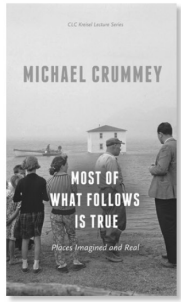

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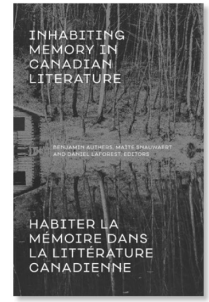

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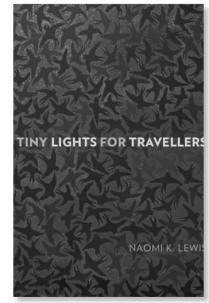

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