

Canadian Literature

A Quarterly of Criticism and Review

Autumn 2003

\$17

178

A cluster of stylized dandelion seed heads in a light beige color, scattered across the lower half of the cover. The seed heads are depicted with multiple radiating lines, and some have short stems with small diamond-shaped seeds at the end.

Archives and History

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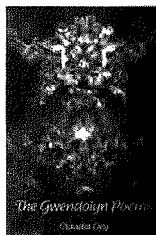


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Correction

The review entitled “Compositions” in #180 (Spring 2004, 160-62) incorrectly describes Michèle Lemieux’s *Stormy Night* as a translation of a German work by another author. *Stormy Night* is a translation of Lemieux's own original book published in Germany under the title *Gewitternacht*.

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Canadian Literature, revue universitaire avec comités d'évaluation, reçoit des soumissions d'articles, d'entrevues et autres portant sur les écrivains du Canada et sur leurs œuvres, de même que des poèmes inédits d'auteurs canadiens. La revue ne publie aucune fiction narrative.

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Archives and History : A Sextet*

The Archive and the Uncanny

My first archive and special collections room was a cold, windowless basement storage chamber lined with three-foot deep shelves built by my father in our Edmonton home. It smelled pleasantly of soap, freshly sawn lumber, and ginger root. On one wall were shelves of preserved pickles, beets, apple sauce, and jam—my mother’s garden bounty—and on another wall was a metal shelving system with two decades worth of *Life* magazines, the *National Geographic*, and boxes of old school assignments. Another shadowy crevasse of the room held two enormous brown steamer trunks and one blue metal one: these held my parents’ “special collections” of memorabilia from the Old Country—old suits, wall hangings, and a secret photo of my father’s Chinese family; books, boots, and feather comforters filled with the furniture polish smell of my mother’s native Berlin. The aura of preservation.

The smaller blue metal trunk was off-limits because it had been left by a family friend from Czechoslovakia. He had boarded with us, left to find work up North—Fort McMurray was the place for men like him—but would eventually return for his suitcase. So I was told. Eight years passed and we heard no word from him. When I was twelve, I discovered the key to this suitcase in a kitchen cupboard. I thought of the shadowy identity of the Czech friend, and how he had never returned. Surely, I imagined, the puzzle of his disappearance would be revealed in this piece of luggage by my own ingenious sleuthing. Convincing my mother of the necessity of opening this case, I was finally allowed to pry open the bent metal top. Inside was a bundle of books, including a Modern Library first edition of *The Basic*

Writings of Sigmund Freud, along with several other first editions of Freud's work; *Hamlet* and *Henry IV*; Stevenson's *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*; Poe's *Collected Stories*. More books on psychoanalysis and other titles in the uncanny canon. Yet the oddest book in this collection—at least to my twelve-year-old mind—was one titled *Ten Easy Steps to Relaxation*. It was a self-help book from the 1950's with line drawings of a man trying to sleep on his back, with pillows carefully arranged under his neck, lower back, knees, feet, and elbows. I knew that this was somehow a picture of the mysterious Czech friend who would never return. "Yes," my mother said, when I showed her the curious drawing. "He was a restless man, who could never sleep. So he read all the time. He was just like your grandfather." This did not explain to me much about the pillows positioned in the picture, but it did create a certain restlessness in me. I took the stack of books from this special collection to my room and began that night to read them, or try to, looking for more clues to the disappearance of the Czech boarder. —G.D.

Family Archives

Both my parents were born in Vancouver and have lived here virtually all their lives. In most of the world, this would not be remarkable, but in Vancouver, the native-born senior citizen is a *rara avis* indeed. My mother is particularly unusual in that both her parents were born in British Columbia—her mother in Vancouver and her father on Vancouver Island. Only recently (and of course belatedly) have I come to realize that they remember a British Columbia that has almost vanished.

One thing they remember is a surprising amount of Chinook. Most people associate the old trading language of the West Coast with the fur trade, but long after the beaver and sea otter lost their value, Chinook words were still part of everyday speech. My father (whose parents had come from opposite ends of the earth—his mother from Chile, his father from Norway) grew up in the poorest part of Vancouver. To get out of the city in the summer, he and his mother would go up the Fraser Valley to pick hops. Most of the other pickers were Native people from throughout the province; Chinook was the one language they had in common. At the end of the day, the boss would shout to the pickers, "Iskum kanaway hop"—something like "It's time for everyone to bring in the hops." My father used this phrase long after he had left the hop fields behind. When as children we were slow or distracted, he would say, "Iskum kanaway hop" and we would hurry along.

My mother also remembers the Chinook expressions of her childhood. Her father used to say, “I have a tum tum that . . .” meaning, “I think that . . .” Her Vancouver-born aunts called their friends “tillicums” and sometimes used “klahowya” for hello.

Last week, when I visited my parents, I took some materials about Chinook that I had found on an Oregon museum website. To my parents, all the information on it was just common knowledge. Talking about Chinook reminded them of a local song that was popular when they were young. The refrain went like this: “There’s mowitch on the hillside / And salmon in the bay / And it’s hiyu tenas mossum / When the daylight fades away.” “Mowitch” means “deer,” and “hiyu tenas mossum” means “we’re all sleepy” or “time to turn in.”

I felt that I ought to be recording them. What if no one else remembers this song? My parents hardly want to be considered museum pieces, but they have been here a long time, and they remember a lot. I am not sure how to begin organizing their memories, but what they know is a precious archive of how life used to be, out here on the edge of the country. —S.F.

Language, said Heidegger, is the house of being, and he may be right, but whatever the case, it is certainly true to call language a house of memory, which is to say a house of oblivion, a house in which things of every sort can be called to mind or allowed to lapse into nothingness. Language is, in other words, an archive, a word as well as a concept that English borrowed from French, which borrowed it from Latin, which borrowed it from Greek, where it originally referred to the public building that housed records and documents. Words in use never stay still, and in a typical metonymic shift—reinforced by a telling grammatical drift into the plural—the word *archive* has come to refer also to the building’s contents. Archives, that is, are both the container and the contained; like languages, they are the houses of what we recall and what we forget, and the things themselves. What they do not hold, or cannot, is no less important than what they do or can hold. If possession is nine points of the law, then forgetting is nine points of the archive.

We cannot live except by forgetting, any more than we can sense some stimuli except by ignoring others; just imagine if you could sense every thing in its own thisness all the time, from the smallest flutter in your lungs to every single point of light entering your eyes. History—a word whose journey

into English followed the same path as archive, only earlier, and which originally meant inquiry—works like our perceptual apparatus, whose seeing is enabled by our blindnesses, by focussing on one thing or set of things to the exclusion of others. That is why there can be no one history, only histories, and these can never be complete, ever.

Between getting it all in and leaving it all out, the possibilities are endless.
—I.H.

When I began to work in archives, I quickly learnt that in addition to logging long hours over boxes of letters and diaries, a substantial chunk of time needed to be set aside each day to talk to archivists—or rather to listen to them free-associate about possible connections between people and events, about papers waiting to be released, and about researchers they had encountered. I invariably came away from these encounters with several pages of notes scribbled at furious speed, enough for half a dozen new research projects in addition to the one I was already engaged in. I was also often in a state of panic at the prospect that only a fraction of this knowledge and these hunches would ever be recorded, and that indeed the only way to become party to it was to follow archivists around the place and quiz them whenever they had the time to answer my questions. It was probably one of the archivists at the National Archives of Canada who first suggested I speak to the historian Pierre Savard, then director of the Centre de recherche en civilisation canadienne-française at the University of Ottawa. I did and we became fast friends. One of the joys of meeting with Pierre was his irrepressible intellectual curiosity, and our conversations ritually began with his propping up his face between his hands and asking, “And what have you found now?” To a casual onlooker, we must have looked like a pair of gossiping sophomores, and indeed I have not known anyone else for whom the pursuit of knowledge was quite such a delicious and exhilarating business. He also delighted in the many comic moments of our profession. At a symposium in Vienna, Pierre’s eyebrows shot up in alarm as the moderator—a gentleman of the old school—introduced me as “still charming after all these years,” but he also undertook some rapid research in cultural *mores* by glancing round the room and comparing the reactions of North Americans and Europeans (a brilliant repartee covering all bases occurred to me 24 hours later). But Pierre Savard was a lot more than an accomplished *causeur*. I remember the great courtesy but also utter lack of hesitation with

which he pursued a line of thought he knew to be right when members of the audience at a conference on “Le Romantisme au Québec” found his material unduly critical, even unpatriotic. This was a man for whom personal honour and professional integrity were one and the same thing, and he was unable to understand that this might not be the case for everyone. Pierre Savard died suddenly in 1998, and many of us miss him terribly. — E.-M.K.

Six years ago, I travelled to the National Archives in Ottawa to look through some recently deposited manuscripts by a writer then just reaching mid-career. I was the second person ever to request the box, and the first actually to open most of its folders. A rough key to the contents had been typed up by the archivists, but, as with most such material, the actual holdings did not correspond to the brief descriptions provided.

I meant to look at drafts of poems and essays but found myself flipping through highly personal pages, ranging from vitriolic letters of two ex-wives to crayon drawings by a young daughter to accompany a letter thanking her father for a poem and asking when she would see him again. How, I asked myself, could he have donated these things? I could concede putting your ex-wives’ harping on display to wreak petty vengeance, but couldn’t figure how anyone could part with his own child’s writing. Given public hunger for biographical minutiae, he might have imagined a future when his biographer might reconcile guarded details of a life lived with what had been put to paper. But I couldn’t shake the uncomfortable deliberateness of the donation of these items, and the feeling that I shouldn’t be reading them.

In “These Poems, She Said,” Robert Bringhurst has a woman’s voice deride “the poems of a man / who would leave his wife and child because / they made noise in his study.” His poem brilliantly and unflinchingly interrogates the difficult collision, even in its own making, of the aesthetic and the lived, and notes the steep price of confusing appreciation for real feeling. This staid reticence to engage with the human world informs the discomfort I felt as I turned those pages. Some moments should not be contained in poems or manuscripts because those enclosures, rather than sustaining lived time, actually dissolve it into beautiful and lifeless craft; there are some betrayals, however lovely, for which a poem could not make up. The grave and imposing grid of the archive, as it squares experience with written history, might be a fine and pleasant place for scholars intent

on building careers, but its floors of shelved fonds mark a tragic deadening no one really deserves. Some boxes are better left not so much closed as unopened. — K.M.

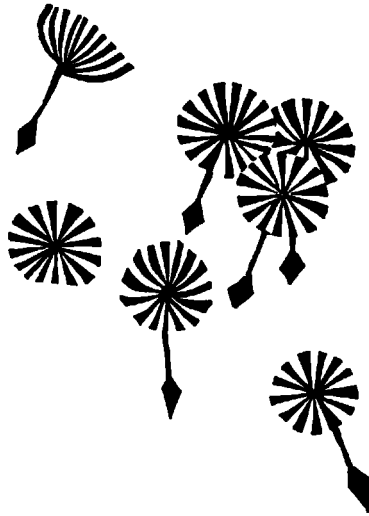
Depuis une quarantaine d'années au Canada se sont opérés dans de multiples secteurs du quotidien des événements qui ont chamboulé aussi bien l'environnement que l'imagination des citoyens, l'un des plus importants étant, pour les francophones du moins, la manifestation d'une différence fondamentale entre les communautés canadiennes-françaises du pays. Que ce soit dans la sphère sociale, culturelle, ou politique, des moments d'émoi ont annoncé puis suivi des périodes de rupture et de transformations radicales, sans précédent. Sans elles, sans la création de grands organismes comme la CBC/Société Radio-Canada, le Canada Council/Conseil des arts du Canada, ou sans l'instauration par le gouvernement Trudeau du bilinguisme pancanadien, dans quel état seraient nos institutions et que serait le Canada d'aujourd'hui? Ces événements, et bien d'autres encore, ont façonné nos deux littératures nationales, les auteurs (hommes et femmes) qui les font et les institutions qui les gèrent. De la même façon, alors que le Québec des années 1960 prenait ses distances face à la francophonie canadienne du temps, les autres communautés francophones, loin de disparaître, ont su créer leurs propres institutions littéraires dont les maisons d'édition sont parmi les plus visibles. C'est ainsi que de décennie en décennie, de nouveaux auteurs (poètes, essayistes, dramaturges, romanciers) seront à même de mieux reconnaître leurs talents et de les développer.

À présent, entre les cinq régions du pays se dressent encore des frontières mais aussi, fort heureusement, de nombreux ponts. La traduction en est un qu'empruntent les citoyens, les auteurs et les éditeurs, francophones comme anglophones, pour se manifester les uns aux autres et s'enrichir mutuellement. La découverte par les auditeurs de l'émission *Canada Reads* au printemps 2003 de *Prochain épisode* d'Hubert Aquin, roman publié en 1965, n'est-elle pas d'ailleurs un exemple éloquent de ce type de partage et d'enrichissement? — A-M. R.

* *Although all of CL's current editors will be involved in the production of the upcoming 45th anniversary issue of the journal, we use this collective editorial as an opportunity to speak as a team before three of us, Iain Higgins, Alain-*

Michel Rocheleau and Eva-Marie Kröller, step down later this year. Iain, who came on board as poetry editor in 1995, has overseen special issues on "Poetry and Poetics" and on "Nature/Culture." He wrote editorials in which the creative and the scholarly were inseparable companions, and he was proof-reader non-pareil. Alain-Michel, in charge of all aspects of CL's publication of francophone writing since 1996, asserted the presence of the latter in everything from the journal's style-sheet to painstaking accuracy in historical facts. Bringing the rigorous scholarship of a true "Lavalien" to our work, he edited issues on "Gay and Lesbian Writing" and "Drama." The journal has been immeasurably enriched by their presence, as have their fellow editors. Two of Iain's own poems appear in this issue, as well as a review essay by Alain-Michel. —E.-M. K.

This year, William H. New, editor of CL from 1977 to 1995, retired from the University of British Columbia. We dedicate this issue to him.



Westward Ever Dreaming

—letters from the Westward journey—

the reason so few are willing to return from the Western country
is not that the country is so good but because the journey is so bad

mother, I can scarcely wright fore the tears
thinking perhaps we may never see each other
in this world again

you say that my writing once a month will not supply
the place of a long epistle, because you live at too great a distance
& want to hear me talk

they mourn your departure, as if you were dead
for truly you are dead to some of them
for they never expect to see you again in this world

telling how she felt at parting with her eldest granddaughter
and the sadness it had given her to see the carriage that was to
take me away
. . . not aware that she said “hearse” instead of “carriage”

I feel as if I must fly to see you
but my wings are soon clipt by the great distance
of 700 miles

mother thear appears to be mountains & rivers
between us I don't know how you are

living in a wilderness surrounded by strangers

there is a grave of a woman near here
the tire of a wagon is bent up
and put to a head and foot stone
her name and age is filed upon it

a woman died in this train yesterday
she left six children one of them only two days old
poor little thing it had better have died with its mother
they made a good picket fence around the grave. . . .

they had just buried the babe
of the woman who died days ago
and were just digging a grave for another woman
what was run over by the cattle and wagons
that stampeded yesterday
she lived twenty-four hours
she gave birth to a child
a short time before she died
the child was buried with her
she leaves a little two year old girl
and a husband
they say he is nearly crazy with sorrow

The Author as Editor

Jordan Zinovich's *Gabriel Dumont* in the Archives

What difference does it make who is speaking?

—MICHEL FOUCAULT

The historical novel has always been a problematic literary genre. Because of the extreme difficulty, if not impossibility, of separating the factual from the fictive in the same narrative, writers and critics have tended to dismiss it for its ostensible impurity, its mongrelization.¹ Even if one does not share Alessandro Manzoni's conviction that the historical novel is part of the "false genre" that comprises all works that "try to mix history and invention, whatever their form" (81), it is difficult not to notice that it has unique problems of its own. The most significant of these is that, unlike "purer" kinds of fiction, it appears to have a referential component. Jonathan Dee, for example, asserts with some cogency that "there is something fundamentally compromised" about a type of literary work "whose characters—their physical appearances, their fates, the actions by which they will be remembered—are known to us before we even open the book" (81). Another troubling aspect of the historical novel is the proclivity of its practitioners to borrow copiously from found texts, particularly non-literary ones. The dangers inherent in such a procedure are conspicuously evident in Jordan Zinovich's *Gabriel Dumont in Paris*, a "novel history" that relies so extensively on documentary evidence that perhaps it should have been entitled *Gabriel Dumont in the Archives*.

In the last three or four decades, there has been a veritable explosion of historical novels, sometimes dealing with rather recent issues or barely dead historical figures. Surprisingly, the return of this generic "misfit" that refuses to vanish (Rigney 20) has elicited remarkably little critical attention. Part of the reason for this void, of course, has to do with the conceptual verities of

the day. The postmodernist tendency to conflate fiction and nonfiction eliminates the need to investigate the nature of a hybrid beast that purports to combine those two entities. Moreover, the few scholars who have focused on the historical novel have not been as illuminating in their forays into the field as one might have wished. Linda Hutcheon is a case in point.

Hutcheon has written extensively on the reflexive historical novel, which she terms historiographic metafiction. However, there are some major contradictions in her work. For instance, she claims that “*history* does not exist except as a text. . . . We cannot know the past except through its texts: its documents, its evidence, even its eye-witness accounts are *texts*” (*Poetics* 16; Hutcheon’s italics). Yet she then argues that even though “we can ‘know’ that past today only through its texts,” it “really did exist” (128). What she fails to elucidate is how one is supposed to navigate one’s way from a textualized past to the real one, given that these are ontologically distinct realms. Similarly, Hutcheon states that “[h]istory (like realist fiction) is *made* by its writer, even if events are made to seem to speak for themselves” (“Canadian” 231-32; Hutcheon’s italics).² Yet, again, she continues to talk about “the truth and lies of the historical record” and how someone like Robert Coover in *The Public Burning* does so much “violence to the known history of the Rosenbergs” (*Poetics* 114, 115). This would seem to be a pseudo-dilemma. Constructivism, such as hers, does not permit one to deal with historical truth (Doležel 248-53), only with aesthetic concerns.³

More pertinent to the study of the contemporary historical novel is the work of Dorrit Cohn. As a narratologist, Cohn is primarily interested in liberating fiction from the unwelcome embrace of the postmodernist concept of universal narrativity. As she writes in the preface to *The Distinction of Fiction*, her book “aims to show that fictional narrative is unique in its potential for crafting a self-enclosed universe ruled by formal patterns that are ruled out in all other forms of discourse” (vii). Therefore, while Hutcheon discerns no crucial distinctions between fictional and nonfictional discourse, Cohn stresses the “essential differences” between the two (9). For her, the central and defining characteristic of fiction is that it is a non-referential narrative that “itself creates the world to which it refers by referring to it” (13). Historical narrative, in contrast, must always possess a “referential” element, some relation to the external world in general and the archive in particular (112). It is true that Cohn concludes that the historical novel is not a cross between fiction and historiography but simply fiction. Still, she acknowledges that it remains a “generic borderline case” (116) and warns that one should not

“lose sight of the peculiarity of the genre,” a singularity evident in the “response of a reader who identifies a work as a historical novel” (158). In fact, Cohn sees proof of the hybridity of the historical novel in the ubiquity in the genre of such “referential apparatus[es]” as prefaces and afterwords, paratexts that she notes are becoming increasingly common and merit further study (115).

The matter of referentiality in the historical novel, as in discourse in general, remains “a vexing problem” for Cohn (112) and many other scholars.⁴ Yet there is at least one situation in which referentiality appears to be unquestionable: when a literary work reproduces another extant text. Zinovich’s novel is replete with instances of this kind of referentiality. As its title suggests, *Gabriel Dumont in Paris* explores the life of Louis Riel’s second military commander—the first one being the once beloved but now largely forgotten Ambroise Lépine—although rather little of it takes place in the French capital. Like the overwhelming majority of the many novels, poems, and plays that have been written on Dumont since the publication of Joseph Kinsey Howard’s *Strange Empire* in 1952, it is a paean to the “prince of the prairies” (Howard 358). For Zinovich, Dumont is not just a master buffalo hunter and a brilliant military tactician. He is also an intellectual of sorts, who “knows French and many different Indian dialects,” and a most devoted husband, whose world appears to revolve around the formidable and “very beautiful” Madeleine Wilkie Dumont (3, 13).⁵ Most significantly, he is a selfless patriot who devotes his life to his nation and who eventually clashes with Canada only because he and the Métis are betrayed by religious leaders and government officials. Zinovich’s Dumont declares, “I didn’t want to go to war. But when my people spoke, we were ignored [. . .]. Other than fighting, our only choice was to watch Canada take our children’s future from them” (92). Furthermore, he elaborates, the word “rebellion did not have the tragic implications then that it has now.” The Saskatchewan Valley Métis were inspired by the “very peaceful rebellion” at Red River in 1869-70, but Ottawa overreacted and they had no other option but to respond in kind (94-95). In short, the Métis did not initiate the hostilities; they merely defended themselves.

One of the more unusual facets of Zinovich’s novel is that, almost solely among recent aesthetic representations of Dumont, it manages to celebrate its protagonist without denigrating his “chiliastic” leader (Vanderhaeghe, “Novel” 47). In their disparate attempts to wrest Dumont from under Riel’s long shadow, writers like George Woodcock and Alfred Silver go as far as to have Dumont surmise that the Métis defeat at Batoche in 1885 was part

of Riel's grand design, his means to "fulfill" his mission (Woodcock, *Six* 107). As Silver has Madeleine Dumont⁶ say to her husband in *Lord of the Plains* (after the narrator notes that she was "definitely past caring" about Riel), "You don't get to be a saint without getting martyred" (399). Zinovich's Dumont, in contrast, is extremely deferential toward "the only man who could seize the attention of the [Canadian] Government" (70). He does come to question Riel's military strategy and at one point determines that he can "wait no longer for the will of God to save us" (133). Yet Dumont displays very little rancour toward the so-called Prophet of the New World. By the end of the novel, he affirms that "Riel surrendered to save the rest of us. He offered himself as a sacrifice in our place" (161). Indeed, "Riel died a saint and a martyr. He took nothing for himself and gave his life for his nation" (178).

The most striking aspect of *Gabriel Dumont in Paris*, though, is not the tale it tells but the way it tells it. So widespread is its dependence on other texts that it raises the question as to when a writer ceases to be the author of a work and becomes its editor or compiler. In a comprehensive review of the novel, Guy Vanderhaeghe maintains that Zinovich uses "the conceit that the story is told by others" (47).⁷ However, I would argue that this is less a conceit than the reality—a considerable portion of the narrative is produced by individuals other than the titular author. The novel opens with a prologue in which the historian Auguste-Henri de Trémaudan says that he has been trying to answer the question, "Who was Gabriel Dumont?" He then adds that he has not been able to solve the enigma for the reader, and that "[m]uch of the manuscript that follows is Gabriel's story as he himself told it to my friend M. [Georges] Demanche," who is ostensibly the first editor of the work we are reading (xiii).⁸ But, echoing the strategy that Zinovich himself enunciates in his afterword of relying on "the documentary record" whenever possible (183), Trémaudan fills the gaps in the Demanche account with numerous other texts by a variety of authors.

Gabriel Dumont in Paris is actually a mosaic of published and unpublished texts. It incorporates documents, memoirs, and poems by everyone from Dumont and Riel to the Métis bard Pierre Falcon, the British soldier and adventurer William F. Butler, buffalo hunters, missionaries, government officials, and even Eric Nicol's own Constable Francis Dickens of the North West Mounted Police. There is so much quotation in the novel that space limitations do not allow me to enumerate every single case. Thus, I will focus on only three examples in order to give a sense of Zinovich's

method of composition. In each instance, I will reproduce a passage from Zinovich's novel and then the original, so that we may determine what changes he makes (or does not make) to it.

The first text is by John Kerr; it is the work that opens the novel proper, and Zinovich duly references it, as he does all his source texts. Kerr was one of the rare whites who hunted with Dumont and, in the mid-1930s, published a memoir about his days with "Riel's right-hand-man in the rebellion of '85" (Kerr 53). Even almost fifty years after the Saskatchewan conflict, Kerr remains utterly sympathetic to Dumont, which might explain the prominence Zinovich gives to his account:

Gabriel was about thirty-four years of age when I first met him in 1872, but I initially believed him to be much older because of his appearance. He is of medium height, square of shoulder, with a homely but kind face and his chin adorned with a scraggly beard. He is by no means huge, as many writers have depicted him, and could not at that time have weighed more than 165 or 170 pounds. His father, *Ai-caw-pow*, and his uncle, *Ska-kas-ta-ow* (these are phonetic renderings from the Cree), were, however, over six feet in height and heavily built. (Zinovich 2-3)

This powerful half-breed must have been 34 years of age in 1872, but I judged him to be about forty because of his thickset appearance. He was of medium height, square of shoulder, with a homely but kind face, and his chin was adorned with a scraggly beard. He was by no means huge, as so many writers have depicted him, and would not have weighed at that time more than 165 or 170 pounds. His father, *Ai-caw-pow*, and his uncle, *Ska-kas-ta-ow*, (these are phonetic spellings!) were over six feet in height, however, and heavily built. (Kerr 53)

Another set of passages reveals a similar degree of indebtedness:

He is a man of unquestioned courage whose word is heeded at the council above all others, even those many years his senior. (Zinovich 3)

He was a man of unquestioned courage, whose word was heeded at the council board above that of all others, some of whom were many years his senior. (Kerr 57)

Zinovich is in such agreement with Kerr that, at the very outset, he devotes almost four whole pages to Kerr's recollections of the "remarkable Métis who, with just treatment, might have become one of the most loyal citizens of Canada" (Kerr 59).

Though also a memoir, the second text that I will examine is quite different from Kerr's, as befits the work (oral testimony) of a very different individual. Norbert Welsh was an Anglo-Protestant Métis buffalo hunter and trader. Either because of social-religious divisions or for some personal reason, he elected not to support the predominantly Franco-Catholic Métis cause in 1885. In fact, Dumont and Riel did not consider Welsh "trustworthy"

and had him briefly arrested under the suspicion that he was a spy for the Mounted Police (Zinovich 96; Weekes 151-54). In any case, in the early 1930s, Welsh told his life story to the journalist Mary Weekes, who then turned it into a book entitled *The Last Buffalo Hunter*. The view that Welsh provides of Dumont differs radically not only from Kerr's but also from his general image as the consummate "man of action," a leader famous for his boundless "cunning and courage" (Woodcock, *Gabriel Dumont* 7, 165). In the process of describing an incident at a buffalo hunt in which the chief of Welsh's brigade refuses to let Dumont's group join it, since the latter is believed to be infected with smallpox, Welsh calls into question even Dumont's vaunted leadership:

Dumont was not a good chief, and I don't know how he got his reputation as one. He could not control his Indians. When the whole brigade arrived, we had to use our guns to keep them out of our camp. We kept them a half a mile away from us, but they came at night and washed their sores in our springs. (Zinovich 34)

Then the whole brigade arrived and wanted to come into our camp. Our Chief told us to take our guns and prevent them from doing this. We were ordered to shoot the first man that came to our camp. We kept Dumont's brigade half a mile away from us. But the beggars would come at night and wash their running sores in our spring water. Dumont was no kind of a leader, and I don't know how he got his reputation as one. He could not control his Indians. (Welsh qtd. in Weekes 74)

Perhaps because of Welsh's obvious animosity toward Dumont, Zinovich is far more selective in his use of Welsh's text than of Kerr's. Still, the most significant correction he makes to Welsh's words is that, when the former buffalo hunter states, "Alcohol was the only treatment they knew of for smallpox" (qtd. in Weekes, 75), Zinovich changes "they" to "we" (35).

The final text that I will discuss is a somewhat curious one, not so much because of what it says about Dumont but because of its own textual nature. Except for the occasional poem, all the other archival texts included in Zinovich's novel are first-hand accounts by historical figures who either knew Dumont personally or were in some way involved with the North-West in the late nineteenth century. The exception is the contribution by Francis Dickens. Charles Dickens's third son served with the Mounted Police for over a decade and played an inglorious role in the surrender of Fort Pitt. Not surprisingly, Eric Nicol's *Dickens of the Mounted* depicts him as an English boob-in-the-woods who is terrified of becoming "known as Dickens the Lesser" (53). But Zinovich treats Nicol's farce as if it were a his-

torical document of the same order as the Weekes/Welsh book. The material from Nicol appears in a letter by the younger Dickens in which he describes his unplanned introduction to Dumont:

How the man spotted me I cannot guess, but before I knew it he was standing over me. I scrambled up, brushing off my trousers. He was a noble-looking savage, barrel-chested and wearing a fringed hide jacket decorated with handsome needlework floral designs in the Métis style. Long, dark hair curled down his neck. His face was nut-brown and unwrinkled, and his blazing eyes would have daunted a panther. He seemed both resolute and faintly cavalier, clearly a Métis, but one such as I had never met before. (Zinovich 60-61)

How the man could have spotted me so quickly in the tricky slant of sunset, I cannot guess. But in no time at all he was standing over me, as I scrambled to my feet, brushing straw off my britches. He had a mien that inspired deference in the beholder: of sturdy, even barrel-chested, build, in his fringed hide jacket, handsomely decorated with needlework floral designs in the Métis style; long black dark hair curling down his pillared neck in a natural ruff of courtly vestment; and a face nut-brown yet unwrinkled, in which blazed two eyes that would have daunted the panther, however famished.

. . . He was clearly a Métis, but a Métis such as I had not met on his own turf. (Nicol 70).

Zinovich's treatment of Francis Dickens's letter has led to some speculation as to whether his novel is a "postmodern" work, written in a spirit of self-conscious irreverence and transgression, or whether Zinovich simply fails to recognize that "Nicol's book is an unabashed tongue-in-cheek hoax" (Vanderhaeghe, "Novel" 46). Perhaps this latter surmise gains some credibility from the fact that the back cover of Nicol's work identifies it as "Fiction/History." But surely other clues (apart from Nicol's reputation as a humorist) should alert one to the farcical nature of *Dickens of the Mounted*. After all, it bears the subtitle *The Astounding Long-Lost Letters of Inspector F. Dickens NWMP 1874-1886*, and opens with a jarring yet familiar Dickensian first line: "It was not the best of times, it was not the worst of times, it was Ottawa" (21).

Zinovich's wholesale incorporation of other people's texts into his novel, as even this small sample should illustrate, raises a score of both aesthetic and ethical issues. As stated earlier, he usually identifies his sources. Therefore, he does not violate "the ethics of literary quotation" in the same way that someone like Rudy Wiebe does in the short story "Games for Queen Victoria," in which Wiebe stealthily borrows words from William F. Butler not in order to better understand the British officer "but to distance

himself from his source text” (Braz 103, 91). Yet, given that so much of Zinovich’s novel is written by others, one cannot help but wonder who is really its author. I will return to the question of authorship, but I would like first to address some aesthetic concerns in *Gabriel Dumont in Paris*, concerns that underline not only the differences between fictional and nonfictional discourse but also the inherent hybridity of the historical novel.

In his review of Zinovich’s novel, Guy Vanderhaeghe contends that while the work “achieves a rich evocation of a time and a people,” it fails to give us “the inner Dumont.” There are several reasons why the title character “seems more an archetype of his people than an individual with his own perplexities and certainties” (Vanderhaeghe, “Novel” 47). The most crucial of these is that, despite all the emphasis on his “first-class mind” and his ability to express himself with “extraordinary ease” (Zinovich 71), Dumont does not appear to have much self-knowledge. His lack of introspection is evident in his propensity to become enraptured by Riel’s words. Dumont often recalls nostalgically some speech that he witnessed the politician-mystic deliver and tends to perceive him as “a visionary” who saw “farther into the future than I did” (81, 77). Consequently, when he claims that at Batoche Riel is merely “a political leader, but in other matters I am the chief here” (87), he is not overly persuasive. In fact, judging by his obeisance to Riel, one cannot help but deduce that Dumont too comes to believe that, while the Métis people have become “a cart with only one wheel” (73), the missing wheel is not the buffalo hunter but the formally educated hero of Red River.

If anything, Dumont’s want of self-knowledge becomes even more apparent in his utter obliviousness to the degree to which he and the Métis are driven by their own nationalism. Throughout the novel we are told how the protagonist is famous for enforcing “the ‘Law of the Plains,’ as the rules of the [buffalo] hunt were called” (3). Yet there are several indications in the text that this is not so much a pan-Prairie code as a Métis one. For instance, the Cree Chief Big Bear supposedly chooses not to support the Métis in 1885 because he has not forgiven Dumont for humiliating him publicly. Years earlier when Big Bear refused to stop his band from chasing a buffalo herd without the consent of Dumont’s larger group, as required by tradition, Dumont “grabbed a gun and jabbed him in the stomach with the butt of it” (39-40). However, it is highly unlikely that a seasoned leader like Big Bear would not be conversant with the rules of the buffalo hunt, unless these are really Métis ordinances. Dumont also proclaims that he is fighting on

behalf of a “united front” of First Nations and Métis against “the White invasion” from the East (72). Yet he frequently boasts about his people’s many victories over First Nations, especially the ferocious Sioux, who had vowed to drive all the “[w]agon men” off the plains (7). When a Cree man tries to justify stealing Madeleine Dumont’s horse by saying that Cree “law obliged their allies to supply their best horses to the warrior going to fight,” Dumont replies unequivocally: “I do not follow your laws” (15). Finally, in an official letter to Sir John A. Macdonald, a committee headed by Dumont attempts to persuade the prime minister that the reason the Métis have a legitimate claim to the territory around Batoche is that they have “so long held this country as its masters and so often defended it against the Indians at the price of our blood” (67). In other words, Dumont’s Métis seem to be a rather autonomous group.

Another reason that Zinovich is unable to capture the inner Dumont, though, has less to do with the psychological makeup of his protagonist than with the formal structure of his work. Since so much of *Gabriel Dumont in Paris* is not fiction at all but a motley collection of third-party documentary accounts, Zinovich often does not have access to the mind of his hero. One of the signposts of fictionality, Cohn argues, is that only fiction “allows a narrator to know what cannot be known in the real world and in narratives that target representations of the real world: the inner life of his figures” (16).⁹ As she asks, “what ‘serious’ discourse ever quoted the thoughts of a person other than the speaker’s own?” (117). That is, for Cohn, novelists (and other fiction writers) have privileges that historians do not, such as the ability to enter the heads of their characters. But this is the very power that Zinovich relinquishes when he nonchalantly imports other people’s texts into his novel, a decision that perhaps explains why Vanderhaeghe feels that, when it comes to Zinovich’s portrayal of the private Dumont, his “‘novel history’ reads more like history than novel” (47).

Needless to say, Zinovich’s reliance on found texts also has major ramifications regarding the authorship of his novel. A key distinction between fiction and nonfiction, as narratologists are wont to stress, is the author-narrator function. It is a given that a nonfictional narrative has “a stable univocal origin, that its narrator is identical to a real person: the author named on its title page” (Cohn 123-24). The narrator in a work of fiction, in contrast, is not the author but just a character. In the words of Paul Hernadi, “fictional narratives demand, historical narratives preclude, a distinction between the narrator and the implied author” (252; qtd. in Cohn

124). The problem with Zinovich's novel, in terms of its authorship, is precisely that his characters are not characters but real people. More specifically, they are not the creations of the ostensible author but their own creations, who, along with their texts, have been conscripted into someone else's work.

Because of its generic hybridity and the authorial desire for authenticity, the historical novel as such is of course prone to borrowing from the archival record. As Roberto González Echevarría has stated, the historical novel often strives to legitimize itself as the "bearer of authentic stories by its association with those [usually non-literary] texts that tell the first stories." Since it has "no fixed form of its own," it tends to assume "the shape of a given kind of document endowed with truth-bearing power in society at specific moments in time" (184, 185). Different historical novelists, however, have employed rather dissimilar strategies for imbuing their fictions with historicity. For example, in *Beloved*, Toni Morrison consciously avoids historical sources in her reconstruction of Margaret Garner's life. As Morrison describes her attempt to convey the moral dilemma faced by the nineteenth-century woman who killed her daughter to prevent her from being returned to slavery, "I really wanted to invent her life" (qtd. in Rothstein). In *The Colony of Unrequited Dreams*, Wayne Johnston makes considerably more use of the archive. He gives such a prominent role to D.W. Prowse's *A History of Newfoundland* that the 1895 classic becomes one of his novel's principal characters. Yet Johnston does not merely reproduce Prowse's text; he becomes dialectically engaged with it, as if he were having a dialogue with the earlier work on the past and future of Newfoundland. This latter aspect is never more evident than when Johnston has one of his protagonists, the journalist Sheilagh Fielding, write a parody of Prowse's *History*, one marked not only by wit and satire but also by "brevity and comprehensiveness" (Johnston 18).

My criticism of Zinovich is not that he borrows from other writers; clearly Johnston does this too, particularly from Richard Gwyn's biography of Joey Smallwood, as Stuart Pierson has shown (285-86). Rather, what troubles me is the sheer magnitude of Zinovich's dependence on other people's words. To rephrase a question posed earlier, at what point does a writer cease to be the author of a text and become its editor? Perhaps Roland Barthes's "The Death of the Author" will shed some light on this matter. At first glance, Barthes's essay would appear to be an odd choice. After all, this is the seminal statement on the nature of writing in which the

French semiotician declares that “it is language which speaks, not the author” (50), and that before reading can become a truly emancipatory act, it is necessary to kill “the Author-God” (52-53). By shifting authorship from the individual writer to discourse itself, Barthes would seem to eliminate the very problem of the ethics of quotation. Yet he also states that writing, by definition, implies “the destruction of every voice, every origin” (49) and that the “Author, when we believe in him, is always conceived as the past of his own book” (52). However, this is what does not occur in *Gabriel Dumont in Paris*. One is never convinced that Zinovich is really “the past of his book,” since one is constantly being reminded that much of “his” text was produced by other people.

Whether or not one fully agrees with Barthes that “contemporary culture is tyrannically centred on the author” (50), it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that authorship is not an uncomplicated matter. All the rhetoric to the contrary notwithstanding, there is scant evidence that we have come to accept that the true “source” of a text is not its writing but its reading (Barthes 54). The pervasive sense of outrage that still greets the unmasking of yet another literary hoax certainly suggests that today’s readers continue to find it hard to separate a book from its purported author. Indeed, the case could easily be made that much of the controversy over cultural impersonation and voice appropriation derives from the fact that we often read authors instead of texts. On a very basic level, it clearly does matter “who is speaking” in a text, to answer the Michel Foucault query that serves as epigraph to this essay (61). The extent and nature of one’s contribution to a work usually determine whether one is its author or its editor.¹⁰ Yet, in reality, the situation is never that simple. For instance, who is the real author of *The Last Buffalo Hunter*? Is it Norbert Welsh, the pioneer whose recollections make up the book? Or is it Mary Weekes, the journalist who recorded and assembled them? The publisher leaves no doubt that it is Weekes, but the matter is not quite resolved, for without Welsh’s words there would be no text.

Considering that a substantial portion of *Gabriel Dumont in Paris* was produced by other individuals, it seems legitimate to suggest that Zinovich is not so much its author as its editor. Nevertheless, the novel remains valuable for more than merely underscoring the politics (and legalities) of authorship. It is also important because of the manner in which it dramatizes the fact that the textual borrowing that appears to be endemic to the historical novel has a narratological dimension. Dorrit Cohn, I noted above,

asserts that one of the signposts of fictionality is that a fiction does not refer to a reality outside itself. This is the reason she disagrees with Hayden White (and, through him, Linda Hutcheon) that a “novel can be said to be plotted, but not *emplotted*” (Cohn 114; Cohn’s italics). As Cohn underlines, a novel’s “serial moments do not refer to, and can therefore not be selected from, an ontologically independent and temporally prior data base of disordered, meaningless happenings that it restructures into order and meaning” (White, *Metahistory* 7-11). However, that would appear to be the case with the historical novel. Because of its dependence on the archive, it is often *emplotted*, and frequently to its own detriment, since the desire to be true to some prior text, or texts, precludes it from developing its own structural unity.

In conclusion, one of the main aesthetic flaws in *Gabriel Dumont in Paris* results from its reliance on the archive. In the penultimate communication that he sends to Georges Demanche, Dumont states that “the Government does not want me to lecture and tell the true history of our rebellion” (180). Presumably, this is Zinovich’s rationale for focusing so closely on documentary accounts. Yet, given that most of the people around Dumont did not know how to write, it is not likely that their “true history” will ever be found in the archives. The consequences of this dilemma are vividly illustrated by the episode that gives the novel its title. Dumont is believed to have spent a year in Paris (Zinovich 184). But since there is little textual evidence of this visit—if it ever did take place—Zinovich does not dwell on it. Despite its title, his novel has only two brief scenes set in the French capital. In the first, Dumont comments that the “River Seine reminds me of our Saskatchewan,” since it has “the same soft, fat, slick, brown skin with a greenish tinge” (26). In the second, he deals mostly with the fact that he has been impersonated in Paris by a fellow Métis, Michel Dumas (178-79). That is, because of the lack of an archival record, the buffalo hunter has virtually nothing to say about his experience in the City of Lights. Indeed, as one reflects on *Gabriel Dumont in Paris*, one cannot help but wish that Zinovich had ventured out of the archive and, following Toni Morrison’s lead, dared to invent the life of his protagonist, not the least his real or imagined adventures in Paris.

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NOTES

- 1 For a compelling analysis of the hybridity of the historical novel, see Rigney 16-21. For spirited defences of the genre in the light of both New Criticism and poststructuralism, see Shaw and the last section of Bermann's introduction to Manzoni, "On the Historical Novel Today" (48-59).
- 2 Hutcheon's constructivism, as she acknowledges, echoes the ideas of Hayden White, such as White's assertion that most nineteenth-century historians "did not realize that the facts do not speak for themselves, but that the historian speaks for them, speaks on their behalf" (*Tropics* 125).
- 3 Prior to the mid-1980s, as Kuester rightly notes, most studies of the Canadian historical novel were not theoretically informed (Kuester 26). The situation has been rectified since then. One notable contribution is Vautier's *New World Myth: Postmodernism and Postcolonialism in Canadian Fiction*. A comparative study of three English-Canadian and three Franco-Québécois historical novels, Vautier's book shows how the "specificity" of the (inter)American myth that infuses novels like *Les têtes à Papineau* and *Obasan* "lies in its need to assert itself by flaunting its *opposition* to the European-inspired versions of the past(s) of the New World" (x). Even more significantly, Vautier explores the continued centrality of history at a time when novelists (and scholars) candidly acknowledge "the impossibility of fully knowing the past" (204). As she observes, "Whether one protests against events of the past or adopts a cynical attitude because of feelings of dispossession, one is still in reaction to history" (205). However, given that most recent works on the Canadian historical novel are heavily influenced by Hutcheon's writings, they tend to contain similar contradictions. For example, in *Speculative Fictions: Contemporary Canadian Novelists and the Writing of History*, Wyle asserts that historiography is as much a "discursive construct" as fiction (11). If that were truly the case, what would make the historical novel the hybrid genre it supposedly is?
- 4 Shaw states that "the problem of how historical fiction can refer to the past quickly spreads to realist reference in general, then to fictional reference in general, then to reference itself" (541).
- 5 One of the more humorous motifs in the novel is how a "homely" man like Dumont, an "ugly animal," as he describes himself, "captured such a lovely wife" (13, 54).
- 6 Although Silver gives the first name of Dumont's wife as "Madelaine," I use the regular spelling to avoid confusion.
- 7 Vanderhaeghe is himself the author of a short story about Dumont's purported visit to Paris. He focuses primarily on the buffalo hunter's sense of alienation, not only because everything is so different in the "accursed city" but also because of Dumont's physiognomy, the fact he is "arabic-looking" ("Cafe" 40, 38).
- 8 While Zinovich does not provide the first names of either Trémaudan or Demanche, I decided to do so for the sake of clarity. Trémaudan was a French-born historian who

lived in Western Canada for some years and wrote extensively about the Métis. Demanche was a French journalist and magazine editor, who wrote a book about his tour of Canada in 1885.

- 9 “Signposts of Fictionality” is the title of chapter 7 in Cohn’s book (109-31)
 10 Adair discusses a case rather unlike Zinovich’s, that of Naomi Campbell, whose novel *Swan* apparently was written by its “editor,” Caroline Upcher (227).

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Unever this gently

Unever this gently—
sever consequently
autumn all our hours
over with rustle,
red, and clover
has left us
restless and hoping.
Could white ever
succeed this?—

succeed to
quiet our needless
flaming
when one summer
refuses

us.

The “Epistolary Method” and the Rhetoric of Assimilation in Bacqueville de La Potherie’s *Histoire de l’Amérique septentrionale*

The representation of the Other in ethnographic writing from the Renaissance and Early Modern period has been the focus of much critical attention in recent years. Discussions on “early contrasts between the ‘decadence’ of Europe and New World ‘virtue’” in particular have contributed to the debate on the so-called myth of the Noble Savage (Chiappelli xix).¹ The purpose of this article is to consider the role of epistolary rhetoric in an example of early Canadian history, Bacqueville de La Potherie’s *Histoire de l’Amérique septentrionale* (1722), and in so doing, to contribute to the discussion on “the discursive nature of the new world” (Turner 10). The well-established epistolary practices used by La Potherie highlight and to some extent shape his representation of the new world. This effect is particularly evident in his descriptions of Aborigines and in his analysis of the role they played throughout the Iroquois wars and peace negotiations in New France in the latter part of the seventeenth century.

Alan Viala asserts that French epistolary writing is characterized by an underlying tension between reality and fiction (183): the letter is presented as an authentic document, but there is an element of fiction at work as well, inasmuch as the letter constitutes an exercise in rhetoric. My primary interest is in this rhetorical or “fictional” aspect of La Potherie’s *Histoire*.

Bacqueville de La Potherie (1663-1736) held various posts in the French Marine in the late seventeenth century and took part in Pierre Le Moyne d’Iberville’s successful expedition to drive the English out of Hudson Bay in 1697. He went on to write an eyewitness account of that voyage, which appeared in the first volume of his *Histoire de l’Amérique septentrionale*.

Three subsequent volumes contain information on the governments of New France as well as descriptions of life in the colony and in Aboriginal societies. The bulk of the book, however, focuses on events of the second half of the seventeenth century: the military conflicts and the peace negotiations in New France which led up to the peace treaty of 1701, known as the *Grande Paix* or Grand Settlement. Although some of the book's material is undoubtedly based on his own encounters with Aboriginal representatives, La Potherie also borrows heavily from earlier unpublished accounts to which he had access while he was in New France, such as the journals of Nicolas Perrot which contained first-hand observations (Pouliot 422). Since these earlier accounts are no longer available, La Potherie's book has long been considered a valuable source of information on New France.²

While most of La Potherie's *Histoire* takes the form of letters addressed to various individuals, it undoubtedly targets a larger audience.³ Indeed, his "letters," like much French epistolary literature, may be linked to an ancient tradition of letter writing, most notably the Ciceronian model in which the primary aim of the writer is not to confide in a friend about personal matters but to address discussion of public topics to a wider audience (Viala 170). Like all writing about Canada during the French regime, La Potherie's *Histoire* was aimed at readers in France. Given that earlier texts from New France, such as Marc Lescarbot's *Histoire de la Nouvelle France* published in 1609, had a positive impact on France's commitment to its colonial presence in North America (Gilmore 525), it is quite reasonable to assume that La Potherie had similar designs in producing his own version of the "History of North America" (which in fact was limited to New France and only extended as far as Hudson Bay).

What is of greater interest to modern scholars is that La Potherie's *Histoire* was one of the first formal histories of the French presence in North America to include detailed descriptions of Aboriginals. His descriptions seem to avoid both the myth of the Noble Savage as well as its negative counterpart, the "degenerate savage" (Beaulieu 10). La Potherie's account is certainly ambiguous and at times inconsistent: while generally steeped in the language of stereotypes prevalent in early contact literature—for instance, the "Savages" are frequently characterized as blood-thirsty, vengeful, and duplicitous—it also reveals a certain admiration for Aboriginals. In some instances, this relatively positive representation is offered in contrast to the "corrupt ways" of the Old World (a familiar device in early contact literature), yet it is not to be confused with the image of uncorrupted inno-

cence which many equate with the Noble Savage. In his depiction of Aboriginals, La Potherie relies on the theory of human nature and self-love, or *amour-propre*, developed by the French moralist tradition. This theory would have been very familiar to his earliest readers since it was given wide circulation in French literary and social circles in the second half of the seventeenth century and well into the eighteenth century. In applying this view of human nature, La Potherie (like many Europeans writing about the new world) “construct[s] a point of view from which new world experience would be coherent and intelligible” (Turner 10-11). To put it in slightly stronger terms, he borrows from French moralist writers in order to tame the savage otherness; the result is what Réal Ouellet has described as “l’apprivoisement de l’inquiétante étrangeté [qui] se produit quand un ensemble de référents permettent d’intégrer métaphoriquement l’Autre dans son propre espace culturel” (“Sauvages” 121). Focusing on La Potherie’s epistolary method reveals how he frames his account of Aboriginals in terms that his audience, composed primarily of members of elite French society, will recognize and understand. My aim in analyzing the rhetoric of La Potherie’s *Histoire* is not to measure the accuracy of his representation of Aboriginals and New France, but rather to examine how his form and his audience determine that representation.

The theory of *amour-propre* developed by such writers as Pierre Nicole and Blaise Pascal in seventeenth-century France provided insights into the motivations governing human relationships in society, particularly the desire to exert control over others. *Amour-propre* was seen as a sign of the basic corruptness of human nature. Surprisingly, in its enlightened form, it could also be seen as a positive attribute, one that, according to La Potherie, was possessed by the military leaders of New France and their enemies, the Iroquois. (That such a vice could be seen as a virtue is perhaps less surprising when one considers the paradox of man’s “grandeur et misère” as described by Pascal.) The epistolary form present in three of La Potherie’s four volumes implicitly acknowledges the importance of *amour-propre* in the writing and reading processes, for the letter writer must flatter the reader in order to persuade him or her. This appeal to the reader’s self-image, which is of course a fundamental precept of rhetoric in general, takes on particular importance in the ceremonial rhetoric of epistolary writing. Examining La Potherie’s *Histoire* in the light of *amour-propre* reveals the extent to which this view of human nature underlies his epistolary rhetoric and thus shapes his representation of Aboriginals.

From Epistolary Rhetoric to the Rhetoric of Assimilation

In his preface to the third volume, La Potherie introduces the term “epistolary method” (a “method” he had already used in the first volume but had dropped for the second): “Je me suis servi de la méthode Epistolaire pour développer années par années tous les mouvemens de la dernière guerre qu’il y a eû entr’eux & nous, & nos Alliez” (3.ii-iii).⁴ Although there are other examples of epistolary writing during the age of exploration and colonialism,⁵ none seems as ambitious in scope as La Potherie’s. While presenting itself as history, La Potherie’s book is also a travel narrative, already well established as a “popular” literary genre by the seventeenth century. Moreover, there are elements of history, geography, anthropology, and linguistics, even though they bear little resemblance to the modern disciplines. For instance, at the beginning of volume III, he provides a glossary of Native metaphors and metonymies—“Termes et expressions des sauvages”—specifically related to war. The epistolary structure allows the author to stray from the chronological narrative and to tackle a number of topics in no particular order; indeed, one finds identical passages repeated in letters addressed to different individuals.

La Potherie’s use of the term “method” seems somewhat curious—epistolary writing is usually seen as a spontaneous form of expression. In fact, La Potherie’s text is not comprised of authentic letters in the modern sense. One might consider by way of contrast another epistolary text on New France from the same period, Lahontan’s *Voyages*, first published in 1702–1703. In a series of letters addressed to a network of friends and associates, Lahontan gives voice to his personal experiences and impressions of Canada.⁶ In La Potherie’s letters, we find virtually no personal reflections, not even in his eyewitness account of Iberville’s expedition to Hudson Bay. La Potherie’s “epistolary method” more closely resembles that of Charlevoix in *Histoire et Description générale de la Nouvelle-France* (1744), a work which, according to Réal Ouellet, owes more to rhetoric than to authentic epistolary communication (“Épistolarité” 184–85). Apart from a few ready-made phrases (such as “You see, Monsieur” or “As I mentioned to you earlier”), the only true epistolary passages in La Potherie’s *Histoire* are located at the beginning of each chapter, where one finds a kind of dedicatory letter combined with a preface. Some of La Potherie’s dedicatees occupy high places in society, in which case the epistolary preamble follows “the classical regime of dedication as tribute to a protector and/or benefactor (acquired or hoped for)” (Genette 118). Other letters follow a pattern that would

become more prevalent in the nineteenth century, when, for instance, “the addressee [was] more apt to be a colleague or a mentor capable of appreciating [the letter’s] message” (Genette 125). In letters that fall into this second category, La Potherie refers admiringly to the voyages and military exploits of his correspondents (1.2; 1.115-16).

In the three volumes of the book in which the “epistolary method” is employed, this rhetorical device engages the reader in a dialogue between Europe and the New World. While one must generally be suspicious of Native discourse relayed through the prism of European representation, the dialogue is not so much between Europeans and Aborigines, but between the elite of French society and the colonial representatives of New France.

La Potherie strives to position himself as a kind of mediator in this dialogue: “Vous me permettrez, Madame, de vous dire que je suis devenu un véritable Iroquois. Souffrez donc que je vous introduise dans le nouveau monde par la Lettre que j’ai l’honneur de vous écrire” (1.198). This discursive positioning is somewhat ambiguous: while he claims to be well acquainted with the ways of the French court, he refers to himself in several letters as a man from a New World (“homme d’un Nouveau Monde”). Little is known about his early life, and there seems to be some confusion as to his place of birth: according to Léon Pouliot in the *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, he was born in Paris (421), but La Potherie claims Guadeloupe as his birthplace and refers to himself as a “Caraïbe” (1.311). La Potherie also presents himself as an “Amériquin” (which at that time could mean a Native of North or South America) and even an Iroquois.

Through their strategies of address, the letters appeal to the manners of the French court, a place at first presented by La Potherie as the complete opposite of the New World. In this opposition one naturally finds a hierarchy that devalues the colony and its inhabitants at the expense of French society, but this is at least partially attributable to the strategy of *captatio benevolentiae* found at the beginning of each letter: in order to ingratiate himself with the reader, the writer humbles not only himself but that New World which he purports to represent. Indeed, he claims to have no greater ambition than to amuse his correspondents by distracting them momentarily from their more serious endeavours. La Potherie even goes so far as to admit that his account of the colony might be inappropriate, as, for example, in a letter addressed to a lady with refined literary tastes: “Que diront les Dames de la Cour, quand elles verront que je vous mets à la tête d’une lettre qui ne parle que d’Iroquois” (1.311). The letter is presented as repay-

ment for a kind service which the addressee has provided to the writer. If it were not so, taking up his pen would be an indiscreet gesture, in spite of its ultimate function of instructing readers in a useful and positive way. La Potherie's attitudes towards writing and authorship clearly belong to the French *ancien régime*: "Si vous ne m'avez permis de vous faire la relation d'une partie de mon Voyage de l'Amerique Septentrionale, je n'aurois eü garde de prendre cette liberté" (1.1). Here he employs a well-known device of classical rhetoric (which the *captatio benevolentiae* depends upon): namely, self-effacement, a variation of the Ciceronian concept of *humilis*. The worthiness of the addressee must be asserted, in contrast with the letter writer's own unworthiness. Ultimately, though, it is the pact between writer and addressee that authorizes him to produce his account: "La reception que vous m'avez faite à la Cour a été si gracieuse, que je me croi obligé de répondre à toutes vos honnêtez par un trait d'Histoire qui regarde l'établissement du Nord du Canada" (1.139).

On a number of occasions La Potherie characterizes himself as an "Iroquois," undoubtedly in a playful reference to the cultural phenomenon of "ensauvagement," that is, Europeans "going native" or assimilating to Native culture.⁷ Although humble self-presentation belongs to the ceremonial aspect of epistolary rhetoric, it also partakes of a theme developed extensively by the French moralist tradition: the basic corruptness of human nature as reflected by its inconstancy. Within this theme, one finds such baroque motifs as mutability and metamorphosis, which La Potherie attempts to demonstrate by using himself as a case in point: "Vous avez été surpris sans doute quand vous avez appris ma metamorphose, ce que c'est que la bizarrerie & l'inconstance du cœur humain. Je suis presentement un Iroquois, & vous me permettrez que je vous entretienne de quelques faits qui regardent cette Nation" (4.83). It should be noted, however, that when he refers to himself as a "man from a New World," or even an Iroquois, he is not merely being modest or humble or suggesting that he is unworthy of his distinguished correspondent's attention; he is also presenting his credentials as an authority on the subject at hand.⁸

La Potherie's treatment of that subject had serious implications. Given the context of constant war with Aborigines and other European powers, it is not surprising that one encounters a propagandistic element in early French ethnographic writing. It is logical for La Potherie to address his letters to specific individuals linked to the Court who would be in a position to influence royal policy. A letter by the missionary Bobé addressed to the

Intendant of New France, included at the end of volume IV, commends La Potherie's *Histoire* as a political tool:

Vous voyez par là, Monsieur, que la lecture du Livre de Monsieur de la Potherie sera agreable au Public, & qu'elle ne sera pas inutile à ceux qui sous les ordres du Roi ont soin de ce qui regarde la Nouvelle France, puisqu'il leur fera connoître qu'il est de la dernière importance de prendre toutes les mesures convenables pour empêcher que les Anglois & les Iroquois ne débauchent les Nations Alliées des François, ou ne les engagent à se faire la guerre les unes avec les autres que pour ruïner par ce moyen notre commerce, & nous obliger d'abandonner le país, afin de s'emparer de l'un & de l'autre. (4.270-71)

This closing letter by Bobé displays an adversarial mentality that immediately strikes one as being at odds with La Potherie's more tolerant commentary on Aborigines. However, the negative characterization of the Iroquois nations and their English allies found in Bobé's comments is also evident in La Potherie's narrative and descriptive sections, though not in his introductory or epistolary passages, which tend to praise the Iroquois. This discrepancy may be attributed in part to the gap which exists between the writing present and the historical past. Epistolary writing creates the illusion of present time—both that of the writer and the reader. Given that a general peace had just been reached close to the time La Potherie completed the book, the more favourable representation of the Iroquois in the epistolary sections could be interpreted as a conciliatory gesture towards former enemies. Perhaps a more likely (if somewhat cynical) explanation is that the threat once posed by those frequently referred to throughout La Potherie's *Histoire* as "sauvages avides de sang" had been neutralized: since the Iroquois were no longer deemed a great threat to the colony's prosperity, the reader was now at liberty to admire their more "positive" character traits.

In any event, as Maurice Lemire has pointed out in his recent study of the literature of New France (107), La Potherie's book is less polemical than most, and at least attempts to present an impartial view of the New World and its inhabitants, as well as of events that transpired between the French and the Aborigines. However, certain comments on key French figures such as Frontenac do border on hagiography: "Il étoit l'amour & les délices de la Nouvelle France, la terreur des Iroquois & le père des Nations Sauvages aliées des François" (1.244). But is claiming that La Potherie presents Aborigines sympathetically simply an attempt to seek out "isolated bits of positive rhetoric within a context of overall negativity," to borrow a phrase from anthropologist Ter Ellingson (50)? There are in fact several examples of "negativity" both in the descriptions of peoples and in the narrative of

the wars and peace negotiations. It could be argued, nonetheless, that in the instances of tolerance or even praise, particularly of the Iroquois Nations, there is an underlying rhetorical strategy linked to the discourse of assimilation. Indeed, Ellingson himself, in his study of the early ethnographic writing of New France, has pointed to the existence of a policy of “‘Frenchifying’ the Indians by assimilating them as near-equals in what was effectively a French-Indian confederation, recognizing and promoting their ‘good’ qualities as a basis for the limited amount of political and religious tutelage they would need to share in the future developments of [. . .] the new Golden Age in America” (107). Such a policy is undoubtedly reflected in some of the literature of New France during that period of seemingly endless conflict and territorial struggle. In La Potherie’s *Histoire*, the epistolary format provides the means for a rhetorical version of this assimilation.

Each letter begins with a flattering portrait of the addressee. The epistolary method creates a mirror effect: not only is there this flattering image of the individual to whom the letter is addressed, but in some instances the content of the letter itself is adjusted to the addressee’s particular circumstances. For instance, in a letter to the King’s physician, La Potherie discusses illnesses to which settlers and travellers are prone, such as scurvy (1.189). In a letter to a lady of the court, he pleads the case for Canadian women, whose manners are not as bizarre or “sauvage” as one might imagine (1.366). In a letter addressed to another lady of the court, La Potherie attempts to smooth the transition from the discourse of polite flattery to a treatise on the Iroquois wars by providing a portrait of Mlle des Verchères, a fourteen-year old girl purported to have successfully defended her fort against an Iroquois attack: “Vous y verrez en passant un trait de valeur d’une Canadienne de naissance, dont les actions sont d’une véritable Amazone” (3.15). Finally, in a letter addressed to a notable member of the clergy, whom he describes as a “second Augustine,” La Potherie discusses the vital role of eloquence in public affairs before describing the impressive rhetorical skills of an Aboriginal chief acting as a mediator in the peace negotiations between the French and the Iroquois (4.83-84).

Once La Potherie has produced a flattering portrait of his addressee, he is able to point out certain qualities which Aboriginals and the addressee both possess: “Vous jugerez, Madame, par la lettre que j’ai l’honneur de vous écrire, de la délicatesse d’esprit des Peuples Alliez de la Nouvelle France, & de la bonté de leur cœur. [. . .] ces Peuples que l’on traite en France comme des Sauvages, méritent que l’on ait pour eux d’autres sentimens” (3.194-95).

La Potherie's praise of the French allies extends also to their former enemies, the Iroquois Nations, who constituted one of the greatest sources of disruption in the colony. Certainly La Potherie conveys the terror that must have gripped the early settlers of New France: "[...] rien au monde n'est plus cruel que la guerre des Iroquois. Le Païsan, ou l'Habitant ne mange pour lors son pain qu'en tremblant. Quiconque sort de son habitation n'est pas sûr d'y rentrer. [...] Le Voyageur ne va guerres que la nuit" (4.60). Yet one of La Potherie's stated ambitions is to rid his French readers of the prejudices that prevent them from fully appreciating the merits of these Nations. He expresses admiration for the Iroquoian peoples by characterizing them as courageous and therefore worthy opponents of the French: "Jamais ces peuples n'ont fait plus éclater leur valeur que depuis dix à douze ans, les François ont avoué eux-mêmes qu'ils étoient nez pour la guerre, & quelques maux qu'ils nous ayent faits nous les avons toûjours estimez" (3.2-3). This praise gives rise to an analogy: the Iroquois wars in North America are comparable to the wars with the English and the Dutch in Europe, in terms both of the heroic ethic displayed and of the political stakes involved (3.52).

The rhetorical aspect of these letters, which is to a large extent required by polite society and its protocols governing writing practices, creates an exchange in which La Potherie offers to share his knowledge of the New World as payment for services rendered by the addressee. This pact provides an opportunity to open up a dialogue between the two worlds, albeit one in which Aboriginal customs and thought are described by means of European cultural references. The use of European references to describe new worlds and their inhabitants was fairly prevalent in early ethnographic writing. Such references undoubtedly reveal a "need to rationalize New World peoples, to incorporate them into Europe's scale of values" (Dickason 55). Certainly these cultural references tell us a good deal about his readers. La Potherie wonders, for instance, what Cartesians would think of the Aboriginals' reverence of the beaver, which is at odds with Descartes' view of animals as purely mechanical beings. The writer claims to share this reverence, having himself seen evidence of their human qualities (1.133). There are also several references to classical antiquity in La Potherie's text: for example, the frenetic activity of the "Jongleur" (shaman or medicine man) is likened to that of Virgil's Sybille producing oracles (1.127); Aboriginals react to the arrival of a French ship in their waters as if it were a "Trojan horse" (2.137). These references are not surprising when one considers the

vast body of new world literature from the Renaissance and early Modern period which engaged in assimilations of Native peoples to Greco-Roman models of representation, thus evoking a kind of Golden Age; Montaigne's essay on cannibals comes to mind, for instance (Todorov 303). While La Potherie does not explicitly engage in such idealizing exercises, he does nonetheless hint at a past Golden Age for the Iroquois Nation from which they have already degenerated as a result of the arrival of the French:

On a crû avec raison que Dieu avoit rendu l'Iroquois superieur à toutes les Nations voisines qu'il a détruites, à cause qu'il étoit plus honnête que les autres Sauvages, mais à present il tend à sa ruïne, Dieu l'a abandonné aux François qui ont brûlé leurs Villages, pris ou tué leur Vieillards, & par consequent détruit leurs conseils, après-quoi le desordre s'est mis parmi eux. (3.15-16)

While one may be tempted to interpret this passage as proof of La Potherie's critical view of European incursions into the Aboriginal way of life, perhaps reminiscent of Lahontan's "accusation that the Savage had degenerated because of the European" (Ouellet and Tremblay 165), the reference to God puts La Potherie's position into focus: this is all part of His plan. In this respect La Potherie reinterprets events in the spirit of the Jesuit missionaries who generally believed that Aborigines, particularly the Iroquois, were in league with the Devil unless, or until, converted to Christianity. Their suffering, according to the Jesuits, was merely a sign that they had been abandoned by God, who used the French as instruments of their destruction (Berthiaume 123). Such a passage is nonetheless fascinating as one is hard pressed not to read a level of ambiguity in La Potherie's views: to what extent does he actually share the Jesuit view of Aborigines?

Certainly La Potherie's praise of Aborigines can be attributed in some measure to the belief that they have been converted to Christianity and therefore somehow redeemed. Their natural goodness has been "perfected" by their new faith: "Je vous ay dit, Monseigneur, tout ce qu'il y a de bon dans leur maniere de vivre, la Foi n'a fait que perfectionner cet état de Sauvage" (3.40). La Potherie treats us to a number of "inspiring and edifying" examples of the sincerity and fervour of Aborigines converted to Christianity: in two separate letters, for instance, he repeats the same anecdote involving the war chief Auriouaé who, on his deathbed, was reported to have expressed great regret at not having been present at Christ's crucifixion which he would gladly have avenged by scalping those responsible (1.358 and 4.91).

The notion that Aborigines possess a natural goodness that can only be perfected by Christianity leads us to reconsider the popular concept of the

Noble Savage. Much of the debate on the usefulness or accuracy of this concept stems at least in part from confusion over the evolving meanings of the first term. “Noble” is generally understood to refer to a universal moral quality rather than a hierarchical distinction as defined by the system of social orders. However, during the *ancien régime* in France, the two meanings usually went together: the hereditary nobility was believed to possess qualities—moral fortitude and physical courage—not seen elsewhere. While there is evidence to suggest that during the early period of contact Aboriginals were often compared to the European peasantry (Dickason 144), La Potherie’s view of the nobility of the “sauvages” is not dissimilar from that of earlier writers of New France such as Marc Lescarbot who, at the beginning of the seventeenth century, was struck by the privileges enjoyed by Aboriginals, such as hunting, which in Europe were strictly limited to the nobility (Ellingson 23). There seems to be a general tendency among the writers of early travel narratives, whether they considered Aboriginals as peasants or nobles, to assimilate in some way Native social structures to the European social order.

Even in the graphic descriptions of torture and mistreatment of prisoners at the hands of the Iroquois (and these abound in La Potherie’s *Histoire*), he manages to reconcile the cruelty of the Iroquois with the claim that they deserve respect and admiration.⁹ The author formulates this paradox at the close of one letter: “enfin aussitôt que cette victime a expiré, ils lui arrachent le Coeur; ils sucent le sang, & coupent le corps en plusieurs morceux qu’ils mangent. Tel est le caractère de la plus redoutable Nation qui soit dans l’Amérique, qui d’ailleurs sont très humains & très généreux avec ceux qui deviennent leurs amis” (3.50). His analysis of the Iroquois’ treatment of prisoners is not at odds with the European view that the treatment individuals receive is determined by their rank in society: “[the Iroquois] mesurent la peine à la qualité, parce qu’ils disent qu’un Officier doit avoir naturellement plus de valeur qu’un simple soldat, & qu’il est plus capable de faire paraître en ce moment plus de courage; ils s’acharnent donc davantage après lui” (3.48). Certainly one must keep in mind that La Potherie addresses many of his letters to members of polite society for whom the realities of war are somewhat removed. He therefore takes into account the “shock factor” of his subject matter, all the while introducing a kind of relativism that allows him to find common ground for his French readers and the Aboriginals about whom he writes. In one passage, for instance, he describes the courage displayed by an Elder who is being tortured by his captors:

Nos Sauvages lui firent souffrir tous les maux imaginables, il endura tous ces tourmens avec une égalité, une presence d'esprit & un courage digne d'un Iroquois. [. . .] Cette constance & cette valeur ne tient point de la ferocité; il y a des Heros parmi ces Barbares, comme chez les Nations les plus policées, & ce que l'on traiteroit parmi nous de brutalité, passe pour vertu dans un Iroquois. (3.279)

Harsh treatment of one's enemies is presented here not as criminal or unnatural behaviour, but rather as a way of honouring the enemy by allowing them to prove their courage. In the minds of La Potherie and his readers, there is nothing inherently contradictory in the concept of the Noble Savage: all nobility is "savage," in so far as the original, primary function of the nobility was to wage war. The belief that cruel and inhumane treatment constitutes a badge of honour bestowed by one's enemies would not be so foreign to the aristocratic ideology of early modern Europe; even a certain degree of tolerance toward cannibalism may be attributed to the code of honour engrained in the social elite of the *noblesse d'épée* (Lestringant 81). Ultimately, the more positive aspects of La Potherie's representation of Aboriginals may be attributed to a militaristic rhetorical strategy, which consists of building up one's enemies in order to underscore one's own strengths. By recognizing the Iroquois as worthy and courageous adversaries, La Potherie could glorify the French military leaders and thereby contribute to the survival and expansion of the colony.

Character and Nation Building

In many instances La Potherie seems to withhold moral judgments on the Aboriginals, whom he portrays as extremely clever and subtle in their conduct, a characterization undoubtedly belonging to the topos of the "Reasoning Savage" which began to emerge in the seventeenth century (Ouellet and Tremblay 164). In these descriptions, the term *politique* is used to refer to their skill in conducting affairs throughout the period of conflict and peace negotiations: "Les Sauvages ont assez de politique pour ne paroître se défier les uns des autres, & sur des nouvelles qu'on leur annonce ils suspendent toujours leurs avis, sans témoigner qu'ils croient souvent que l'on ne dit pas la verité" (2.119). *Politique* implies, however, an element of deception, with negative connotations that are more fully developed elsewhere: "L'esprit du Sauvage est difficile à connoître, il parle d'une manière & pense de l'autre, si l'intérêt de son ami a du rapport avec le sien propre il est serviable, sinon il prend toujours la voye qui l'acommode le mieux pour arriver à ses fins, il fait consister son courage à tromper l'ennemi par mille artifices &

fourberies” (2.262). In spite of its negative connotations, being *politique* is recognized as an essential quality in conducting affairs of state, especially in times of war. Obviously it is not a quality to be wished for in one’s enemies:

Le Baron qui a été un des plus politiques Chefs de cette Nation [Iroquoise], nous a donné bien de la peine par toutes ses ruses & ses stratagèmes. Tantôt il étoit de nos amis, & tantôt il renversoit tous les projets des autres alliez qui ne respiroient que la destruction des Iroquois. On peut dire qu’ils sont extrêmement politiques, traîtres dans leurs mouvemens, & extrêmement orgueilleux. Ils ont beaucoup plus d’esprit que les autres Sauvages. Ils sont genereux, ils ont de la délicatesse dans leurs entretiens, ils parlent avec justice, ils sont insinuans, & il est rare qu’ils soient la dupe de qui que ce soit. (1.227)

But in European statesmen who are able to uncover the plots and intrigues of opposing nations, *politique* is a quality to be valued. For example, La Potherie begins one letter (4.193-94) addressed to the former French ambassador to Venice by praising the latter’s successes in dealing with one of the most *politique* and subtle nations on earth; this opening then allows him to describe the various machinations and stratagems employed by the First Nations of North America, especially the Iroquois. It is this element of deceitfulness that is tied into the theory of human nature and *amour-propre* developed by French moralist writers such as Pascal and Nicole.

The use of this theory to describe the machinations of the French and Iroquois constitutes one of the most intriguing examples of rhetorical assimilation in La Potherie’s *Histoire*. In references to the French court, La Potherie reveals a view of human nature that plainly relies on the French moralist tradition; its relevance to Aborigines is only implicit to begin with, but by the end of the book a full-blown comparison has emerged. First La Potherie describes the court as a dangerously deceptive place (“épineux” or thorny) (1.229). Later, in another letter, he sings the praises of a courtier to whom the letter is addressed; he does so by enumerating all the vices which thankfully the addressee does not happen to possess, but which are evidently all too typical of courtiers in general. Most notable among the addressee’s virtues is his love of the King which is transparent and selfless (3.252). In other words, he lacks the vices of other courtiers—disguise and self-interest, both products of that underlying and all-powerful force known as *amour-propre*. In another letter, La Potherie elaborates further on the nature of *amour-propre* in order to underscore the differences between human nature as described by the pessimistic moralists and the character displayed by the peoples of the New World, both French and Aboriginal:

C'est avec raison, Monsieur, que le Sage nous dit de ne nous point fier à nôtre Ennemi, il connoissoit bien le cœur de l'homme & savoir que les protestations d'amitié d'un fourbe sont autant de pièges qu'il nous tend.

Que vous dirai-je, Monsieur du caractere de l'Iroquois, il parle & pense tout autrement, il se méfie de tout le monde, & tâche de penetrer la pensée de ceux avec lesquels il a affaire, parce qu'il apprehende toujôurs qu'on ne lui fasse ce qu'il est prêt de faire aux autres.

Le Comte de Frontenac les connoissoit si bien qu'il ne se fioit à eux qu'autant que sa prudence lui faisoit découvrir leurs desseins. Toutes les Ambassades qu'on lui avoit faites jusques alors auroient flâté agreablement un cœur qui se laisse toucher par le doux poison de la vanité & d'amour-propre, mais il avoit trop de discernement pour ne les pas prévenir. (4.3)

In this passage we can see that La Potherie's praise of the Iroquois blends into that of Frontenac: both display an intelligence at odds with the self-delusion resulting from *amour-propre*. (In this respect, Frontenac stands in contrast to another French figure in the Iroquois wars, La Salle, who was blind to the plots being hatched against him and the colony [2.139], a blindness characterized by La Potherie as "surprising" in a French general.) The human heart, enslaved to *amour-propre*, puts on a variety of disguises in order to deceive others, a process which ultimately leads to self-deception. The individual governed by *amour-propre* becomes so used to disguising himself in order to fulfill his secret desires that he eventually becomes unrecognizable to himself. Neither the French nor the Iroquois have fallen into this trap; they are not the dupes of *amour-propre*. On the contrary, they display what the jansenist Pierre Nicole calls an enlightened *amour-propre*, for they use reason to accomplish their true goals, of which they never lose sight (Nicole 381). Although the theory of *amour-propre* developed in seventeenth-century France was used to explain human interaction in polite society, according to Nicole, even in times of peace men are at war with each other (382-83). La Potherie uses this theory to explain why the French and the Iroquois have been such formidable enemies. In short, Frontenac and the Iroquois chiefs display a type of thinking that, according to Pascal, is characteristic of the *habiles*, a term the moralist reserves for those few individuals who have reached a higher order of intelligence and intuitiveness. Such men never let others know their true thoughts, but exercise a "*pensée de derrière*" or hidden thought (Pascal 70). La Potherie uses the term to describe Frontenac: "Il ne falloit pas un homme moins habile que Monsieur de Frontenac pour réduire une pareille Nation sous l'obeïssance du Roi" (4.81). This is in contrast to the *demi-habiles* who not only underestimate their enemies but make the mistake of saying what they think, thereby

revealing their shortcomings. Both Frontenac and the Iroquois chiefs are presented by La Potherie as adept moralists, that is, intuitive readers of the human heart; they are skilful at exploiting the weaknesses of their enemies.

La Potherie's representation of Native character can be better understood in the context of efforts by the French to transform Native chiefs into French leaders. For example they tried to assimilate Native political structures to the European concept of power: "the French envisioned chiefs who would command and thus reject consensual politics and noncoercive power. The chiefs would become governors of petty principalities and agents of the French state" (R. White 145). This notion certainly accords with La Potherie's representation of the Aboriginal chiefs as worthy adversaries and allies, almost on an equal footing with the French generals. The reader is meant to come away with the impression that the French and Iroquois, although bitter enemies in the past, are poised to form the solid core of a new and enduring Franco-Aboriginal alliance in this New World configuration.

La Potherie's use of letters seems at first rather arbitrary and even insignificant. Yet the epistolary method allows La Potherie to deal with the difficult challenge faced by writers of early contact literature: that of finding adequate discursive means to represent the unknown. It allows him to establish a dialogue in which he presents himself as the spokesman for the Aboriginals, claiming to have been transformed into a veritable "sauvage." Through this dialogue, he can more effectively persuade his readers of the centrality of the Aboriginal peoples in helping to shape North America's destiny. Only later would historians move Aboriginals to the margins of the picture.

NOTES

- 1 Such studies include those by H. White (1976), Dickason (1984), Ouellet (1989), Todorov (1989), Delège (1991), Ouellet and Tremblay (2001), and Ellingson (2001).
- 2 There is a good deal of uncertainty surrounding the publication of this book: although La Potherie submitted his manuscript to the royal censor in 1702, he did not receive the *privilège*, or permission to publish, until fourteen years later, for the book was deemed to contain information of a sensitive nature that could help the English during the War of the Spanish Succession. In any case, the first known edition is from 1722, although an earlier edition may have appeared in 1716 (Pouliot 422).
- 3 Here I disagree with Yves Cazaux who, in his introduction to the 1997 edition of La Potherie's *Histoire*, claims that all the letters (except for a few clearly addressed to a woman) are addressed to an unidentified male correspondent who liked to travel (Cazaux 14). A closer reading reveals that La Potherie addresses his letters to several different individuals—friends, relatives, acquaintances, military men, ladies of the French

- Court, important government officials—some of whom he even mentions by name.
- 4 The volume and page references to the 1722 edition are given in parentheses. I have not modernized the spelling or punctuation.
 - 5 This would include not only works such as Lahontan's *Voyages* (1702-1703) and Charlevoix's *Histoire et Description générale de la Nouvelle-France* (1744), but also a large body of religious writing from the seventeenth century, including Marie de l'Incarnation's *Correspondance* and the *Relations des Jésuites*.
 - 6 For a detailed analysis of Lohontan's use of the epistolary form, see Réal Ouellet, "Épistolarité et relations de voyage," 191-97.
 - 7 La Potherie discusses this issue in another passage where he attempts to explain, and even sympathize with, the behaviour of Frenchmen who were reluctant to follow orders they had been given to return to Montreal: "La vie Sauvage est si douce & si tranquille, quelque penchant que l'on puisse avoir pour sa patrie, que rien ne pût faire impression sur leur esprit pour les faire rentrer en eux mêmes" (4.157).
 - 8 "Discursive authority in the early literature of travel [. . .] derives from a different source than it would in other forms of poesis—not from an appeal to higher wisdom or social superiority but from a miming, by the elite, of the simple, direct, unfigured language of perception" (Greenblatt 146).
 - 9 Although far less numerous, there are a number of passages where La Potherie points with approbation to similarly harsh treatment of Aboriginals at the hands of the French. While describing the fate of Aboriginal allies who had strayed from the French (they had their throats cut or were burned alive), he writes: "C'est ainsi, Monsieur, que l'on est contraint en Canada de repousser le feu par le feu. Si le Comte de Frontenac en eût d'abord agi de même avec les Iroquois, il eut arrêté cours à bien des maux" (4.98).

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Ours for the Picking

One day the dozers came, dumpers too,
smeared the ground. The way it was was ours
for the picking, factory seconds.
So we built again. Next time was what
an adjustor calls an act of God,
though this has its other names: *che sarà*
for one, tradition, redundancy. Pickings
remained and again we rose up, again
chose the latest in knobs and shades.
Small birds meanwhile made short work
of the extras in the flaking bark,
the way a gentle-tweezered nurse scrapes
your abrasions to a raw purity, pickings done.

History and Place

An Interview with Daphne Marlatt

Born in Melbourne, Australia, where her British father was stationed during World War II, Daphne Marlatt is a Vancouver poet and writer whose two novels, *Ana Historic* (1988) and *Taken* (1996), weave present and past narratives to explore the lives of contemporary and historical Canadian women. In *Ana Historic*, the narrator, Annie, re-imagines and reconstructs the late-nineteenth-century life of a schoolteacher she is researching, while simultaneously exploring her own past and that of her mother, Ina. All three women struggle to maintain their selfhood in a land that is new to them. In *Taken*, the narrative moves among Sydney's Blue Mountains, Malaysia, and Vancouver, from contemporary Canadian politics with its entanglement in the Gulf War to the Second World War and Japanese internment camps, evoking displacement and loss, both political and personal.

Daphne Marlatt was kind enough to invite me to her Vancouver home when I visited Canada from Australia for the first time. We shared experiences of colonial childhoods, hers in Penang, Malaysia, and mine in Zambia. I was particularly interested in discussing her own particular sense of place, locality and self, and the ways in which she rewrites what she has called "the great diorama of history."

SK I've just read *Taken* for the first time and have re-read *Ana Historic*. What do you see as the relationship between these two texts?

DM There is a conscious connection between them because when I finished writing *Ana Historic* I realized that I wanted to go back and talk about the

mother figure. I felt that she was too much a victim figure in *Ana Historic* and that there wasn't enough of her past to explain why she was like that. So I thought I needed to write a book about *her* young adulthood and the war. I was very interested in talking about how war impacts on civilian women and it just so happened that the Gulf War started at the same time so, of course, it got written in.

SK That idea that you talk about in *Taken* about complicity, both political and personal, is something I'm fascinated with. I'm looking at that uneasy relationship the "white woman" has with indigenous people and with place. Did you mean it in a similar way in *Taken*?

DM Oh, yes. What was a real challenge in the writing was to try and give Esme enough of a consciousness to display resistance so that there could be a critique of the colonial system that she was very much a part of, and yet not have her resistance sound unrealistic, because she *was* a part of it and she was therefore complicit. It was very class-oriented—she definitely benefited from the privilege associated with her class.

SK And, in a way, she was complicit with patriarchy because she propagated those notions about womanhood that she'd been taught.

DM Yes, she did. She didn't have a way of critiquing them and she had a very patriarchal father, so even though she tried to resist him, as in that scene where he's reading the paper and she says she'd like to help the war effort by "manning" one of those "stirrup pumps," she can't. She wants to be a hero, she wants to be brave, but then she's also caught in her own doubts about being "just" a woman, and pregnant at that.

SK Talking about heroes, I wanted to ask you about the italicized voices from the Japanese prisoner-of-war camps in Sumatra. Are we meant to be able to identify them as particular individuals?

DM I thought of them as something like a Greek chorus of women's voices. There's a child and there are women of different ages. I wanted them to be anonymous because that's actually how many of them died—some of them didn't even have markers on their graves. It's something that still isn't really well known, that these women, many of whom came from a very privileged class, were prisoners of war and were treated almost as badly as the Jewish prisoners in Germany. I mean, they weren't annihilated in gas chambers but they starved to death and many of them died from the kinds of diseases you get from living in crowded unsanitary conditions in a tropical climate.

SK Could you comment on the link between the nation and history and personal history in your work?

DM This link fascinates me and it's why I did oral history for a while. I think it's partly to do with coming into a different culture and then wanting to find out a lot about it. When you come in [to a new culture] from outside, you sometimes see things more clearly than you do when you grow up inside it. You see certain kinds of attitudes or mindsets and where they come from and what they lead to. Coastal British Columbia is really the western fringe of Canada, and we feel on the fringe, we have a very disjointed sense of being Canadian. Southern British Columbians feel closer to the States than to the rest of Canada, because it's just across the border, and there's always this sense that Ottawa doesn't really understand BC. So it's an interesting conundrum: what does it mean to be Canadian? Back East we're seen as lotus-eaters, a bit like California with its political extremes and slower pace, with a lot more sensuality in our culture just because this climate is so much more temperate than the rest of the country. Coming from the East with its leafless trees in winter, people are astonished at how everything is green here—this *is* the rainforest, after all.

SK That vivid sense of place that you write about seems to be important wherever you are: not just in Canada but also Malaysia and the Blue Mountains in Sydney in *Taken*. Are you conscious of this in your work?

DM Well, it's both conscious and unconscious. The unconscious part has, again, I think, to do with being an immigrant child and coming from a dangerous place. By the time we left Penang, it was getting quite dangerous because of the Communist guerilla activities there, so we were kept under fairly close surveillance. We lived up Penang Hill and our house was surrounded by jungle so there was obviously a sense of what was lurking in the jungle—not just the snakes or ants but human activity, because there was an attempt to set the hill railway on fire and cut off everybody living up there. When we came here [to Vancouver], the second house we lived in had forest outside the back door (it's now all built up but that part of Grouse Mountain was still heavily wooded then) and we could just go out the back garden gate and play in the woods for hours. It was that tremendous sense of freedom and that sense of just falling in love with the trees, especially the cedars. We had an old stump that we used to love to play in—yes, *in*—it was large enough to hold all three of us. There was a sense of laying claim to the place, of saying, "I want this place to be mine, this is a place where I think I can belong." Because children, even though they don't have any larger political consciousness, are very aware of power relations and the immediate impact of politics. As a child, you can sense conflict, you can see how your parents

feel, even if they don't talk about it when you're present. I don't know what would have happened if we'd gone on living in Penang. I think it would have been interesting to know what sense of belonging or non-belonging I might have had if I had reached adulthood there. Given the times, of course, and Malaysia's nationalization, I think it would have been very difficult to have any sense of belonging. Even as a child, although you feel at the centre of a certain colonial privilege or entitlement, you still sense what you're outside of. We were sad to leave Penang and especially our amah; there was a lot of nostalgia for years. But at the same time there was a tremendous feeling of freedom here: you could go out and leave the adults behind and nobody had to keep an eye on you. You could just run free in the woods and I wanted to get that experience across in the beginning of *Ana Historic*.

The conscious part of it has to do with the time at which I came into writing in the early 1960s, and the group that I was associated with, the TISH group. There wasn't much that had been written about Vancouver then—Earle Birney, Ethel Wilson—these were probably the two best-known writers of the generation that preceded ours. We shared a sense that Vancouver wasn't really on the literary map. So that was the conscious part: I didn't want to be writing about some place where I wasn't actually living and this aspect of the TISH poetic fused with my desire to find out more about this city that I was just beginning to explore as a young adult. In those years when people asked where I came from, I'd say, Oh North Van, which of course was only half true, and it still pleases me when readers who've grown up in North Vancouver say, "It's great to see North Van in your novel."

- SK One of the things that struck me about *Ana Historic* in particular is that, despite this sense of being at home that you've talked about, there's still that sense of being an intruder on someone else's land.
- DM That's much stronger in *Taken*, I think, than it is in *Ana Historic*. But even in *Ana Historic*, there are two things happening there. There is that sense of being an intruder in a non-human environment where all the relationships that count are vegetal or animal. And overlaid on that, there is the fear passed on from Ina about men, men in the woods, partly because of some sensational killings around the time I was growing up.
- SK That reminds me of the "lost child" syndrome that has been so prevalent in many Australian cultural texts, where there is a sense that the landscape can swallow children up because they don't really have a spiritual map of the place that actually belongs to someone else.
- DM Yes, and that's the second thing. If the land belongs to anyone—First Nations

people understand that it doesn't—really it's the first inhabitants who have the deepest sense of the land and we should recognize that. I always thought it was very peculiar that people grew up without much knowledge of indigenous cultures here and that they would name things with imported names when there were perfectly good Salish or Kwakiutl names. I was particularly interested in Kwakiutl [Kwakwaka'wakw] culture on Vancouver Island a little bit north of here. That was partly because I met a woman at UBC, Susan Reid, who was doing a dissertation on the Hamatsa ritual of the Kwakiutl.¹ I had already come into contact with Franz Boas's translation of Hamatsa songs but then I ran up against First Nation property rights, as the songs, even though they were taken by Boas who then translated them, are really the property of the people who inherit these songs, so I didn't go any further with that. But Susan's dissertation talked about the spiritual cosmology of the Kwakiutl and the sense of everything being alive, even the rock you're standing on, and, of course, that resonates for me with what it felt like when I was out in the woods as a child with those giant trees and the wonderful smells of the rainforest and everything being so animate. Their culture [First Nations culture] hasn't lost touch with the understanding that place is actually our mother, place is what nourishes us, that without this sense of place we're dead and, of course, the whole capitalist culture, the global culture, that we're experiencing now works to erase that recognition.

SK That sounds very similar to the Australian Aboriginal sense of place and its immersion in spirituality.

DM Yes, that wonderful sense of the Dreamtime as a vital constant, that the sung story dreams what is past into the now of place, and also in a sense births the singer in that place at the same time. In *Double Negative*, the collaboration Betsy Warland and I wrote together, we touch on this notion, just touch on it, because we were writing the first section as we were crossing the Nullarbor on the train from Sydney to Perth, and we were thinking a lot about the desert.

SK You talk in one of your essays, "Subverting the Heroic in Feminist Writing of the West Coast," about the anti-intellectual, macho culture of pioneer British Columbia with the women characters constantly needing to fight what you call the "great diorama of history." How does your work resist that heroic notion of history?

DM Well, for one thing, women's daily experiences of history have hardly been taken note of, perhaps because there's still an identification of women with the sphere of personal life, domestic life. Much of women's work, a lot of it

caretaking, never enters the records, is a-historic as such. So I've wanted to look at historical events through the filter of women's daily lives, foregrounding the textures of those lives. Women's experiences of war—rape, famine, destruction of their families and homes—are often callously viewed as just “collateral damage” in the grand heroic narrative of war. I think a lot of women don't subscribe to the grand narrative, perhaps because women are the ones who most experience the losses that go along with it. In a wonderful film we saw last night, Jean Renoir's 1937 film, *La Grande Illusion*, about POWs in World War I, there's a German woman with whom one of the escaped French prisoners falls in love and whom she rescues. He doesn't trust her, but she brings these two famished escapees into the farmhouse and feeds them. Later, she points to a photograph of her husband and brothers and names the battle that each died in and turns to them saying, “These were all German victories” and you can hear the quotation marks around the word “victories.” This woman, who could have slid into bitter victimization and fear of “the enemy,” instead had this generosity and could relate to these men as human beings. A quiet kind of heroism of an entirely different order.

SK I'm interested in the underlying sense of violence beneath the domesticated exterior of order. Can you say anything about that notion in your work?

DM There are different kinds of violence, of course, but I think it's endemic wherever you have a colonial situation because you have extreme displacement of the original people. Even though here they were pushed onto reserves and supposedly kept out of sight, they're never really out of mind because the psychological violence of forced deculturation, the problems that stem from that violence, become everyone's problems. I myself had the experience in the 50s of going to a new high school in North Vancouver with two opposed populations, students from a new upper middle-class white suburb and a very few students from the Indian reserve. They came from opposite ends of North Vancouver but were somehow in the same catchment area for the school. At that point in the late 50s, there weren't many Native kids who made it into high school and the ones who did really had a hard time. The art room was my home room and I noticed these kids were good at art. They didn't want to show that they were good at things but you could see they were. Often in the morning the white guys would be hanging around talking about how they'd beaten up a bunch of Indians the night before, and the contrast was violent. There was always this sense of incipient violence or memorialized violence, and I think that was just a metaphor for our whole society.

SK There's also the more subtle kind of violence, like that which keeps women "in their place."

DM Yes, there's that classic division that Simone de Beauvoir in *The Second Sex* pointed out, that women are be-ers and men are do-ers, especially in the culture she was writing about, middle-class urban culture, where women were supposed to "be" first of all feminine, bodies, alluring, accepting, compliant even. In a frontier society, even though the women were doing a lot of hard work, it wasn't acknowledged because it was "just" supportive work for the "real" work the men were doing.

SK Another compelling aspect of your work is the powerful influence of the past on the present and of memory. Can you comment on your use of history?

DM Well, perhaps what triggered it was the very first book I was given when I came to Canada as a child. It was a suede-bound copy of Pauline Johnson's retelling of legends that she had collected from Chief Joe Capilano of the Squamish people. It was called *Legends of Vancouver* and when my great-uncle gave it to me, he said, "Now that you're here, you should find out something about this place." That was a springboard for me. Without it I would never have known a terrain, *this* terrain, animated by the kind of history these stories carry. Of course, it wasn't what is recognized as official history. In fact, it wasn't even good oral history because it was all told in that romanticized, rather Victorian voice of Pauline Johnson's. But it was perfect for a nine-year-old. Official history, written history, interests me because it passes itself off as objective, documentary, as "the facts," when it usually represents the view of an elite or of one privileged historian. Even items in the so-called popular press represent particular journalists' take on what is going on. The question of what gets reported and what doesn't is a huge issue. I'm always interested in what gets left out of any official history. This is what oral history focuses on: the telling details, the daily experience of people who lived through events that later become "author-ized" as historic events—authorized in both senses of the word.

And then there's memory, which is famously unreliable because it tends to carry a fictional component. I like rubbing the edges of document and memory/fiction against one another. I like the friction that is produced between the stark reporting of document, the pseudo-factual language of journalism, and the more emotional, even poetic, language of memory. That's why I used such a hodgepodge of sources in *Ana Historic*: a little nineteenth-century and very local journalism that sounds like a gossip column, a 1906 school textbook, various historical accounts, some contemporary feminist

theory, and a school teacher's diary from 1873 that was completely fictitious. By the time I got to *Taken*, I was interested in another language texture, the colonial British dialect my parents spoke and wrote, with its sprinkling of Malay and Anglo-Indian words. This language carried the textures of their daily experience in contrast to the dramatic black and white language of news reports during the war. I'm still fascinated by the differences in language texture between personal, interior, domestic language and the public, declarative language of the press, which over time reflects larger changes in social consciousness. I'm looking at these textures during the 50s in North Vancouver in the work I'm doing now.

Recorded Monday, 15 July 2002 in Vancouver.

NOTE

- 1 A Kwakwaka'wakw (Kwakiutl) dance ceremony dramatizing myths and personifying mythic creatures. The most important dancer is the Hamatsa or Cannibal Dancer.



Stanzas, Sexes, Seductions

It's good to be neuter.
I want to have meaningless legs.
There are things unbearable.
One can evade them a long time.
Then you die.

The oceans remind me
of your green room.
There are things unbearable.
Scorn, princes, this little size
of dying.

My personal poetry is a failure.
I do not want to be a person.
I want to be unbearable.
Lover to lover, the greenness of love.
Cool, cooling.

Earth bears no such plant.
Who does not end up
a female impersonator?
Drink all the sex there is.
Still die.

I tempt you.
I blush.
There are things unbearable.
Legs alas.
Legs die.

Rocking themselves down,
crazy slow,
some ballet term for it—
fragment of foil, little
spin, little drunk, little do, little oh, alas.

A Residential School Memoir

Basil Johnston's *Indian School Days*

The publication in 1988 of Basil Johnston's *Indian School Days* initiated an explosion of writing about residential schools in Canada. A narrative re-creation of life at the Garnier Residential School for Boys by one of its "former [. . .] inmates" (11), Johnston's memoir helped mobilize a collective response to these institutions.¹ Since its publication, a great deal more attention has been directed to the residential school experience, a chapter of Canadian history that extended from the 1870s to the early 1980s. In the same year that Johnston's residential school memoir was published, Celia Haig-Brown's *Resistance and Renewal: Surviving the Indian Residential School* also appeared. A year later, the CBC aired *Where the Spirit Lives*, a film that depicts the devastating effects of an Anglican residential school on an Akainaa (Blood) community in Alberta. Increased media coverage of residential schools followed over the next two years, including an hour-long special by *The Fifth Estate* and commissioned films broadcast on TVO and VISION.² A number of books on residential schools appeared, including survivor accounts such as Isabelle Knockwood's *Out of the Depths* (1992), autobiographies such as Rita Joe's *Song of Rita Joe* (1996) and Tomson Highway's loosely autobiographical novel, *Kiss of the Fur Queen* (1996), as well as a substantial body of critical writing by Native and non-Native writers.³ The traumatic effects of residential schooling came to be known as "Residential School Syndrome." This belated attention to accounts of the residential schools produced a secondary effect: skepticism about their purpose and intended audience. Do such accounts serve to purge a dominant culture's sense of culpability or to heal a lingering pain in survivors and Native audiences?⁴

Indian School Days, because of its mild, nostalgic tone, could be considered a text that serves the first purpose—that is, of easing the collective guilt for the residential schools. But Johnston’s memoir is a much more resistant text than it might appear. *Indian School Days* intervenes in the historical record with an unofficial version of life in a residential school. “None of the stories recounted in this text will be found recorded in any official or unofficial journals of the Garnier Residential School for Boys,” Johnston writes in his introduction (11). Francis Hart, in his essay, “History Talking to Itself: Public Personality in Recent Memoir” (1979), asserts a similar role for the memoir, distinct from that of institutional history, describing the memoir as “the personal act of repossessing a public world, historical, institutional, collective” (195). “The memoirs are of a person,” Hart further characterizes this genre, “but they are ‘really’ of an event, an era, an institution, a class identity” (195). In her more recent study of the memoir, *Repossessing the World: Reading Memoirs by Contemporary Women* (2002), Helen Buss highlights its value in recording formerly suppressed histories. Her gender-based inquiry emphasizes the appeal of the memoir to those whose experiences and voices have been excluded from official history: “Its concentration on scenes of trauma, initiation, and radical changes in consciousness are performed through the writing, which makes real what the larger culture may not recognize. Set in vivid, scenic recreations of lived experience, the memoir wishes to register as history formerly untold [. . .]” (23). Like critics before her, Buss places the memoir at the junction of history and autobiography. Narrating in a mode that is both historiographic and idiographic, traversing public and local spheres, the memoir “perform[s] the connections between private lives (ones lived by ordinary people who are not direct actors in large events) and the public ideologies that they are both shaped by and resistant to” (Buss 115).

In asserting that the memoir serves writers whose histories have been denied, Buss, however, dismisses the use of the genre by contemporary male writers: “[I]t is women who most often take up the memoir form,” she writes, “for the specific purpose of revising their cultural contexts so that their experience is not excluded” (3). “In doing so,” Buss continues, these female writers “are bringing female gendering to bear on our previously male-gendered narratives of the self and culture” (3). But Johnston, like the female memoirists Buss describes, also uses this genre to recover a “history formerly untold” (23). His work is an instance of a minority male author’s adaptation of this mode, a situation that Buss leaves largely unexamined in her study of gender and genre.

Moreover, Buss argues that the memoir is becoming a predominant mode for female writers because it enables them to explore how their sense of self depends upon community. Contemporary women's memoirs unfold around the narrator's negotiation with her defined community to present a subjectivity and narrative that, in Buss's view, are more relational. "In contemporary times, when 'radical individuality' is becoming more a burden than a blessing, new syntheses of group and individual identity factors are being made," she further points out (4). But while Buss acknowledges these "new syntheses of group and individual identity" that are altering the study of life writing, she tends to overlook the memoir's value to male writers such as Johnston who also wish to articulate a "relational self" (Eakin 43).

Notions about community and self in life writing are linked not only to gender but also to culture. In her essay, "First-Person Plural: Subjectivity and Community in Native American Women's Autobiography," Hertha Sweet Wong examines how the use of the terms "relationality" and "community" in Native writing differs from feminist formulations. Wong identifies context as a key factor in determining notions of community, a qualification with obvious relevance to the type of identity formation at work in *Indian School Days*. Within the setting of the residential school, Johnston and his classmates acquire a sense of community that is familial and gender-specific. Wong suggests that the invocation of community by Native writers can be a conscious strategy to "resist the official tragic narrative of Indian loss and disappearance" (173). Here Wong's and Buss's studies converge: both emphasize how the articulation of a collective identity can be a way to resist silencing, alienation, or imposed identity.

Despite its often light-hearted tone, *Indian School Days* contains an undercurrent of resistance—a resistance traceable to the "contradictory" version of history it presents. Johnston's extended description of the students' defiance of the priests' authority, his subversion of official discourses, and his affirmation of collective solidarity all serve to articulate a collective identity in opposition to the residential school system. Johnston's collective identity also represents a challenge to the theme of cultural defeat so frequent in conventional narratives of post-contact Native life.

"**S**panish!"—thus begins Johnston's memoir. "In its most common applications the word refers to a citizen of Spain, and his or her language, and evokes romantic images of señoritas and dons, matadors and conquistadors, flamenco dancers and Don Quixote, castles and courts

of inquisition” (1). A word clearly unfitted to the northern Ontario village bearing the name, its derivation is the subject of local legend. Johnson retells a commonly told tale of a group of Anishnabe warriors who, around 1750, traveled south into Spanish-occupied territory. Enraptured by the Spanish women they discovered in their foray, the warriors took home with them one “winsome señorita” who then married an Anishnabe chief, named the village, and bore descendents bearing the name Espaniol (5).

Although Johnston casts doubt on the plausibility of this history, it nonetheless serves an important function at the beginning of his memoir. In a role-reversal that runs counter to the process of acculturation typically depicted in colonial chronicles, this inverted conversion tale depicts a Spanish subject adopting an Anishnabe way of life. For Johnston as for his classmates, “Spanish” evokes yet another, stronger set of associations: “It was a word synonymous with residential school, penitentiary, reformatory, exile, dungeon, whippings, kicks, slaps” (6). “Spanish” becomes a synecdoche for the residential schools sustaining the town—St. Peter Claver’s Residential School for Indian Boys (later re-named Garnier Residential School) and St. Joseph’s Residential School for Indian Girls. Downstream from this village, whose “mixture of French, English, Irish, Scottish, half-breeds, full breeds and one Syrian” all “liv[ed] more or less peacefully with one another” (3), are two Indian reservations whose fishing waters were contaminated by the nearby paper mill, whose “affairs and prospects were governed by an ‘Indian agent’ who ruled with an autocratic hand and ill-informed dedication,” and whose “present [. . .] was grim, and the future scarcely better” (4). Disturbing the veneer of the otherwise sleepy Leacockian town of Spanish is the recognition that “what kept the village from extinction [was] ‘the school’” (1). The school provided both entertainment and industry for Spanish, the latter fact disturbingly evident in Johnston’s reminder that the students were under the guardianship of the Minister of Mines and Resources.

These introductory pages of *Indian School Days* cast Johnston in the role of historian, sorting through multiple histories and inserting a new, previously unrecorded account of Spanish. The inverted conversion tale functions as a *petite histoire* or local history of how the village got its name. More importantly for the historical focus of his text, Johnston brings this local history into dialogue with his classmates’ perspective, for immediately following the playful anecdote is Johnston’s more serious commentary on the fear that “Spanish!” evoked in Native children. The señorita’s romantic

captivity recedes as Johnston discusses the real incarceration that he and his classmates experienced. A more critical Johnston emerges, as the forced confinement of Aboriginal children becomes the focus of his introduction. Alternating between anecdotal and argumentative styles, moving from storyteller to historian, Johnston corrects the local accounts of this place with the particular experiences of his classmates.

Johnston's choice of memoir for his residential school account allows this mingling of anecdotal reminiscence and historical revision to continue throughout his text. Using the discursive elasticity of this genre—"a style that is at the same time narrative and essayistic, descriptive and imagistic, factually testimonial and anecdotally fictive" (Buss 2-3)—Johnston depicts the daily operations of the residential school with both humour and incisive criticism. The memoir also offers Johnston a flexible perspective. As Marcus Billson points out, the narrator of a memoir moves freely among the rhetorical stances of participant, spectator, and historian (271). Francis Hart further refines this description by referring to the memoirist as a "collective spectator" (204), an observation with particular resonance for *Indian School Days*. "In setting down some of the stories," Johnston writes in the introduction, "I have had to rely on my own memory and on the memories of my colleagues," whose names he proceeds to list (11). More than an expression of authorial gratitude, this statement calls to mind the polyvocality of Isabelle Knockwood's residential school account.⁵ By emphasizing not only the collectivity of this experience but also the collective retrieval of it, *Indian School Days* testifies to a shared, communal history rather than an individual experience of exclusion.

Johnston's acknowledgement of his colleagues' contributions is also a way of authenticating his representation of events. By allowing the perspectives of his classmates to corroborate his own, Johnston outmaneuvers some of the judgments often levelled at the memoir. "Because of their dependence on narrators who are never fully impartial," Buss notes, "memoirs have been considered to be both bad history (which assumes objectivity) and inferior literature (which prefers narratives that show rather than tell)" (xv). Johnston, however, strives for fairness in his depiction. At the same time, he eschews the expectation, indeed the possibility, of impartiality: "This account of Garnier covering two periods, 1939-44 and 1947-50, is as accurate as memory and affect and bias will allow," Johnston states. "I hope as well that it is fair" (11). As "personal revelation of the event" (Hart 204), memoir makes no claims to objectivity. The memoir attempts to recreate instead the

texture of daily life in a way that gives history a real, lived dimension.

Memoirs often focus on a segment of the narrator's life, an experience or event that holds wider, historical import: "Titles such as memoirs of *my* times, memoirs of San Quentin, memoirs of a girlhood among ghosts, reflect on that ambiguous genitive" (Hart 195). By titling his account, *Indian School Days*, Johnston takes the reader to a place and experience that are both generalized and specific. It might also allude to *Glengarry School Days* (1902), Ralph Connor's popular turn-of-the-century memoir of a rural Ontario boyhood. *Indian School Days* suggests a similar kind of nostalgic reminiscence, a quality characteristic of the memoir generally. As Billson observes, "The memoir expresses the memorialist's strong sense of loss for a past which he reveres and misses" (261). Particularly relevant to Johnston's work is Billson's observation that this nostalgic mood prevails "even when that past is one of disappointment and failure" (268). Memoir attempts to recapture "the special, unique, never to be repeated character of the past" (261). Though this description might seem ill-suited to a narrative that revisits an entire youth spent in the residential school, it does capture the fondness with which Johnston looks back on his and his classmates' shared experience. In concentrating on the roguish behaviour of the students—antics that enlivened their daily lives while enabling their psychological survival—Johnston resists what Gerald Vizenor calls "hypotragedies"⁶ or what Donald Bahr refers to as "victimist [. . .] history."⁷ Instead, Johnston emphasizes the collective solidarity that he and his classmates formed in this environment, a sense of community that was not broken by the personal and social trauma they experienced.

"Were it not for the spirit of the boys, every day would have passed according to plan and schedule, and there would have been no story," Johnston asserts (47). This statement, presented alongside a schedule of the residents' daily routine, draws attention to what unfolded outside the structure of the residential school's operation. The "spirit" that Johnston attempts to capture is the spirit of resistance, the boys' adeptness at defying the priests. At night in the dormitory, Johnson recalls, there were "muted whispers commingled with muffled giggles" (46). On one occasion, upon overhearing the patriotic sentiments of two supervising German prefects, the students exact their own punishment:

There was always someone awake, someone to hear, someone to whisper aloud, "Nazi"; and the word "Nazi" echoed and re-echoed throughout the dormitory. "Who says thees?"

"Nazi," in the north corner.

"Who says thees?"

"Nazi," in the south end.

"Who says thees?"

"Nazi." (46)

"Eventually," Johnston adds, "[Fathers Buck and Kehl] stopped talking to one another in the dormitory and finally learned that it was better to grit their teeth and to bear whatever names the boys called them" (46-47).

Because of the anonymous and collective nature of these acts, they were difficult to punish. *Indian School Days* recounts many similar situations in which the students challenge the priests' control.

In showing the irony and quiet transgression behind the boys' conduct and apparent obedience, Johnston also undermines the official discourses of the school. The most pervasive of these institutional discourses is Christian doctrine. When the boys were ordered to "Kneel down and say your prayers," Johnston notes that "We prayed, imploring God to allow us release from Spanish the next day" (45). Johnston recounts with similar skepticism and mockery the boys' tutelage in confession: "Every Thursday night there were confessions to be made, regardless of guilt or innocence" (54). He recalls the boys' organized efforts at avoiding the severe priests:

Of [the four] confessors fathers Richard and Belanger were to be avoided. When the confessors entered the confessional, therefore, the boys quickly formed lines outside the cubicles of the "easy" priests who, for penance, directed penitents to say "One Our Father, one Hail Mary and one Glory Be. . . ." (54)

On occasions when the stricter priests could not be avoided, the boys claimed neither to be free of sin nor to have sinned too much. "Three was a good number," remembers Johnston, "neither too pious nor too dissolute. 'I fought three times during this past week' was credible and acceptable" (55). What the boys learn from such rituals is not innocence or forgiveness but how to avoid the priests' harangues. "Sinner and innocent alike," Johnston sardonically reflects, "we soon got the hang of confessing" (55).

Outside the confessional, the boys are continually reminded of their inherent guilt. Johnston recalls his lesson in original sin when he and a classmate are mistakenly accused of smoking:

Father looked astounded as I gave my testimony [of innocence] and then, like a lawyer who has caught a witness in a lie during cross-examination, frowned in triumphant indignation, "Oh-ho! So you were smoking, were you?"

"No, Father."

"How many puffs?"

"I wasn' smoking."
"Two. How many puffs?"
"But I wasn' smoking."
"Four. How many puffs?"
"I didn' take none."
"Eight. How many puffs?" (160)

Johnston's representation of the exchange in courtroom terms—"testimony," "lawyer," "witness," "cross-examination"—suggests that a criminal-judicial discourse supplemented the Christian one within the school. The questioning continues until Johnston realizes the situation: "At last what Father Hawkins was doing seeped into my skull. He didn't believe me, and he was doubling the number of lashes he was going to deliver on my hands for each untruth that I uttered. I was to be punished for truth instead of being rewarded" (160). "Not wanting sixty-four lashes," Johnston concedes, "I blurted out, 'I took a puff'" (160). The priest responds with the following admonition: "When are you going to learn to tell the truth? It's one of the lessons that we try to teach you, but if you cannot learn the easy way, then I guess you'll have to learn it the hard way" (160). These anecdotes call attention to how the disciplinary practices of this institution often ran contrary to the principles it purported to instill.

Johnston's critical commentary extends to the political rhetoric justifying the operation of residential schools. He quotes Reverend Wilson, a residential school proponent: "We don't wish to un-Indianize them, but for their own good induce them to lay aside the bow and fish-spear and put their hand to the plough or make them wield the tool of the mechanic" (7). These "civilizing" sensibilities justify assimilationist policies: "[W]e want them to become apprenticed out to white people and to become, in fact, Canadians" (7). (The economic interests served by this stance are clear: the type of work that Native people are encouraged to take up is limited to trades and service jobs.) But "to become [. . .] Canadian[. . .]" did not mean straightforward enfranchisement but rather assimilation and indenture.⁸ Education was recognized as an important tool of assimilation,⁹ an instrument capable of ensuring, in Duncan Campbell Scott's words, that "there is not a single Indian in Canada that has not been absorbed in the body politic" (qtd. in Haig-Brown 27).

Johnston's position on enfranchisement and assimilation is developed in successive stages of the text. In the introduction, he quotes from his valedictory speech where he appears to extol the value of enfranchisement: "The *Sudbury Star* of June 8, 1950 reported that I had said in my closing remarks

as valedictorian: ‘Only through having the courage to continue our studies and determination to use the talents we have for advancement can our Indian people become true citizens of Canada’” (12). The community newspaper, a regional institution representing the dominant culture of Northern Ontario, is eager to depict the “Indian” as already assimilated. Johnston quickly corrects this view: “We were ‘wards of the Crown’, not citizens of Canada. [. . .] It was not until 1960 that Indians were allowed to vote in federal elections in Canada” (12). Still, the impression that Johnston leaves here is of the necessity, indeed the desirability, of enfranchisement—the liberal assumption that gaining full citizenship would place Aboriginal people on an equal footing with other Canadians. Near the end of the text, however, Johnston undermines this impression. He returns to his valedictory address once more, prefacing it with the same statement: “It was reported by the *Sudbury Star* that I spoke as follows [. . .]” (241). Later, to a classmate’s question of how he “got all those fancy ideas,” Johnston admits that the speech was written not by him but by one of his instructors (241). Even though he loses the speech before addressing the audience, he describes having the good fortune of Father McKenna’s text “projecting [. . .] on my mind’s memory screen” (242). This revelation of authorship unsettles the reader’s confidence in the statements Johnston made on that day. In this closing section of his memoir, Johnston confirms that the possibilities for individual and collective expression within the residential school were few. Even the exemplary valedictorian at the end of his tenure was not entrusted with the opportunity to represent himself and his classmates.

On several occasions, Johnston questions the suitability and effectiveness of the instruction offered by the residential school:

St. Peter Claver’s existed for two reasons. One was to train Indian youth for some vocation. [. . .] Alas, while there were some accomplished farmers and shoemakers, no graduate went into business; the trades for which we had been trained were rendered obsolete by new technology. The school’s other purpose was to foster religious vocations by frequent prayer and adoration. But all the prayers, masses, novenas and benedictions could not overcome the natural resistance of most boys to a career in holy orders. The school produced neither tradesmen nor priests. (26-27)

This criticism of education in the residential schools is not uncommon. Lee Maracle writes of her sister “spen[ding] years praying at convent school, cooking delicious pies and ironing the starched paraphernalia of the nunnery and the priesthood along with dozens of other Native girls. She left school at fifteen, functionally illiterate” (38). Isabelle Knockwood makes a similar

observation about the male students in her school: "Because so much time was spent in hard physical labour, few of the boys developed more than minimal educational skills" (56). One of Knockwood's former classmates reveals that, "[u]pon discharge, I was not even able to fill out a job application without help" (56). Left with this impression of the dubious effectiveness of the residential school, one cannot but help read Johnston's dedication "to all the prefects and priests and teachers who tried to instruct us" as somewhat ironic (11). "Tried to instruct us," rather than "instructed us" is the phrasing Johnston chooses here, implying not only that the educational program failed, but also that the attendant political objectives of neutralizing and "absorbing" Native subjects into the body politic were not achieved.

Johnston balances his criticisms, however, with a reminder of the relationships he and his classmates formed in their environment. It is this solidarity, invoked later in life, that occasions the telling of this story. Johnston begins the first chapter by describing a reunion with some of the former residents of the school: "It was an evening of recollection, of reliving the days in Spanish by recalling not the dark and dismal, but the incidents that brought a little cheer and relief to a bleak existence. I share some of these with you" (11). Johnston's affectionate recollection of this time is a way of writing against "aesthetic victimry," as Vizenor calls it. Equally significant is the way in which this assertion of solidarity counters theoretical formulations of the "social dimension of trauma," the view that "trauma damages the texture of community" (Erikson 187). In "Notes on Trauma and Community," Kai Erikson defines collective trauma as a "blow to the basic tissues of social life that damages the bonds attaching people together and impairs the prevailing sense of communality" (187). Erikson further describes the effect of collective trauma on social relationships: "'I' continue to exist, though damaged and maybe even permanently changed. 'You' continue to exist, though distant and hard to relate to. But 'we' no longer exist as a connected pair or as linked cells in a larger communal body" (187). Yet Johnston affirms the bonds that his community of peers formed within the often denigrating environment of the residential school.

Johnston's assertion of collective solidarity writes against the impression of these institutions as creating only social disruption and fragmentation within Native communities. Because subsequent accounts have been much more explicit in their condemnation of the residential school, Johnston's memoir seems perhaps a milder or more modulated response. But Johnston's narrative remains subversive, not simply because it was one of

the first books to deal with the residential schools, but because it uses the memoir as a form of resistance.

While many writers have used memoirs to celebrate great acts of history—in CBC parlance, the “heritage moments” that contributed to the making of a national identity—Johnston returns to a dark and shameful moment in Canadian history. However, he imbues his record of the residential school experience with nostalgia and affection for his fellow students and their capacity to resist this institution’s uncontested authority. His complex representation of the residential school is a way of asserting interpretive sovereignty over his experiences. Retelling this segment of his life in a way that resists cultural scripts is one of the ways that Johnston recuperates, or “repossesses,” his past. Memoir, as Hart describes it, is “the autobiography of survival” (195), of living to tell about “an event, an era, an institution” (195). It is fitting, then, that Johnston ends his memoir with a statement by a fellow classmate, whose defiant declaration, “We toughed it out, didn’t we? They couldn’t break us down, could they?” (243), reinforces this text’s spirit of collective survival and resistance.

NOTES

- 1 I do not mean to suggest that Johnston’s was the first narrative account of the residential school. Jane Willis’s *Geniesh: An Indian Girlhood* (1973) was an earlier instance of the residential school narrative in Canada. Written in the tradition of the boarding school autobiography, *Geniesh* centres on Willis’s youth spent in this institution and its deleterious effects on her life afterward. Willis’s text received very little critical attention following its publication and eventually fell out of print. Maria Campbell’s *Halfbreed* (1973) and Anthony Apakark Thrasher’s *Thrasher: Skid Row Eskimo* (1976) discuss their adolescence in residential schools, but this experience is not the primary focus of either book.
- 2 Mary Jane Miller documents this surge of media attention in her essay, “*Where the Spirit Lives: An Influential and Contentious Television Drama about Residential Schools.*”
- 3 See, for instance, Agnes Grant, J.R. Miller, Judith Ennamorato, and John S. Milloy.
- 4 This issue is raised by Roland Chrisjohn and Sherri Young in *The Circle Game: Shadows and Substance in the Indian Residential School in Canada* (1997). Written in reaction to the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP), this work intervenes in the “Standard Account” that emerged from the proceedings on residential schools. Young and Chrisjohn criticize the rhetoric of healing and the pathologizing of “residential school syndrome,” which in their view have neutralized discussions of legal recourse and monetary redress.

Other critics have turned their attention to the child welfare system in Canada and claim that the disproportionate removal of aboriginal children from their families is a continuation of the residential school legacy. See Patrick Johnston’s *Native Children and the Child Welfare System*, Bradford Morse’s “Native Indian and Métis Children in Canada and Victims of the Child Welfare System,” Patricia Monture-Angus’s “A Vicious

- Circle: Child Welfare and the First Nations” (in *Thunder in My Soul*) and Robert Bensen’s introduction to *Children of the Dragonfly: Native American Voices on Child Custody and Education*.
- 5 Knockwood also acknowledges the contributions of her classmates in her account. Like Johnston, she emphasizes the collective significance of her writing and dedicates the book to her colleagues. Her work creates a context for a collective witnessing that draws on the memories and impressions of her former classmates. Knockwood explains that the inspiration of her text came from other survivors who shared her pain. “I began to feel that I was carrying their pain, as well as my own, around with me,” she writes (10).
- 6 From “A Postmodern Introduction” (*Narrative Chance* 11).
- 7 “Just as dichotomized, binary, or Manichean reasoning once served as justification for imperial domination,” Arnold Krupat summarizes, “so, too, is it often retained today to justify that form of postcolonial revisionism that produces what Donald Bahr has called ‘victimist . . . history,’ a very specific form of narrative which ‘tells how one people was damaged by another’” (316).
- 8 The assimilationist undercurrents of enfranchisement also reverberate in *Out of the Depths*, where Knockwood reproduces school policy: “In the primary grades, instill the qualities of obedience, respect, order, neatness, and cleanliness. . . . As students become more advanced, inculcate as near as possible in the order mentioned, independence, self-respect, industry, honesty, thrift, self-maintenance, citizenship and patriotism. Discuss charity, pauperism, Indian and white life, the evils of Indian isolation, enfranchisement . . .” (Knockwood 48).
- 9 The 1969 White Paper on Indian Affairs recognized education as a primary tool of assimilation. The National Indian Brotherhood (now the AFN) responded in 1972 with the document “Indian Control of Indian Education” (Monture-Angus 93). Under the Indian Act, enfranchisement was also mandatory for those who received a university education (Tobias 42-48).

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Gorgias the magician

Oh yes, Gorgias the magician did finally make it
To our town. He came to our glass tavern, the glass
Dirty, cracked, strung with spiderwebs, flyspotted—
The genius condescended to grace our glass tavern.
We knew him from his portraits, you know
He has them painted every three years. We knew
That too-trim black beard, that furry condensation
Of illimitable self-care, we knew that black close
Hair, the dilating pale bald-spot and the black-
Pupilled eyes vainly magisterial but scattered
At the touch of someone's stronger will
Like a pond shocked at insolence of a sided pebble.
He meant his famous picture to say: Invincible mask.

He has his portrait, the one retouched exactly every
Three years, paraded even through dumps like ours
By strong acolytes, boys, all of them, and all too stupid
To understand even the easiest of his spells. Those boys
Trudge the dangerous paths because they march
Under his breakable spell (a special execration
Against the will of women meant to break
The will of men), and off they trot, the boys,
To carry his picture in a tasseled litter passengered
Also by a gaudy statuette of our Blessed Virgin.
It's the just way the Romans lugged ancestral busts
In a chaise during a funeral procession, swaying.

But now Gorgias was actually here in the flesh, he
Grasped our disjointed podium and spoke
Into our crackly microphone, avoiding the thick worn cord.
He did look like his painting—but his hands shook, hard,
They shook even when we shook them, though they
Looked strong if only you could still them, vibrating
Like the abdomens of incited wasps, incited injured wasps.

And when he read from his falsely antiquated scrolls
Embarrassed pity made us fidget—for he meant so clearly,
We being boys, he meant clearly
To catch us in the oracular cages of his syntax,
But the sophistry of the work was such that the bars
Stood as far apart as lamps posted to dispel the night
On a trivial avenue. The shadow of his hand
On the wall shook to make the semblance of
The crown of a tossing tree so that even, you thought,
The roots shook loose, and we pretended to go into
Gorgias's bad old cages, we feigned our capture, we applauded
His magic with shaking hands as though debility were ours,
Delusion ours, and we escorted him in the insult
Of our kindness to the hinge-loose glass door. Beyond
It, our well-founded trees as firm as rock
Found a pleasure in the night breeze they pleased
With a sound that tickled like the love of heaven.

Archives and Truth in Fred Stenson's *The Trade*

Fred Stenson uses two sets of archives in his historical novel *The Trade*: the first grounds his narrative firmly in historical actuality, and the second engages the reader's imagination in exploring the possibilities behind that actuality. The first archive consists of actual written records of the fur trade; these provide the factual material in the novel, and include copies of fur trade records, reminiscences of a fur trader from the beginning of the twentieth century, and the vast body of records that are held in the Hudson's Bay Company (HBC) Archives and that have already been used as evidence in histories of the fur trade.¹ The second archive is a number of writings produced or alluded to in the narrative which make up an imaginary archive within the novel. The letters, ledgers, reports, post journals, novels, history books, and magazine articles—both actual and imaginary—referred to in the narrative are constant reminders that the past is mediated through texts.

In using the documents themselves, and even more importantly, in imagining the contexts of their production, Stenson reunites the archival traces of the past with the lived reality they represent, but also thematizes the contingent and partial nature of historical knowledge. The doubling of the archive in *The Trade* results in a realist narrative that repeatedly calls the reader's attention to the lack of transparency in the record itself. Yet the effect of the narrative is not to question the possibility of truth or representation in historiography. As Stenson himself tells us in a note to the reader at the end of *The Trade*, his novel "argues with some of history's assessments" (344), that is, it proposes a historical revision of the fur trade rather than seeking to demonstrate that history is unknowable.

There is an apparent contradiction in contending that the actual context and thus the “real meaning” behind the archival record may be lost to knowledge, but that the historical record as a whole is still subject to interpretation, misinterpretation, and revision. That contradiction is best explained by splitting the notion of “truth” into two *kinds* of truth in representations—truth-to-actuality and truth-to-meaning. For historian Ann Rigney, these two kinds of truth rely on different kinds of authority:

Representations that are “true-to-actuality” claim fidelity to historical sources, and their authority is thus based on their relation to evidence and to the historical particulars gleaned from it. [. . .] In contrast, representations that are “true-to-meaning” claim to have insight into the underlying configuration of past events, and their authority is based to a lesser degree on evidence and much more on confidence in the understanding and learning of the interpreter. (26)

This distinction accounts for the fact that the same historical evidence can be used to support different interpretations of past events and personalities, but it also helps account for the possibility of “truth” in historical fiction quite independent of its “fictional truth,” to borrow Michael Riffaterre’s phrase. That is, some of the “historical” content may be imagined, but the interpretation of the events and characters in question, the meaning given to them by the fiction, may be true historically as well as fictionally.

The question of what distinguishes history from historical fiction is often answered by the observation that the historian is answerable to the evidence—the epistemological bedrock of the archives—whereas the fiction writer is not. Fiction, according to this argument, cannot and need not answer the test of “Is it true?” Robert Scholes states the distinction between history and fiction thus:

History is a narrative discourse with different rules than those that govern fiction. The producer of a historical text affirms that the events entextualised did indeed occur prior to the entextualisation. Thus it is quite proper to bring extratextual information to bear on those events when interpreting and evaluating a historical narrative. [. . .] [I]n fiction the events may be said to be created by and with the text. They have no prior temporal existence, even though they are presented as if they did. (211)

Dorrit Cohn asserts that the distinction holds even for the type of fiction that most closely approaches formal historiography: “Marked by their distinctive discursive modes, historical fiction and history are different in kind, not merely in degree” (121). The distinctive discursive mode, and the unmistakable marker of fiction, says Cohn, is focalization—that is, narratorial access to the inner world of characters. From this point of view, even

though a historical novel such as *The Trade* refers in large part to actual events based on the historical record, its status as fiction means that the question of its empirical truth simply cannot be asked. Clearly, however, people can and do ask about the empirical truth of historical novels. In his essay on Canadian historical fiction, Dennis Duffy states confidently that “History is being turned into fiction. Critics will decide how authentic the fiction is; historians will judge the authenticity of the history” (64). As Jeremy Mouat in turn points out in a discussion of western Canadian historical fiction, “Academic historians have yet to take fictionalized history very seriously” in Canada, even though this fiction “gives the past of western Canada a specificity and an authenticity that few others—even professional historians—have been able to achieve” (245-46). While Mouat is emphasizing the truth-to-meaning of “fictionalized history,” Duffy implies that the historian intervenes only as to the truth-to-actuality of historical fiction. Yet it is precisely through the combination of these two kinds of truth that Stenson achieves one of the higher purposes of historical fiction, that is, “to engage its readers in acts of historical cognition” (Shaw 535) through a representation of the past.

The postmodern historical novel (more familiarly known by Linda Hutcheon’s term, “historiographical metafiction”) has been the means by which fiction writers have most recently grappled with the problem of the past as residing in textual traces. This is a question that historians had faced earlier in the twentieth century, according to Hayden White, in a “crisis of historicism” that produced “a general despair of ever attaining to that ‘objective science of history’ sought in the nineteenth century as an antidote to ideology in social and political thought” (23). The postmodern approach, exemplified in such works as Leonard Cohen’s *Beautiful Losers* and George Bowering’s *Burning Water*, is to play with historical “facts” in order to question the very notion of factuality and to focus on the search for historical knowledge as an inevitably flawed process. (In *Burning Water*, for example, the explorer George Vancouver—an adamant “lover of facts” (196)—rejects a correction to the map of the Pacific that would make the Spanish and not the British the “discoverers” of the Sandwich Islands.) By mixing historiography with metafiction, postmodern historical fiction “keeps distinct its formal auto-representation and its historical context, and in so doing problematizes the very possibility of historical knowledge” (Hutcheon 106).

The postmodern problematizing of historical representation has not, however, led to its collapse. Instead, historians continue to write histories,

while downplaying “the fact that historical practice involves muddling along in a less than perfect world” (Rigney 4). At the same time, novelists continue to write versions of the past that do not aim merely to reiterate the truths passed on by formal history, or to make the point repeatedly that historiography stands on epistemologically shaky ground. Far from skeptically absenting itself from the field of historical representation, Stenson’s realist historical novel makes its own statements about historical truths that ask not to be dismissed as so much postmodern play. As Stenson himself puts it, *The Trade* is the product of a revisionist approach to Canadian history, and in particular its assessments of fur trade bosses, “some of whom are revered figures in the formal history” (344). In the case of John Rowand (Chief Trader and later Chief Factor at Edmonton), this means countering what Stenson sees as a bias in history: “I felt the character [i.e., Rowand] in history had been treated always too kindly [. . .]. He was always given the positive benefit of the doubt in history, where the unknowns were concerned, and all I did was reverse the direction” (Interview). Stenson’s authority to engage in such an argument comes from his own archival research and from the work of historians whom he acknowledges as his sources.² Yet Stenson does not revert to an earlier innocent era of historical writing: he incorporates into his fiction questions about historical sources, that is, the sorts of questions that historiographical metafiction raises. But, unlike earlier practitioners of metafiction, Stenson embeds archives in his narrative not to question our ability ever to know the truth about history but rather to heighten the coherence of his story as a representation of the past.

In the interplay of archives in *The Trade*, the fictional archive serves to make a metahistorical commentary on the nature of the real archive. The scenes in which documents are produced, read, and reacted to in the fictional narrative point to one of the truths about the real archive: in the HBC, officers were the principal producers of discursive accounts of the trade, whether in the form of reports, letters, or diaries.³ This basic truth about the source of written archives poses a problem in a narrative whose aim is to use the actual record to create the backbone of the plot while adopting a revisionist attitude toward interpretations of that record.

The one real-world archival source for Stenson’s narrative that departs from the norm of officer-written accounts is William Gladstone’s reminiscences of the fur trade.⁴ As Stenson points out, Gladstone’s is one of the few non-officer accounts of the fur trade on record, and as such gives a labourer’s view of the bosses he works under. In his *Diary*, Gladstone describes an

incident in which the men mutiny as a result of Rowand's bad treatment of them, and writes that "I think [Rowand's] death gave more genuine pleasure to us than anything he could have done for us" (39). While Gladstone's view of his bosses informs their portrayal in *The Trade*, Stenson uses Gladstone's voice even more pointedly in a series of fictional letters that comment on the writing of history. These letters from Gladstone to the newspaper editor who has elicited his reminiscences introduce each major section of the novel, thus framing the narrative with an argumentative voice that reacts to unspoken pressures to shape history in certain ways. Stenson's fictionalized Gladstone refers to a list of names the editor has sent him, and makes his first crucial metahistorical comment when he notes, "I saw how you put a line under the Governor's name. I said to myself that's how history gets started. Some young fella putting a line under a name and leaving other people off" (5). Yet Gladstone yields to that pressure to write history in terms of "great men" when he suggests immediately afterward that the editor begin his story at the point when the Governor assumes power upon the amalgamation of the HBC and the Northwest Company—the point at which the narrative then begins.

The narrative voice of the novel echoes—though it is not identical to—the voice of the Gladstone we read in these letters, which is in turn modelled on the voice of the actual reminiscences. Thus John Rowand is known to the reader as "One Pound One," which (the actual) Gladstone gives as the men's nickname for him. A nickname taken from the historical record becomes in the novel a subtle reminder that Rowand is always to be seen as a boss, even when he is a focalizer in the novel. Similarly, George Simpson's name never appears in *The Trade*. His designation only as "the Governor" represents the power and privilege the man derives from his position. Again, the title is historically factual, but Stenson's use of it rather than "George Simpson" emphasizes the pervasive effects of power as it flows through the fur trade hierarchy.

Another important point in Gladstone's first letter is his self-identification as a labourer: "I was a working stiff in the trade. What you call history looks upside down to me" (5). This class-conscious framing of the narrative sets the stage for Stenson's interpretation of the fur trade—that it was a brutal business, more because of the merciless mercantilist ethos driving it than because of any savagery on the part of its Native trading partners. The letters offer a perspective on the events and characters in the narrative itself that guides the reader's interpretation. They also raise the underlying theme

of the distortions and misinterpretations hidden within a historical record that inevitably reflects the perspective of the “bosses.” Gladstone-as-source provides some of the historical material for the novel, while Gladstone-as-commentator is an agent of metahistorical commentary with a skeptical outsider’s view of “how history gets started.”

In one of his letters, Gladstone makes a wry comment on Edward Harriott, the young HBC officer whose melancholy and ironic intelligence is the dominant focalizing presence in the novel. According to Gladstone, Harriott “should have been a hero but I never heard anyone say he was” (83), indicating the divide between imperialist notions of heroism—in which being the first or going the farthest in daunting conditions is enough to gain the title of hero—and the mercantilist version, which requires that the hero bring back the goods and beat out the competition. The first major episode of the novel, in which the members of the Bow River Expedition attempt to open new trading territory, is a story of “heroic” exploration based on misguided conjecture about the prospects of finding an abundant source of beaver on the treeless prairie.

The explanation for this bad decision-making on the part of HBC management highlights the difference between the classic historical explanation and the fictional one. J.G. MacGregor, Rowand’s biographer, attributes the failure of the expedition to a lapse of institutional memory:

Somewhere, probably in London, someone had also failed to remember Peter Fidler’s reports of the conditions he had encountered in 1800-1802 and how he had found the parched grasslands south of the Bow River to be valueless as a beaver country. Simpson, of course, was a relatively new man, so he can hardly be blamed for not knowing about Fidler’s reports and his maps lying on some shelf in London. (51)

In *The Trade*, the failure is in lack of communication between the Governor and Colin Robertson, a trader who knew what Fidler had reported. The Governor’s admonishment of Robertson for failing to tell him about Fidler’s findings establishes his sense of impervious power, his keen insight into character, and a Machiavellian ability to sidestep responsibility for his own actions and deflect blame onto others: “I had told you earlier to be quiet, to hold your comments. This wounded your pride and you decided to wound me back. But you cannot hurt me. You lack the power. What you have done instead is hurt these other men, this Harriott of whom you allege to be so fond and some thirty others” (73). Stenson’s version fits plausibly with the historical interpretation of the incident while also supporting his

own interpretation of Simpson as a man whose ambition and egotism may in fact have made the HBC more inefficient and brutal.

This management-level bungling in the Bow River Expedition in turn becomes part of the explanation for Edward Harriott's falsification of his report. When he writes, "*No beaver. Not enough to warrant forts*" he knows it is "Not a lie. But a little less than the truth" (77). So while Harriott has seen beaver furs in the Piegan camp, he lies to make the numbers sound insignificant, and the reader is privy to his reasons for doing so:

As to motive, that was simple enough. As [Harriott's mixed-blood friend] Jimmy Jock had said, the Company, or [expedition leader Donald] McKenzie at least, had tried to kill him. If he needed more reason, Jimmy Jock had provided that as well. If Harriott said there were no beaver, there would likely be no forts. If there were no forts, he would never be forced to return, and Jimmy Jock would never be obliged to kill him. (77)

A "heroic" interpretation of this incident might suggest that McKenzie is assiduously carrying out his duty as head of an exploratory expedition. But from another perspective, his decision to send Harriott and his men out on foot in the middle of winter with inadequate provisions amounts to a death sentence, and reflects the casual disregard on the part of some officers for the well-being of their subordinates. Given that Jimmy Jock has saved the expedition from starvation, Harriott finds his interpretation easy to accept, particularly in light of Jimmy Jock's own threat to kill him—a threat intended to keep the HBC out of Piegan territory. The fiction in the narrative thus coincides with the known historical record but gives it a new inflection. Having demonstrated his intelligence and (relative) moral rectitude as well as his awareness that any given action may have a number of hidden motivations and consequences, Edward Harriott becomes the author's privileged source of insights into the workings of the fur trade.

As the novel progresses, an emerging mythology of the northwestern fur trade emanating from Britain and the United States begins to impinge on the participants in the trade themselves. A romanticized view of the trade distorts the actual nature of white-Native relations in the region even during the lifetime of the men involved. This *fictional* version of the Northwest, created in far-off metropolitan centres, becomes a force that the people who know better are either disinclined or unable to counteract. The juxtaposition of romantic versions of the fur trade with the novel's "true" accounts provides commentary on an irony of which the characters are not necessarily aware. Colin Robertson reads a novel about the fur trade in which the

“Company men are shown as noble chaps, vigorous and brave, fighting for England among the blood-thirsty savages” and declares it “inspiring” (70),⁵ but this incident is inserted into the account of the disastrous expedition, where the main concern of a boss such as John Rowand is to show his men and himself that he is “tough enough” (31) to deal with Natives whose territory they are invading. The men are not brave, but fearful: “Few among them credited Indians with being human, and each night they paid a price for it. [. . .] In their exhausted sleep, fearsome images rose from the murk to stare. Warriors fanged and wolf-eared” (23). Rowand’s readiness to beat a belligerent Native man is consistent with his practice of antagonizing and abusing his own men: “When they fought a man of higher rank, they fought their fear as much as you. It made them distracted and weak. They all but worshipped you for half killing them” (74). This reinterpretation of heroic vigour and bravery as being in fact attributable to brutality and fear is one of the keys to Stenson’s revisionist effort in *The Trade*. As Albert Braz points out, the “Hobbesian” (240) worldview of the novel makes for a bleak narrative in which neither nature, religion, nor art offers much solace, but that view is part of the truth-to-meaning that Stenson strives for as he refutes the implicit exaggeration of white men’s heroism in formal histories.

The falsely romantic image of the fur trade is driven by the American public as much as by the British. In retirement in the Red River district, Harriott combats the pressure from an American writer for *Harper’s Magazine* who is eager to interpret fur trade history as a close approximation to American frontier myth.⁶ To the journalist’s conjecture that Harriott must have “killed a lot of Indians in [his] time,” the ironically revisionist reply is, “If I had, [. . .] with whom would I have traded?” (332). Similarly, the journalist’s reaction to the Governor’s massive Stone Fort is that it must have been built for protection against the Indians. Harriott, who sees the structure as a symbol of pretentious and misplaced European grandiosity (its thick walls a “little Tower of London thrown in to impress and comfort the wife”) tells the writer that his interpretation is “not right” (333), a reply that is hardly calculated to correct the mistake. With the prescience that he has exercised in other situations, Harriott seems to realize that it is simply beyond his power to sway the social forces at work in enforcing such interpretations—the very interpretations, of course, that Stenson has set out to combat rather more forcefully, using Harriott as his ironic focalizer.

Scenes of interaction with solid historical traces are interspersed with more fleeting moments when imaginary documents are produced (or, even

more significantly, *not* produced). Stenson uses entries from the (actual) post journal of Chesterfield House,⁷ but adds further details that mock the accomplishment recorded: “October 11: Today the men hung the gate. / The Indians pressed around the palisades and laughed at them through the gapes and cracks as they did so. [. . .] The search went on for wood to line the holes and cover the laughing faces” (29; italics in original). Stenson’s characters are (perhaps anachronistically) aware of the enduring and potentially incriminating power of written documents. This leads Rowand to hesitate when he contemplates writing to Harriott to warn him about the Governor’s plans to seduce Margaret Pruden, Edward Harriott’s mixed-blood cousin and lover: “Warn Harriott, aye. But would One Pound One risk a letter to do so? A letter that could easily get into the wrong hands?” (99). Not to write is to betray Harriott, but to write might jeopardize his own future in the Company. Rowand’s decision not to write can be partly attributed to his realization that outside the HBC, he would be “just another man without a trade” (125). It also reflects, however, a much deeper truth about fur trade society: in addition to being a trader, Rowand is a family man with a “country wife” and mixed-blood daughters whom he could not easily transplant to his native city of Montreal. The only place for such a family is the Northwest, and the Northwest is ruled by the Company.

Rowand’s concern about how his own position will affect his family is not just a passing detail: a significant part of Stenson’s historical interpretation rests on his vision of the life of women in fur trade society. This is an issue that gained prominence in the early 1980s with the publication of Sylvia Van Kirk’s *Many Tender Ties* (1980) and Jennifer Brown’s *Strangers in Blood* (1980). In *The Trade*, Harriott’s lover Margaret Pruden is central to the development of dramatic tension in the fictional plot, but this plot is the vehicle for Stenson’s critical view of the virtual commodification of Métis daughters in fur trade society, as well as of George Simpson’s role in taking racial discrimination to a new level of cruelty and acceptability. Stenson uses an ingenious device to lend plausibility to the fictional seduction/rape scene between Margaret and the Governor. This scene is central to the fictional plot: it establishes most memorably the Governor’s licentiousness and abuse of his power; it explains why Margaret goes mad (which the real-life Margaret did indeed do);⁸ and it provides a reason for Harriott’s subsequent grudge against the Governor. But Stenson has to make this fictional scene blend into the historical material that surrounds it. Stenson’s solution is to use the incident to comment on gaps in the archives as possible effects of power as

well as of weakness. Braz observes that “at a time when many individuals and groups are striving to empower themselves by entering history, Stenson suggests that sometimes power resides in the fact that one manages to stay outside history” (239). The Governor’s elaborate preparations to ensure that no one else is at the fort when he arrives to meet Margaret, and his order to the intruding Harriott—“I was not here” (*The Trade* 145)—ensure that no one will record his lightning trip to Fort Carlton, a historical silence that Simpson savours: “What an adventure, thought the Governor. Greater than anything he had attempted before, and greater too for the fact that it would never be found in anyone’s journal, letter or history” (128).

In imagining a gap in the record as a fabricated silence, Stenson strengthens the argument for the historical imagination as a form of possible knowledge, and not mere invention. Though this particular incident might be closer to plausibility than to full-fledged possibility, Stenson notes that “Some of the things I made up may be true” (344). The possibility that a fiction might actually be a fact challenges the distinction between fiction and history. Lubomír Doležel casts this distinction as a difference between ontology and epistemology: “While fictional poesis constructs a possible world that did not exist prior to the act of writing, historical noesis uses writing to construct models of the past that exists (existed) prior to the act of writing” (262). The gaps in fiction, argues Doležel, are ontological gaps that cannot be filled by new knowledge because there is nothing there to know outside of what the fiction tells us. The gaps in history, on the contrary, are epistemological gaps that could be filled in if further evidence came to light. Yet this distinction fails to address a work of historical fiction such as Stenson’s, which uses the already constructed model of a past that did exist and adds fiction to the model. While Doležel in his discussion of historical fiction admits that it produces an “overlap” between history and fiction, he then notes as a defining feature of historical fiction that “fictional persons coexist and interact with counterparts of historical persons” (257). He concludes that a “possible world where counterparts of historical persons cohabit with fictional persons is not a historical world” (257) and is therefore not valid as history. Clearly, this characterization of historical fiction does not deal with the case of a novel such as *The Trade*, in which all of the characters have historical counterparts.

The fact that all of the characters in *The Trade* also appear in the historical record, and Stenson’s speculation that events in the novel that are invented might in fact be true, raise the question of how much overlap, and

what kinds of overlap, must be present in fiction before it is considered “history.” We are very far here from Dorrit Cohn’s assertion that historical fiction and history belong to different categories rather than lying at different points on a continuum. Stenson is playing with the notion that what is usually a matter of ontology (the fictional creation of something that did not previously exist) might in fact be a matter of epistemology (knowing something that was not previously known). Of course, we cannot *know* that we know something factual without evidence to prove it, but the Governor’s ability to ensure that evidence will not appear in the record merely reinforces the claim of Stenson’s fiction: this could have happened.

Moreover, because Stenson’s account of the HBC and the Governor is so strongly based on existing evidence, his project of viewing history “upside down,” which results in a focus on the effects of HBC mercantilism and a view of George Simpson as a tyrant and a predator, stands on solid epistemological ground in its own right. The evolving views on Simpson in historiography are proof of that. In his 1978 biography of John Rowand, J.G. MacGregor offers an apologia for Simpson’s and J.G. McTavish’s abandonment of their Métis wives after they had brought white wives back from England:

Before one irrevocably despises Simpson and McTavish, one should look at the practice prevailing on the Indian frontier. Amongst freemen, natives, and white traders living with a Métis or Indian girl—marrying her in the *façon du Nord* which everyone condoned—this practice of abandoning wives was common. [. . .] Any Indian girl marrying such a trader knew that there was every chance that their union would last only until her husband discarded her or left the country. (85)

Van Kirk refutes this argument, noting that before 1821 “it had been customary, particularly for the Nor’Westers, to leave their Indian wives behind, even though they might take their children with them. Most bourgeois who married mixed-blood women, however, did not follow this course but took their entire family with them when they returned to Eastern Canada” (123). She asserts that as an outsider who had not been socialized within the fur trade, Simpson had no sympathy for these practices. According to Van Kirk, the “Governor’s reputation for having a woman at every post is exaggerated, but he showed a flagrant disregard for fur-trade custom and formed a series of liaisons with young mixed-blood women whom he treated in a most callous manner” (142). Twenty-two years after Van Kirk’s work was published, Aritha van Herk characterizes Simpson thus in her popular history of Alberta:

Simpson wrestled and throttled his empire, and through a combination of lightning inspection tours and terrible cutbacks that he christened “Economies,” he succeeded in keeping everyone off balance and himself high in the saddle. [. . .]

He felt, of course, that every beautiful woman in the country should be made available to him, and had a string of mistresses, whom he called "bits of brown" and treated much as he treated company pots and pans, with finely honed contempt. (63-64)

One might conclude that Stenson is indeed working on history in a derivative way, as Frank Ankersmit would have it ("Historiography *develops* narrative interpretations of sociohistorical reality; literature *applies* them" (238; italics in original). Yet Stenson's "application" amounts to creating a world in which the various parts—the mercantile drive of the fur trade and its bosses, the interactions between whites and Natives, the social structures and the individuals who make them up—are presented so coherently (often through the entirely convincing internal focalization of major characters) that this fiction appears ordinary, not derivative. Still, it is a mark of the deeply satisfying nature of Stenson's fiction as historical interpretation that van Herk cites at length his imaginary betrothal scene between One Pound One and his Cree wife, Louise. His portrayal of a Native woman as the tough-minded agent of her own marital arrangements effectively counteracts the notion that Native women were victimized and exploited by white traders (or, as MacGregor implies, that Louise was an aging, abandoned woman with a child by another man who desperately chased Rowand to ensure her survival).

As a historical novelist, Stenson engages with the existing historical record by imagining the context of production—that which does not remain in the trace itself—and the possibility of unreadable biases behind the evidence. Harriott's report on his expedition to the Marias River is treated as authoritative by the company and by the "objective" eye of history: it is, after all, the official record of a responsible participant. As imagined by Stenson, however, Harriott deliberately falsifies his report to ensure that he will not be sent back into Jimmy Jock's territory. Harriott's personal interest in the effect of his report turns it into a "false" document whose falseness cannot be objectively discerned. Stenson's stories of the Bow River Expedition and One Pound One's betrothal to Louise tell us that the "truth" of history at the level of individual events may never be known, not because an eyewitness account is missing but because the motivations of eyewitnesses are always silently and invisibly bound up in their accounts.

Stenson also draws our attention to the different meanings of "truth" at the level of discourse. In the Prologue to the novel, the narrator tells us that the story of a keg of bones crossing the Atlantic twice is "true," but Stenson the author reaffirms in his Acknowledgements that "One Pound One's bones

did cross the ocean in two directions en route to their burial in Montreal” (344). The fact that the author asserts the truth-to-actuality of this story (at the end of the volume and outside the narrative) indicates that what the narrator had asserted was a different sort of “truth”: truth-to-meaning. Conversely, William Gladstone’s letters to the editor have all the hallmarks of archival documents, but are in fact fictional imitations of such documents. The use of forms of discourse that imitate archives, and of a fictional voice to tell a doubly-true story—that is, true to actuality *and* true to the fictional interpretation of that actuality—tells the reader that “truth” has many guises, only one of which is that of archival evidence.

If, as Rigney argues, “Compromise, failure, provisionality, [and] dissatisfaction [are] unfortunate but inevitable features of history writing” (1), then the historical novel that hopes to offer a vision of history must include devices that mirror, in fictional terms, that sense of compromise, failure, provisionality and dissatisfaction. Fred Stenson appears to believe that historians of the fur trade have lost sight of the provisionality of their historical accounts and allowed a false sense of epic heroism to dominate their portrayals of fur trade bosses. Yet the novelist who wishes to intervene in the interpretation of history cannot go so far as to denounce all history as fatally compromised. By reducing his metafictional questioning of historiography to unobtrusive shorthand—showing possible contexts of archival material without completely discrediting that material—Stenson demonstrates that archival records are subject to the contingency of their contexts without casting doubt on the ability of historians (and novelists) to interpret history. Stenson’s narrative might be seen as a neo-realist strain of historical fiction that has absorbed the lessons of the postmodern but continues to stake a claim to historiographical relevance.

The problem with using official history to propose a revisionist version of that history—what Stenson calls “writ[ing] between the lines” (343) of history—is that the fictional narrative necessarily repeats the structural outlines of the existing archives. The archival trail in *The Trade* reflects the voices present in the actual record, but it also reflects the silences. Margaret Pruden is both illiterate and mad, so that after the crucial scene with the Governor, we see and hear very little of her directly. Jimmy Jock Bird, though literate, has chosen to live with the Piegan rather than continue serving the HBC, and has no interest in engaging in the sort of written communication that might tell a latter-day historian about his role or motivations. As these telltale silences indicate, a narrative that relies on the

historical record for its broad outlines and most of its specific events can attain in only a limited way the goal of much revisionist history, that is, to give a voice to the voiceless in history. The marginal presences in the novel must remain marginal if the existing record is to be respected.

As a result of archival constraints, the narrator of *The Trade* has access to the thoughts and emotions of Edward Harriott, One Pound One, and the Governor, but knowledge of Jimmy Jock Bird and Margaret Pruden is available only through others' interactions with them. At the same time, Stenson uses the archive's silence about these marginal figures to strengthen his central argument. Harriott interprets Margaret's retreat into madness as the result of the Governor's treatment of her. Moreover, in the most thoroughgoing criticism of the fur trade and its effects on everyone who comes in contact with it, Stenson portrays Jimmy Jock Bird as representative of an unsettling resistance. While Harriott himself acts for the most part as the novel's skeptical and contrarian observer of the fur trade, Jimmy Jock questions Harriott's own assumptions when he asks, "Are you such a Company man as all that, Ted? That you can't imagine opportunity that isn't about them?" (68). As someone who pursues his own goals without subordinating them to the mercantile forces that govern the fur trade, or the evangelizing desires of the missionaries, Jimmy Jock acts as a seriously troubling presence to the white men and their projects. This version of Bird is more coherent and satisfactory than that offered by official histories, where he is portrayed as "victimizing" the missionary he interprets for, and as a man unreliably given to "fit[s] of pique" (MacGregor 112). But Stenson does not—cannot, given his archive-based premise—let Bird play more than an adjunct role in the novel.

By reading between the lines of official history and consciously arguing with that history, the novelist can unsettle its representations and contest its pronouncements. In following the official line, however, Stenson cannot do more than touch on the question of how the dispossessed and voiceless in the history of a society are to be adequately represented in their own right. He eschews the freedom that postmodern historical fiction grants itself to intervene in the archive itself as well as to question the "facts" construed from that archive. Instead, Stenson imagines the contexts in which archival documents are produced in order to suggest an alternative truth-to-meaning for established truth-to-actuality. The question then is whether the necessarily partial truth of archive-based historical fiction can satisfy the needs of society as a whole for representation.

Stenson's purpose was clearly not, however, to represent the marginalized in official history. What he has done is to integrate more recent research on fur trade society with the long tradition of formal fur trade history based on officer-dominated archives in order to create a unified sense of the fur trade ethos under the central trope of the novel: trade. By positing the Governor and One Pound One as embodiments of that ethos, Edward Harriott as an anti-heroic dissenter, and Jimmy Jock Bird as a rogue who works to destabilize the system after opting out of it, Stenson fashions a convincing truth-to-meaning around these characters from actuality. The play of imaginary and real archives in the novel shows how the fiction writer, in imagining the unknown contexts behind the historical record, may offer true and satisfactory interpretations of history.

NOTES

- 1 The impressive scope of this archive is attributable to the HBC's meticulous corporate record-keeping and makes the Company, in the words of Peter C. Newman, "probably the best-documented institution in the world, next to the Vatican" (xii).
- 2 Stenson cites J.G. MacGregor's biography of John Rowand and William Gladstone's diary in particular, though he rejects MacGregor's sympathetic treatment of Rowand. As I discuss below, one can discern the work of such historians as Jennifer S.H. Brown and Sylvia Van Kirk behind Stenson's portraits of George Simpson, Margaret Pruden, and Louise Rowand.
- 3 Post journals and accounts might be kept by apprentice clerks, but in the post-amalgamation HBC, clerks were "gentlemen" with an expectation of promotion to higher rank.
- 4 William S. Gladstone, born in Montreal in 1832, was a boat-builder with the HBC at Fort Edmonton and Rocky Mountain House from 1848 to 1862. His diary was first published in the *Rocky Mountain Echo* of Pincher Creek, Alberta in 1903.
- 5 Here, Stenson anticipates by a few decades the emergence of fur trade narratives and fiction, beginning with such works as R.M. Ballantyne's *Hudson's Bay* (1848) and Alexander Ross's *The Fur Hunters of the Far West* (1855).
- 6 In 1860-1861, *Harper's Magazine* published a three-part report by Manton Marble entitled "To Red River and Beyond." The author mentions Harriott's hospitality and describes his residence, but does not record any dialogue.
- 7 This was confirmed by Stenson in e-mail to the author, 16 May 2003; the original journal is in the Hudson's Bay Company Archives in Winnipeg (B.34/a/4).
- 8 MacGregor mentions Margaret's madness (83) and her disappearance in the Athabasca Pass (89-90).

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Self-Portrait in a Display Window

The late sky is home to proofs of other worlds—
contrails fading south-south-west, Venus hung
near a thin infant moon, crows drifting back
to rookeries in the suburbs—though heaven for him
was never there, outlying or ethereal, and hell
endures unreal, like these circling johns, these curbside
come-ons, cash prized for its consolations.
The fault's his own, he knows, crudely sutured
by tax-deductibles, spare change, the reading of novels,
AI communiqués, dead sages, menus dressed with local fare.
Warning, says a text on the passenger side, *objects
in this mirror are larger than they seem*. A look
back confirms the truth—how easy the engineers
have made this object-world, whether or not,
and can you blame them?

Such gestures are rhetorical,
left behind when he leaves the car
for the sidewalk. Day done, the street concedes
to borrowed light, concedes as easily as valleys
rise to lakes where dams squat, as easily words
emerge to rhythm's charms like scarves
from a magic gap, then light as flocking rock doves
on the page, mocking about most mournfully,
as starlings too. Day done, and a fat spattering rain
has glossed the set with greasy colours. This
could be anywhere traffic happens, where
someone's statues stand shitstreaked and verdigrised—
and is, and isn't either. Treed ten thousand years
since the Vachon ice drew back, this
was bush while Wordsworth made adjustments
in the ledger of his mind, balanced

verse dedicate to Nature's self,
and things that teach as Nature teaches,
 recreational myth some keep in play, some only
 as nature knows its place, standing
 reserve. More—this *here* was home
 to other peoples' other worlds, done
 down by paper powers (Douglas, Trutch, & co.)
 for a time, maybe longer. Monuments
 are made largely for oblivion, company
 to trash, sperm, our sloppy opulence and
 excrements, as though this ceaselessly unearthly world
 were half in love with tempered entropy, the graph's
 providential arrow raised for a futured fall
 into pensions, Paradise, or slate-blanking bankruptcy.
 Downsized, canned, packed off, didn't make
 the cut for subsidy or instauration
 like this curbside crate of op-ed dailies. No shoes
 but shambling's made them lighter, no shirt
 but what a dumpster offers up, no service
 needed—this appropriated shopping cart will serve
 to carry curried favours—no shit
 but the shit that happens so shareholders hold
 their own, properly. Disjected stuff cleaves
 to your feet everywhere—so turn and scrape,
 scrape and turn, dance, fiddle?

He turned
 and caught himself dispersed in a glass
 divide, spreadeagled Shadbolt surface with a bursting
 fetish face, smeared, flayed, as though only now
 remembering—then vanished as a light came on.
 A room occurred, and through the door a window
 dresser, bare dummy underarm—they have long
 necks now and nipples, like mannerist madonnas,
 uncreased angel crotches. He had always thought
 such vacant creatures stood themselves, but saw there
 that they must be mounted from behind, then
 for a change brought down again like that famed
 old corpse.

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John Adams

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Michael Shaw Bond

Way Out West: On the Trail of an Errant Ancestor. McClelland & Stewart \$32.99

Reviewed by Bryan N.S. Gooch

To relate the emergence of Vancouver Island and the mainland of British Columbia from wilderness to colony and on to provincial status is to tell a myriad of stories, many of which still remain to be shaped, detailed, and set into the historic fabric. One of the most important narratives is that of Sir James Douglas, and thus Adams's thorough and carefully documented *Old Square-Toes and His Lady* is a welcome addition to the corpus of studies about the province's past. Tracing Douglas's family background and early life in Scotland, through his departure for Montreal, his indenture to the North West Company, his marriage to Amelia Connelly, and his subsequent rise to the rank of Chief Factor in the Columbia Department of the Hudson's Bay Company, Adams spells out a story of determination, courage, and devotion to duty. At the same time he paints a clear picture of the country through which Douglas moved, the travails of the fur brigade, the daily routine of company posts (especially Fort Vancouver), and the fragility of human life in Oregon Country. In documenting Douglas' appointment and tenure first as Governor of Vancouver

Island and, subsequently, British Columbia, Adams clearly shows a man who was forced to make a sometimes difficult transition from the authoritarian Company approach to a new world of colonists, coal miners, gold-seekers, and criticism. Douglas had to balance matters in the colonies, worry about potential American invasions, and satisfy his administrative masters in London. The narrative moves easily, and the style is lucid as portraits of James and Amelia and their family are carefully drawn, with moments of great sorrow (particularly early deaths of many of their children) sadly tinting the picture. In one way, this book offers the life of James and Amelia Douglas; in another, it tells the story not only of the outposts of the fur trade but of the development of Victoria and, to a much lesser degree, New Westminster. In providing a social context and details about other significant personalities (for example, Sir Matthew Baillie Begbie, the Rev. [afterwards Bishop] Edward Gidge, *et al.*), it invites the exploration of other lives and the examination of numerous events of singular importance and interest.

By no means less compelling is *Way Out West*, a charming, illuminating, and sometimes humorous account of the author's retracing of the famous westward journey made in 1862-63 by his great-great-grandfather, Viscount Milton, who, in company with Dr. Walter Cheadle, travelled to Winnipeg and thence over the Carleton trail to Edmonton, through the Yellowhead Pass, down the North Thompson River to

Fort Kamloops, and then westward to the Fraser River and on to Victoria (where, as Bond notes, Milton was given petitions critical of Douglas' autocratic ways to take back to Earl Fitzwilliam, Milton's father, in London, who was to pass them to the appropriate political hands). Paths cross! Milton described his often perilous exploits—an attempt to find a practical land route to the gold-rich Cariboo region—in *The North-West Passage by Land* (1865), and testimony (sometimes contradictory and always illuminating) also emerges in Cheadle's *Journal of a Trip across Canada, 1862-1863* (1931). Bond neatly splices into the story of his own adventure—often on foot or on horseback—extracts from Milton's and Cheadle's accounts of guides, terrain, frequently appalling weather, and hair-raising dangers. The result is a masterly blend of old and new as Bond explores and discovers the fascination that western Canada held for his distinguished ancestor and which still captures the living heart with ease. The modern trek and Bond's book are, in the best sense, labours of love, and the details Bond so generously provides offer sharp reminders of the debt which Canada owes to its intrepid early wanderers.

Both Adams and Bond open numerous windows to scenes and personalities long past, and in doing so they both sharpen one's understanding of modern western Canada. Though differing in style and approach (Adams's *Old Square-Toes* is a formal, step-by-step biography while Bond's *Way Out West* is a lighter-toned amalgam of a single trip and its near replication), both narratives, each offering useful bibliographic detail, are compelling in their individual ways and successfully draw the reader into the thick of events. Indeed, neither book, once begun, can easily be set aside.



The Essential Mary

Kimberly VanEsveld Adams

Our Lady of Victorian Feminism: The Madonna in the Work of Anna Jameson, Margaret Fuller, and George Eliot. Ohio UP \$59.95

Reviewed by Nancy L. Cocks

Our Lady of Victorian Feminism provides a provocative look at the interpretation of Mary, a central figure in Christian symbolism, offered in the work of three nineteenth-century feminist authors: art historian Anna Jameson, essayist Margaret Fuller, and novelist and poet George Eliot. In these writers, Kimberly Adams finds fresh and challenging visions that draw on Mary as an image of women's power and significance. From a selection of their works, she demonstrates the ways in which "Our Lady" and "The Virgin Mother," traditional titles for Mary, are reworked to support women's social equality and political participation. Adams intends to provoke reconsideration of the conclusion shared by many twentieth-century feminist commentators that Mary's only symbolic function is to reinforce the patriarchal oppression of women.

Adams's topic is also provocative because her three subjects were shaped to varying extents within Protestant traditions in which Mary played little symbolic role. As a Protestant theologian, I was intrigued by the theological sophistication of these authors and their courage to reinterpret the image of Mary as part of wider theological ferment in their day. In our time, when general knowledge of religious history is declining, Adams's study provides helpful interdisciplinary conversation with theological sources, including important nineteenth-century authors as well as a variety of contemporary feminist theologians.

Her analysis offers a credible summary of key theological debates of the nineteenth century, pointing to important issues

and authors reflected in the writing of her three subjects.

The writers in question offer different interpretations of Mary, but Adams makes clear the influence of the earlier work of Jameson on the other two. In Jameson's texts, Adams finds Mary celebrated as the feminine face of the divine who has shared her glory and power with womankind. Jameson was attracted to portrayals of Mary as "Queen of Heaven," situating Mary in virtual equality with Christ. Jameson "saw spiritual queenship as authorizing women's claim of gender equality and their reform effort," for Mary had become "a figure of action for women like Jameson."

Fuller's exploration of Mary exploits the paradox between the images of "Virgin" and "Mother," finding here "the perfect balance of the self-reliant and relational aspects of female identity." In her correspondence, Fuller "rescues" virginity from its connection with "mere spinsterhood," using it instead to "designate spiritual self-reliance." Mary as Virgin Mother represents female creativity and authorship for Fuller, who was intrigued by the connections between the Madonna and the female figure of Holy Wisdom. Adams proposes that Fuller was often "inventing her own mythological parallels rather than following established links."

The best-documented section of the book treats the development of Mary in several works by George Eliot. According to Adams, "Virginity, in Eliot, . . . should be read sexually as well as psychically and socially, because of her emphasis on the body." Adams traces Eliot's changing perspective on Mary through characters such as Dinah, Romola, and Dorothea who symbolize virginity in different novels and poems. She puts the characters in dialogue with Eliot's views on religion as recorded in essays and correspondence. This analysis provokes reflection on the social and philosophical critique Eliot's novels provide and on the

challenge of identifying an author's view within a rich and diverse corpus like Eliot's.

Throughout her analysis, Adams demonstrates the importance of understanding these women and their views of Mary in light of the issues of their day. She takes care to examine the subtleties of religious symbolism and the often tangled root system that feeds both traditional interpretation and the re-appropriation of Mary. She points out anachronistic assumptions embedded in some feminist critics who reject any possibility for Mary to play a transformative role in women's self-understanding. She also cautions against dismissing the essentialist assumptions about women's identity common in nineteenth-century feminist argument in light of postmodern gender theories: "Given the three writers' sustained advocacy of women's rights, if they are denied the label 'feminist,' they are most likely being judged according to the standards of our time rather than their own."

Yet Adams herself falls prey to occasional anachronistic readings, for example, in her references to the German theologian, Friedrich Schleiermacher. She confuses Schleiermacher's use of the term "feeling" with "emotion" when she examines the influences of his theology on Jameson. Schleiermacher's vocabulary is notoriously difficult to translate, but his central concept of Christian faith as "the feeling of absolute dependence" on God does not speak of an emotional experience in a contemporary sense. Rather, he explores what we might call intuitive or pre-rational response to God's initiative. Despite this and the occasional gap between her conclusions and the documentary evidence actually cited, Adams's work demonstrates the value of careful interdisciplinary study when religious themes and symbols have a significant place in literary texts and social argument. Her book is important, I believe, not only for its insight into Victorian feminism but also for its model of investigation.

Postcolonial Challenges

Fawzia Afzal-Khan, and Kalpana Seshadri-Crooks, ed.

The Pre-Occupation of Postcolonial Studies. Duke UP \$110.48

Paul A. Bové, ed.

Edward Said and the Work of the Critic: Speaking Truth to Power. Duke UP \$103.57

Reviewed by Ajay Heble

Postcolonialism has undoubtedly broadened our sense of purpose as scholars and teachers not only in Canadian Studies but also in the humanities. For some, it offers the analytical-critical model best suited to reconceptualizing the links between textual analysis and our commitment to broader interventions in the public sphere (to struggles for human rights, social justice, and equality). Indeed, as Kalpana Seshadri-Crooks notes in *The Pre-Occupation of Postcolonial Studies*, “For some scholars situated outside the field, postcolonial studies seems to . . . offer the possibility of a radically revised history: a relentlessly dissident method of reading that will alter the way business is done *in and out of the academy*” (my emphasis). But just how dissident is it? And what exactly is the impact it has (or might have) outside the walls of the academy?

The essays in *The Pre-Occupation of Postcolonial Studies* encourage us to ask precisely these kinds of questions. As the book’s co-editor, Fawzia Afzal-Khan, puts it in her own introduction, “it is clear that the movement of postcolonial discourse from the political arena into the academy, its consequent packaging as a field to be mined, has itself become a cause of debate.” Particularly engaging in this context is Ali Behdad’s essay, which, by way of a provocative analysis of material from a range of thinkers including Edward Said, Néstor García Canclini, and Tony Bennett, prompts discussion about the institutional strategies that maintain and transform our cultural

practices. Equally absorbing are previously published essays by Ella Shohat and Bruce Robbins. Both of these landmark essays, indeed, have already opened up resonant questions about the extent to which “the rise of (post)colonial studies is compromised by its metropolitan and class location” (Robbins) and by its potential ahistoricism and universalism (Shohat).

Essays by other contributors probe the relations among postmodernism, post-structuralism and postcolonialism, the failure of postcolonial studies to address issues of class and ideology, the ways in which the retreat into theory in the contemporary teaching of English runs the risk of reinforcing the gap between aesthetics and politics, and the implications (and relevance) of deploying postcolonial etiquettes of reading and analysis in an American context. Pivotal, too, are two exemplary essays which, by way of contemporary case studies, explore how questions of gender and sexuality can productively complicate postcolonial analysis: Afzal-Khan’s contribution on street theatre in Pakistani Punjab and Rajeswari Sunder Rajan’s piece on the 1994 hysterectomy scandal in Maharashtra, India.

While the essays raise troubling (and important) questions about the “institutional cachet” of postcolonialism, I wonder whether some of the contributors might have engaged more fully in sustained analysis of postcolonialism’s failure to be more than just part of an academic career. How might postcolonialism best avoid the danger of settling into (and settling for) a kind of feel-good armchair activism that doesn’t purposefully move beyond the business we do with texts? What happens, that is, when postcolonial theory gets reduced to a method, when the progressivist impulses of an oppositional field of inquiry begin to settle into an orthodoxy? Aren’t these, after all, among the key challenges confronting postcolonialists today?

Indeed, I wanted to hear more about how

a rhetoric of postcoloniality can often serve to mask the absence of any real commitment to social change. Some of the essays in *Edward Said and the Work of the Critic: Speaking Truth to Power* are particularly forthright on this point. In “Criticism Between Opposition and Counterpoint,” Jonathan Arac, most notably, takes issue with “those who would rather play out racial issues only in literature . . . as if, for example, we no longer need affirmative action provided that Huck [Finn] is in every classroom.” What’s exemplary about Said, of course, is not just that he has been a pioneering and inspirational figure in postcolonial theory, but also, as Jim Merod so rightly reminds us, that his work “has achieved tangible results in the world.”

While the essays in this volume touch on a wide range of concerns—Said’s political engagement, his literary criticism, his status as a public intellectual, his writings on music, his critiques of media representations of American foreign policy, his work on behalf of the struggle for Palestine, his recently published memoir and so forth — its distinctive focus and coherence derive from its repeated insistence that critical pressure be put on the assumptions that allow domination and injustice to continue unchecked. As the book’s subtitle suggests, many of the essays here take up one of the central concerns voiced in Said’s 1994 book *Representations of the Intellectual*: the need for intellectuals to take responsibility for “speaking truth to power.” For Said, as editor Paul Bové notes, this means jettisoning postmodern worries about “what we can know” in order to be able to affirm that, “at the level of politics and history, we can know certain and often quite deadly things — massacres, cover-ups, and the suppression of human rights — and intellectuals must use their special training to speak of these matters as they speak about race and stories.” Barbara Harlow’s extraordinary essay on land mines and human rights

argues that the “overriding imperative of settling accounts and coming to terms with the past is a challenge that radically disturbs the cultural and political processes of the turn of the century.” Reflecting on a related set of issues, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, too, in her essay on Jack Forbes, tells us that “We must not lose sight of the importance of reclaiming the place of giving evidence — of telling truths — of the importance, even, of the truth; but in the process, we must not, paradoxically, advance that very vanguardism of truth-evidence-theory that can generate oppression in its name.”

Lest the book appear to offer an unqualified celebration of Said’s lifework, it is worth noting that many pieces included here (see especially Jacqueline Rose’s interview with Said) do try to grapple with the controversies that have emerged in response to his endeavours. Indeed, I would suggest that the most compelling contribution of both these volumes resides in their genuine spirit of intellectual exchange. Just as the essays in each individual volume can productively be read for the debates that get played out between essays and amongst contributors, reading them jointly makes clear just how much the contributions of some of the most salient figures in postcolonial studies — Said, Spivak, Homi Bhabha, Aijaz Ahmad — continue to be open to challenge and debate.

Archaïque.. et avant-garde

Anne Ancrenat

De mémoire de femmes. « La mémoire archaïque » dans l'œuvre romanesque d'Anne Hébert. Éditions Nota bene \$24.95

Reviewed by Neil B. Bishop

Cet excellent ouvrage porte sur sept romans—*Les chambres de bois*, *Kamouraska*, *Les enfants du sabbat*, *Héloïse*, *Les fous de Bassan*, *Le premier jardin* et *L'enfant chargé*

de songes. Son riche foisonnement comporte des thèses relatives à ce corpus (et à l'œuvre entière), à l'histoire des femmes, leur préhistoire, les psychologies féminine et masculine, les interactions entre les deux sexes, la condition féminine (pourquoi ce singulier?), la place d'Hébert dans la lutte féministe et le rôle socio-idéologique des écrivaines.

Ces thèses constituent un ensemble à potentiel de controverses. Ce potentiel se manifeste dès la première phrase qui affirme que l'œuvre romanesque hébertienne "n'a pas d'emblée séduit les lectrices féministes" qui en firent la victime d'une "non-reconnaissance" ou d'une "reconnaissance plus que mitigée." Sa thèse fondamentale : ce corpus est fort féministe. Thèse d'une mince originalité, eût-on cru (nombreuses sont les études démontrant le féminisme hébertien), n'eût été les démonstrations d'Ancrenat quant à *comment* cette œuvre est féministe de plusieurs façons formelles et thématiques.

Pour Ancrenat, la psychanalyse possède une valeur scientifique indiscutable, ce que beaucoup d'analyses nient de nos jours. Puisse ces douteurs rengainer leur scepticisme, car quelle que soit la valeur scientifique de l'ouvrage, Ancrenat y fait, à l'aide de la psychanalyse parmi d'autres outils, des analyses et démonstrations intelligentes et convaincantes. Analyses belles aussi, tant par la finesse des démonstrations que par leur organisation en un réseau où tout se tient dans le cadre de la vision du monde (dont l'humanité et le corpus étudié) que précise l'auteure. Convaincantes, elles éclairent les rapports mère-fille chez Hébert ainsi que la problématique de ses fameux fils faibles. Elles sont d'autant plus persuasives, qu'Ancrenat conjugue psychanalyse et narratologie (voire d'autres outils d'analyse littéraire généralement considérés plus fiables et rigoureux que la psychanalyse) : cette approche critique polyvalente s'avère efficace.

Selon Ancrenat, il ne faut point confondre "mémoire [archaïque] de femmes" et "inconscient collectif." "Faire le lien entre la femme archaïque et la jeune moderne . . . fait partie du projet littéraire d'Anne Hébert." Ce livre postule l'existence—au moins comme phénomène dans la psyché d'Anne Hébert, et peut-être bien comme phénomène du monde social préhistorique—d'un état social où la femme avait un statut soit égal, soit supérieur à celui des hommes. Ancrenat est loin d'être la première à postuler ce "féminin original" (pourquoi pas "originel"?), mais elle en démontre bien l'importance chez Hébert romancière.

La constellation assertive essentielle de ce livre : 1. Anne Hébert romancière a privilégié un univers féminin et féministe aux niveaux formel et thématique ; 2. dans cet univers, les personnages féminins tendent à chercher, (et, à l'occasion, à trouver) identité, bonheur et pouvoir en renouant avec un éternel féminin riche en bonheur, en liberté, en pouvoir (à l'opposé de l'éternel féminin défini par le patriarcat), une force féminine qui perdure dans la "mémoire archaïque" des femmes depuis toujours ; 3. pour ce faire, Hébert casse presque tout lien mère-fille pour permettre à celle-ci de renouer avec d'autres femmes, des mères archaïques, grâce à cette mémoire d'un passé (postulé) qui pourrait devenir leur présent et leur avenir—au lieu de rester prisonnières de la mère biologique, celle-ci, dans les sociétés occidentales, étant obligée par le patriarcat d'assurer sa dominance permanente en inculquant sa vision du monde à ses filles ; 4. les points 1, 2 et 3 ne sont aucunement les fruits du hasard mais d'une intentionalité auctoriale féministe chez Anne Hébert l'écrivaine "impliquée."

On regrette vivement l'absence d'un index, et l'on peut se demander pourquoi les travaux de Kells, de Whitfield et plus de travaux de Saint-Martin ne figurent pas parmi les études citées; le titre de l'article

de Lamy devrait se lire "Le roman," non "Un livre." Largement libre toutefois de fautes d'impression ou autres, *De mémoire de femmes* est un hommage stimulant et parfois brillant à l'œuvre d'un génie disparu.

The "Lighter" Companion

William L. Andrews, Frances Smith Foster, and Trudier Harris, eds.

The Concise Oxford Companion to African American Literature. Oxford UP \$24.95

Reviewed by Wibke Reger

When *The Oxford Companion to African American Literature* was published in 1997, the one-volume reference was hailed as "a breath-taking achievement" and "an indispensable collection of the voices and visions of African-American writers and thinkers" by such noted scholars as Nellie McKay and Darlene Clark Hine. *The Concise Companion*, which went to the press four years later, is a streamlined version aimed at an even wider audience. Whether the editors, William L. Andrews, Frances Smith Foster and Trudier Harris, achieved their aim to create a more "portable" book might depend on the size of your backpack or book bag—at 488 pages, *The Concise Companion* is still quite substantial.

The Companion contains well-researched and enlightening entries by 244 contributors, some of them as distinguished as Gerald Early, Arnold Rampersad or Claudia Tate. The book covers little-known figures such as Mary Prince and the major works of famous authors like Zora Neale Hurston. More than 150 key texts of African American fiction, poetry, drama, autobiography, essay collections, and children's and young adult literature receive their own entries, as do literary characters from Langston Hughes' Simple to Bigger Thomas, Janie Crawford or Kunta Kinte, characters like Aunt Jemima or Brer Rabbit, and cultural icons from Stepin Fetchit to Miles Davis or

Muhammad Ali. There are extensive cross-references and a subject index, and the bibliographies appended to the entries provide helpful pointers for further reading.

In order to abbreviate the original *Companion*, the editors omitted articles with a more general or theoretical focus in favor of biographical and textual entries. The entries have not been shortened and have largely remained unchanged. As a result, while the editors claim that they have made an effort to keep the scholarship current, many articles have not been updated. There is no information, for instance, about Charles Waddell Chesnut's novels *The Quarry* and *Paul Marchand, F.M.C.*, both published in 1999, or about Ann Petry's death, although she died in April 1997. Many of the small flaws of the original *Companion* have been allowed to live on in the concise version. The selection of entries is sometimes difficult to understand. While Sugar Ray Robinson and director Spike Lee have been allotted entries, those on the slave narrative, the Harlem Renaissance, and the entries on stock characters have been deleted.

The editors chose well, however, when they decided to incorporate the five-part, fifteen-page essay on literary history that is one of the key articles in the original *Companion*. It provides readers with a good overview of African American writing from the colonial and early national era to the antislavery and the reconstruction eras, and finally to the developments in the twentieth century. Unfortunately not all of the writers mentioned in the essay have been allotted their own entries, but the essay, which includes numerous cross-references, is still a good starting point for readers who are not yet familiar with African American literature.

The leaner version of *The Concise Oxford Companion to African American Literature* is still a great resource and might be the reference volume of choice for the general reader.

Discovering North/Self

William Barr, ed.

From Barrow to Boothia: The Arctic Journal of Chief Factor Peter Warren Dease, 1836-1839. McGill-Queen's UP \$49.95

Barbara Kelcey

Alone in Silence: European Women in the Canadian North before 1940. McGill-Queen's UP cloth \$75.00, paper \$27.95

William Finnes

The Snow Geese: A Story of Home. Random House \$34.95

Reviewed by Sherrill Grace

Here I am again reviewing three new books about the Canadian North. The books, however, keep coming, and I keep agreeing to read them and write about them because the North, with the spell it casts over our individual and collective imagination, persists. This time that spell reaches out to us from the early nineteenth century and catches up with us in 2002. This time most of the voices telling us their northern stories are visitors, Englishmen or Scots following a romantic dream to the Canadian Arctic or non-Native and European women travelling to the Arctic with husbands, or the missions, or for other professional and personal reasons. In every case, however, the stories are deeply personal, autobiographical, private; the North does that—draws out this narrative of self-discovery from those who go there and survive to tell their tales.

The most scholarly of these books is Barr's annotated edition of Peter Dease's journal. Barr is an expert on the North, and he brings that knowledge to bear in the publication of this document. The journal itself is superbly annotated; the introductions are judicious and helpful; the biographies at the end are essential guides, a who-was-who in the HBC of the period. However, the purpose behind this publication is more personal and moving.

Peter Dease co-led a major expedition to

the Arctic with Thomas Simpson, a young relative of George Simpson, the HBC governor-in-chief in North America and a towering figure in his own right. Historians have seen young Simpson as the real leader, and successful cartographer, of the mission to map uncharted expanses of the Arctic coast, but this interpretation is largely of Simpson's making; Barr is setting the record straight, much as Ken McGoogan does, in *Fatal Passage*, for the maligned John Rae. Through Barr's deft editing and the inclusion of Simpson's letters, it quickly becomes clear that Simpson was arrogant, racist, vain, bad-tempered and wildly ambitious. He was also an insufferable prig, quick to damn the writing of others while pontificating and, as Barr notes, garbling a passage from Byron in an attempt to sound clever. Moreover, in his letters Simpson casts aspersions on Dease and insists that he alone is the hero of the expedition. Dease's journals—factual, modest, fair, and informative—tell a different story; nowhere does Dease claim things for himself, and nowhere does he criticise Simpson. In short, Barr allows Simpson to damn himself and Dease to emerge as the intrepid, loyal, highly competent man he was.

Alone in Silence is also a deeply scholarly work, but what I especially appreciate is Kelcey's emphasis on gender. It is commonplace to assume that the North was no place for a woman and that no white women ventured there or, if they did, they could not stick it out. Through careful analysis of women's diaries, letters, and actual publications, Kelcey gives this story the lie. She presents the stories of numerous women who lived, worked, and travelled across the Arctic and sub-Arctic, from the famous wives of missionaries like Charlotte Bompas or the Grey Nuns, who travelled by land from St Boniface to Fort Providence to bring their mission to the Dene, to little-known figures like the artist Kathleen Shackleton or the nurse Helen Snowden.

Throughout, Kelcey is careful to situate her women in their cultural contexts, which means that she does not blame them for their views but tries to understand them, as much as possible, on their own terms. I found much new information here, especially in the chapters about professional women, and the only absence I regret is that of Mina Benson Hubbard, who successfully crossed Labrador in 1905.

Fiennes's book is the most personal and, for me, the least interesting. The book is about his pilgrimage, following the migration of snow geese from their southern wintering grounds in Texas, north, by stages, to their Arctic home, where they breed, raise their young and fatten up before fleeing the winters on the two-thousand-mile flight south. Embedded in his narrative are the stories of several people he meets along the way, but few of these stories hold much intrinsic interest. His narrative also includes summaries of and quotations from numerous scientific studies of birds and their migratory, navigational equipment. But the key intertext, the book that together with a serious illness sent Fiennes on his wild goose chase, is Paul Gallico's classic novella *The Snow Goose*. Unfortunately, however, for the reader who knows Gallico's story, Fiennes' pales by comparison.

Ultimately, this book is about home—the snow geese make their home in the Arctic, but for Fiennes, always the Englishman, home is England and his parents' house; home is where his heart is, and his long journey is a discovery as much of home as it is of the birds, the Inuit, the Muskeg Express, or the long trek North. Kelcey's women also long for home, but for them home is often a complex attempt to make something familiar from minimal supplies in totally unfamiliar and unforgiving surroundings. Those women travellers—Shackleton, Cameron, Hutchison and the others—always knew they would be return-

ing south or home to Great Britain. For Dease and the HBC men, however, home scarcely enters the picture, unless, as in Simpson's case, in longings for the comforts of his mother's hearth. The contrast between the men's world and the women's could hardly be more dramatic, and yet for all the genuine respect due to Dease (and to Simpson, despite his faults) as much respect, admiration and praise is due Kelcey's women. Their challenge was to face down the assumption that they were mere add-ons to the masculine enterprises of trade, missions, education and health care. Not only did they have to survive like the men, but they also had to chart feminine parameters within which to carve out their contribution, a contribution that, whatever we might say today about its ethics, was major.

Une utopie canadienne

Pierre Berthiaume

Relation des aventures de Mathieu Sagean, Canadien. Éditions du Nouveau Monde \$40.00

Reviewed by Marie-Christine Pioffet

Grâce à la très belle édition critique de Pierre Berthiaume publiée récemment aux éditions du Nouveau Monde, les lecteurs d'aujourd'hui pourront suivre les étonnantes aventures de Mathieu Sagean, jeune homme natif de Montréal pour qui l'Amérique et la plupart des océans du globe ne connaissent pas de secrets. Mais retraçons brièvement son itinéraire mouvementé tel que le dessine cette petite relation où le réel et l'imaginaire se mêlent inextricablement.

Membre prétendu de l'expédition exploratrice de Cavalier de La Salle, Sagean se dirige vers les Grands Lacs, longe la rivière des Illinois, traverse le pays des Missouris, pour s'établir quelque temps au fort Saint-Louis sous le commandement du sieur de Tonty. De là accompagné de onze Français

et de deux Mahégans, il se hasarde plus avant au cœur du continent. En chemin, ils rencontrèrent « quantité de lions, de léopards et de tigres qui ne leur firent aucun mal. » Puis, à quelques centaines de lieues de leur camp, les voyageurs découvrent le fabuleux pays des Acaaniba, contrée luxuriante composée de plusieurs « villes fortifiées » et de nombre de « vilages. » Ses habitants « policed en leur manière » et surtout le magnifique palais du roi, où ils sont reçus fort civilement, les ravissent. Cependant, bien loin de constituer une invention originale, la représentation de cette oasis au cœur des déserts américains dérive de *topoi* romanesques bien connus. Ainsi que le fait remarquer avec justesse Pierre Berthiaume, la vision idéalisée de Sagean se situe à la croisée des chemins entre le pays de cocagne et le mythe de l'Eldorado. En effet, les mines d'or assurent la prospérité de ces peuples des plus hospitaliers. Des fruits de toutes sortes « bien plus gros et meilleurs qu'en Europe » y prolifèrent. Autre lieu commun des voyages imaginaires, le climat tempéré procure aux naturels une étonnante longévité à l'abri des « maladies » et des « infirmités. » S'ensuit, conformément à la tradition utopique, un inventaire enthousiaste des nombreuses ressources de la région, puis s'amorce le difficile retour à la réalité. Autant ce séjour édenique fut exaltant, autant la suite du périple, véritable descente aux enfers, se révélera décevante. À peine rentré à Montréal, notre aventurier apprend la mort des membres de sa famille tués par des Iroquois. Avec quelques compagnons, il se lance aussitôt à la poursuite des meurtriers contre lesquels s'engagent de sanglants combats. De retour chez lui, le héros, cherchant à tirer profit de sa fortune, tente de regagner la France. Mais d'autres tribulations l'attendent. Capturé par des forbans qui le tourmentent inlassablement pour connaître la provenance de son trésor acaanibien, il en réchappe de peu après

plusieurs mois de captivité. Abandonné sur les côtes américaines avec les quelques compagnons qu'il lui reste, il sera reçu par le gouverneur de Boston qui lui confie une mission délicate auprès des Iroquois. Voyageur infatigable, il s'engage par la suite à bord d'un navire de flibustiers en quête de nouvelles richesses. À partir de ce jour, les hasards de la course ou plutôt de la mer le mèneront aux quatre coins du monde. Des Antilles à la Chine en passant la côte barbaresque, l'archipel du Cap-Vert et l'Afrique australe, la trajectoire de Sagean prend l'allure d'un chemin de croix au cours duquel la soif, la faim, la captivité et la mort sont ses principales compagnes. Qu'au terme de cette malheureuse odyssee, notre Robinson canadien veuille revoir le pays des Acaaniba paraît tout naturel.

Ce petit roman où les péripéties se suivent à un rythme haletant n'a rien à envier sur ce plan aux aventures du Capitaine Siden ou de Jacques Sadeur. Cependant, davantage qu'il ne rappelle le royaume des Australiens, l'épisode central des Acaaniba annonce en quelque sorte celui des Abaquis dans le *Cleveland* de l'abbé Prévost. Là où la plupart des utopistes rompent délibérément avec la topographie réelle, l'auteur de cette brève relation multiplie les repères géographiques et historiques pour rendre son récit plausible. Rien d'étonnant à ce que, comme le note Pierre Berthiaume, les autorités françaises, et en particulier le ministre de la marine Pontchartrain, aient longtemps cru à sa véracité. En annexe au récit figure un des interrogatoires que ce dernier imposa à Mathieu Sagean, preuve indubitable de la curiosité éveillée par les mines d'or du « créol de Canada ».

Il faudrait être bien naïf aujourd'hui pour croire à l'existence des Acaaniba, mais il en était tout autrement à la fin du Grand Siècle où la configuration intérieure du continent américain demeurait encore incertaine. Que le protagoniste soit un imposteur, nul ne saurait en douter.

Pourtant son histoire comporte maints traits pittoresques et exotiques qui tendent parfois à suggérer une observation de première main.

Au demeurant, le principal mérite de l'éditeur n'est pas seulement d'avoir exhumé un manuscrit inédit, mais d'avoir su en montrer les failles et les contradictions à la lumière d'un patient travail d'archives. Juste et précise, l'exégèse historique lève le voile sur ses propres limites. Qui était Mathieu Sagean? Malgré une investigation approfondie, l'éditeur doit se contenter d'hypothèses puisque aucun document officiel n'atteste l'existence de ce patronyme. Comment a-t-il rédigé ce récit alors qu'il savait à peine écrire? Quelle est la part qui lui revient précisément dans cette narration? Berthiaume met au jour la collaboration de Fossecaev, le commis qui a entendu la déposition de Sagean, sans pouvoir déterminer l'étendue de sa contribution. Démêler dans cet imbroglio narratif la vérité de l'invention n'était certes pas chose facile en raison des lacunes et des incohérences contenues dans l'œuvre. Enfin, plusieurs questions demeurent sur les sources de cette mystification.

Ceux qui connaissent les travaux antérieurs de Pierre Berthiaume et notamment son édition critique du *Journal d'un voyage [...] dans l'Amérique septentrionale* de Charlevoix reconnaîtront ici la même rigueur scientifique ou philologique. Il faut donc saluer avec chaleur la publication de ce nouvel ouvrage de la très sérieuse collection du Nouveau Monde qui témoigne de la vitalité des études canadiennes.



Nouveautés théâtrales

Hélène Beauchamp, Joël Beddows (dir.)

Les théâtres professionnels du Canada francophone.
Le Nordir \$28.00

Anne-Marie Sicotte

Gratien Gélinas. Du naïf Fridolin à l'ombrageux Tit-Coq. XYZ éditeur \$15.95

Carole Fréchette

Jean et Béatrice. Leméac/Acte Sud \$15.95

Wajdi Mouawad

Rêves. Leméac/Acte Sud \$15.95

Reviewed by Alain-Michel Rocheleau

D'une opulence qui ne commence à ne plus étonner personne, les publications en théâtre marquent de plus en plus, au Canada, le marché du livre francophone. Parmi celles-ci figurent quatre ouvrages qui, bien que de valeur et d'importance inégales, sauront sans doute intéresser de nombreux lecteurs.

Le premier, intitulé *Les théâtres professionnels du Canada francophone* et publié en 2001 sous la direction d'Hélène Beauchamp et de Joël Beddows, rassemble une douzaine de textes qui, en dépit de leur grande diversité, constituent un ensemble assez unifié. Cet ouvrage regroupe des textes portant sur les pratiques du théâtre francophone en milieu minoritaire, tant en Ontario (Joël Beddows, Catherine Graham), en Saskatchewan (Moirra Day), qu'en Alberta (France Levasseur-Ouimet & Roger Parent). On y retrouve aussi des études sur l'évolution de compagnies franco-canadiennes, comme le Théâtre populaire d'Acadie (David Lonergan), le Cercle Molière de Saint-Boniface (Lise Gaboury-Diallo & Laurence Véron), la Troupe du Jour de Saskatoon (Louise Forsyth) et le Théâtre la Seizième de Vancouver (Hélène Beauchamp). Une réflexion sur l'importance des alliances stratégiques entre les troupes de théâtre francophone (Patrick Leroux), de même que quelques textes consacrés à l'œuvre d'auteurs comme

I Herménégilde Chiasson (Glen Nichols), Michel Ouellette (Dominique Lafon), Jean Marc Dalpé (Stéphanie Nutting) et au travail de la comédienne Viola Léger (Louise Lemieux), sont eux aussi intéressants. On y apprend, entre autres choses, que dans des contextes culturels et linguistiques minoritaires, les enjeux liés à la pratique du théâtre au Canada sont toujours énormes. En considérant la rareté des publications portant sur le même sujet, ce livre possède une valeur informative certaine.

Le deuxième ouvrage, *Gratien Gélinas. Du naïf Fridolin à l'ombrageux Tit-Coq*, est d'une toute autre nature. Tout en relatant les grands moments de la vie professionnelle de Gratien Gélinas (1909-1999), Anne-Marie Sicotte réfère à des événements déjà fort connus: à la fondation de la troupe des Anciens du Collège de Montréal (le 5 mai 1931), à la participation de Gélinas dans *Le curé de village* de Robert Choquette (1934), à la production des *Fridolinons 43, 44 et 45 (Les Fridolinades)*, de *Tit-Coq* (1948), de *Bousille et les justes* (1958), jusqu'aux premiers insuccès d'*Hier, les enfants dansaient* (1967). À cela s'ajoutent d'autres détails, plus méconnus du grand public (l'amitié indéfectible du scripteur-journaliste Louis Morisset pour Gélinas, l'admiration de ce dernier pour Marcel Pagnol, par exemple), qui ne manquent pas d'intérêt, de même que la chronologie préparée par Michèle Vanasse, qui est détaillée et fort bien constituée.

On ne doute pas que l'auteure ait accompli un travail de recherche documentaire sérieux pour écrire ce récit biographique. Or, si les événements de la vie professionnelle—auxquels fait référence madame Sicotte—sont le plus souvent pertinents, en revanche, ceux touchant la vie familiale et privée du dramaturge sont abordés d'une façon qui frôle à peine le manque d'objectivité. Par exemple, tout en faisant le récit de certains faits, comme s'ils étaient relatés du point de vue de l'épouse de Gélinas—souvent dépeinte comme une «pauvre

sainte femme»—, Anne-Marie Sicotte écrit: «Comme Claude Robillard l'année précédente, [Louis] Pelland écrira dans l'ombre. Personne dans le public ne saura qu'il est l'auteur d'une partie des textes de la nouvelle émission de radio de Gratien, *Le train de plaisir*, et de sa revue de variétés, *Fridolinons*. L'espace d'un instant, Simone a envie de s'agenouiller [...] et de demander à Dieu de pardonner à son mari ce péché d'orgueil.» (39-40). Sur un ton semblable, Gratien Gélinas nous est présenté comme un libertin (les allusions à des relations extra-conjugales, impliquant Huguette Oigny notamment, sont nombreuses), comme un être égoïste, irascible et susceptible, qui rendait à sa famille aussi bien qu'à ses amis et collègues les plus proches l'existence assez difficile. Si l'auteure souhaitait tracer de Gélinas un portrait plutôt négatif, elle a très bien réussi. Son livre nous apparaît d'ailleurs beaucoup plus comme un éloge visant à célébrer le courage et les vertus théologiques pratiqués par Simone Lalonde-Gélinas qu'un hommage objectif rendu à l'auteur de *Tit-Coq*.

Dans le domaine de la création, deux textes dramatiques retiennent l'attention. Tout d'abord, après avoir signé *Les Quatre Morts de Marie* (1995), *Les Sept Jours de Simon Labrosse: si sa vie vous intéresse* (1999) et *Violette sur la terre* (2002), voilà que Carole Fréchette publie *Jean et Béatrice*. La fable de ce texte, de facture plutôt classique, peut se résumer ainsi: dans un appartement presque vide situé au trente-troisième étage d'un immeuble sans ascenseur, une jeune femme, Béatrice, rêve de rencontrer chez elle un homme capable de combler son existence esseulée. Elle fait alors passer une petite annonce dans un journal, tout en promettant une «récompense substantielle» à celui qui pourra «l'intéresser, l'émouvoir et la séduire» (10). Un chasseur de primes, prénommé Jean et captivé «par toutes les choses qu'on peut acheter avec [des] billets de vingt» dollars,

se soumet avec brio aux trois épreuves exigées. Mais la relation entre les deux protagonistes se transforme, peu à peu, en confrontation désespérée, dans laquelle ceux-ci improvisent des comportements liant l'intimité au familier, le mensonge à la vérité.

Dans cette pièce, Carole Fréchette aborde sur un ton personnel quelques thèmes courants, comme la solitude et l'usure du temps ; certaines trouvailles scénographiques (comme la projection d'images différentes chaque fois que Béatrice tombe endormie) ne manquent pas d'originalité. Certaines faiblesses viennent toutefois ternir celle-ci. Par exemple, des répliques telles que «L'émotion, ça pousse dans l'humidité, [...] [c]omme les champignons» (10), ou encore, la séduction est «comme un déluge sur le désert en plein mois de juillet.» (41), sont—pour dire le moins—peu recherchées ; d'autres véhiculent—sans grande nuance—des stéréotypes sexistes comme celui de l'homme *primitif* [«T'es juste un homme qui sue et qui rote et qui ronfle» (59), lance Béatrice] ou encore celui de la femme hystérique [«Tu es complètement hystérique» (60), lui répond Jean].

Dans un tout autre registre, Wajdi Mouawad, auteur de *Littoral* (1999), de *Mains d'Edwige au moment de la naissance* (1999), et d'un roman, *Visage retrouvé* (2002), vient de faire paraître une pièce intitulée *Rêves* et qui a pour sujet principal le processus de création littéraire. D'où viennent les personnages de fiction? Quel est leur statut? Peut-on vraiment les considérer comme des entités distinctes de leur créateur? C'est à ces questions, entre autres, que Mouawad tente de répondre par l'entremise de son personnage principal, Willem. Celui-ci, après avoir loué une chambre d'hôtel, passe la nuit à écrire les grandes lignes d'un roman à venir, *Architecture d'un marcheur*, et qui raconte l'histoire d'un homme qui marche vers la mer. «Tous les soirs, [ce dernier] arrive,

[...] se plante devant moi et ne dit plus rien. [...] Il me regarde. Et son regard me fait tellement peur [...]» (17), avoue Willem. De ce processus naissent une dizaine de personnages aux délires oniriques et qui, tour à tour, viennent mobiliser l'imaginaire de leur créateur, argumenter avec lui, nourrir ses exaspérations et sa fureur, ses incertitudes et ses angoisses. De cette fable émerge aussi le personnage de l'hôtesse, qui est loin de toute cette agitation autour de Willem et qu'elle côtoie sans la voir ni l'entendre. Seul la touche le drame poignant de son fils (sa tentative de suicide, notamment [55]), que le jeune visiteur lui rappelle avec douleur.

Rêves est un texte poétique écrit avec soin. Wajdi Mouawad nous parle certes des difficultés liées à l'écriture, mais aussi de la douleur des humains («La douleur voyage au cœur du métal [...] [t]out comme l'amour voyage dans le cœur de l'homme» [65-66]) et de la civilisation de ceux-ci: «J'appartiens à une civilisation qui ne marche pas. Une civilisation qui [...] tente d'aller de plus en plus vite.» (54) Par ailleurs, le nombre élevé de didascalies et de répliques imprégnées de répétitions, comme «[...] ils pouvaient pas la placer ailleurs, la minuterie, alors j'ai dit de ne pas la placer, la minuterie... et puis ils l'ont placée quand même, la minuterie... et puis j'aurais pas dû accepter cette histoire de minuterie [...]» (14), ne sont pas sans rappeler le théâtre de Samuel Beckett.



Soothsaid Verse

Stephen Brockwell

Cometology. ECW \$15.95

Stephen Cain

Torontology. ECW \$15.95

Bruce Whiteman

The Invisible World Is In Decline, Book V. ECW \$14.95

Reviewed by Tim Conley

There's an undeniable new strain of the prophetic emerging in Canadian poetry. In part it is a reaction to the aggravating inward spiral of postmodern confessionalism: there is a need for a public, even popular poetics to address the sensory bombardment an allegedly postliterate world experiences. Our stories and autobiographies seem so conditional now that we live, however uncomfortably, in the future.

Stephen Brockwell watches the skies. For him the future arrives in paths and patterns, perhaps fleetingly discerned through the telescope as well as in the more immediate "rivulets of water" of whose greater river of memory we are part. In *Cometology*, he traces the gazes of Osceola, Kepler, Elizabeth I, and Herod, and locates comets as their mutual object. Although he writes of a heavenly body "I will not / catalogue her beauty," Brockwell does in fact offer an index of naturalist's observations, dreams, and mathematical propositions. For the apocalyptic reader there is star-fixed cultism of a different sort: Brockwell illuminates an unholy cinematic trinity in Stanley Kubrick, Stan Brakhage, and James Bond. Cultural stars are as ably arranged in new constellations here as human forms are assembled, in verse and accompanying illustration, as a tetrahedron, helicoid, or klein bottle in "Constructive Geometry":

Your neck enters your side:
a sleeping swan,
a lover alone in a large bed.

You will never be
filled with water.

If the ambivalence seems affected, the attempt may be crucial. Brockwell's phenomenology is not a disinterested affair, for he admits, "I fail to watch without reverence." The comets do not predict themselves, we must pose our own questions to them.

Stephen Cain is the mixmaster and barstool prophet. *Torontology*, his second book, is an urban sound studio in which the reels replay, at new speeds and in new directions, the catchwords, pieties, notable quotables of modern verse. Reading Cain is perversely like listening to recordings played in reverse, not to discover that Paul is dead but that something else is alive:

I have my books & my pornography to
protect me. I have yielded in my amour. I
am a crock, I am a lying man. All the holy
peepholes, why do they all hum glum? I
am a lonely fainter, I give in a pox of
taint. Joys, joys, joys of an addict.

Although his affinities for Gertrude Stein and T. S. Eliot, proclaimed in his previous book *dyslexicon* (1998), are yet strong and compete with his fondness for the simple lyric, Cain avoids both an easy nostalgia for modernism and a cloying, self-aware pop savvy by retaining focus on the cultural background noise. "Psychles" is a film-based autobiography, a series of paronomasia-rich responses to ten films, arranged anadiplostically: the last word of each line is the first of the next. Cain's formalism is cannibalistic but his desperation is enjoyably irreverent.

Besides being the veteran of this grouping, Bruce Whiteman is the oldest kind of prophet: the inward seer confuting the wilderness. Comparable to (though I think less accomplished than) Christopher Dewdney's ongoing *The Natural History of Southwestern Ontario*, Whiteman's *The Invisible World is in Decline* is a chronicle of sensory experience that began in 1984 with

the aggressive statement, “The world is an invasion.” This fifth volume concerns the body and solitude, though unlike its predecessors it seems more of a loose collection than a unified book or poetic argument. In fact, the invisible world is not much in evidence except in “Polyphonic Windows”:

The beautiful counterpoint of what is out the window. A landscape of desire where people and the geography in which they move make a perfect scene of adoration. The window, thrown up to give air, makes possible a body fugue. Everything in sight depends on it.

While the first sentence is admirable in its deceptive simplicity—the colloquial possibilities of “what is out the window” make me think of Wittgenstein and what may be taken to be the case—the epigrams which follow use tired tropes (the “landscape of desire” has been well-tilled by now). Too often are the expressions of the erotic (“The sheer comic gymnastics of sex are part of its lovely conspiracy”) distressingly banal. The book ends with the line “love alone has no season”; but that, by way of forecast, isn’t very practical advice.

Signs of Life

Helen M. Buss, D.L. MacDonald and Anne McWhir, eds.

Mary Wollstonecraft and Mary Shelley: Writing Lives. Wilfrid Laurier UP \$41.39

J.I. Little, ed.

Love Strong as Death: Lucy Peel’s Canadian Journal, 1833-1836. Wilfrid Laurier UP \$55.20

Reviewed by Julie Rak

Two new books from Wilfrid Laurier University Press show how commitment to the area of life writing and autobiographical studies is growing in Canada. *Mary Wollstonecraft and Mary Shelley* and *Love Strong as Death* represent two important areas in the study of life writing by women.

Writing Lives combines biographical intertextual studies with the idea of biography and autobiography as a creative mode of reading women’s lives and texts, while Little’s work is part of the larger project of recovering women’s unpublished autobiographical texts from earlier periods and making them available to a contemporary readership.

Writing Lives is a collection based on presentations made during a 1997 conference at the University of Calgary to honour the bicentenary of Wollstonecraft’s death, and of Shelley’s birth, in 1797. The collection focuses on the relationship between Mary Shelley and her famous parents, Mary Wollstonecraft and William Godwin, both of whom are counted among the most influential radical intellectuals in the Romantic period. The connections between Wollstonecraft and Shelley are made poignant by the fact that Wollstonecraft, an early feminist and radical author, died just after she gave birth to her daughter Mary, and that Mary Shelley read her *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters* while she was working on *Frankenstein* in 1818. William Godwin’s biography of his wife, *Memoirs of the Author of Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1798), was meant to salvage Wollstonecraft’s moral reputation, but had the opposite effect and caused a backlash against Wollstonecraft and her radical ideas. Mary Shelley’s biography of her father, from whom she was often estranged after her marriage to Percy Bysshe Shelley, was never published. Such a tangled set of literary lives would seem to invite comparisons between texts and lives, and between the lives of the writers who often could only relate textually to each other.

Writing Lives sets for itself an ambitious and creative project, since the issues that it raises are complex, and these writers are all very well known already. The success of such a complex project is mixed, in part because the trope of “life writing” that

underwrites many of the articles in this collection enables high-quality scholarship in some cases, while in others it proves to be too diffuse. "Life writing" is a concept pioneered in Canada by Marlene Kadar in her 1992 collection *Essays on Life Writing: from Genre to Critical Practice*, which was meant to take into account the non-public forms of writing by women who were excluded from the male-dominated public sphere. Life writing proved to be a fruitful way to look at diaries, letters and journals by women that did not take the form of published autobiographies. However, the concept has also caused some problems. The delineation between the public and private spheres is no longer thought to be so absolute, and the distinction is not always gendered, but can depend on other identity categorizations such as class or race. And if "life writing" is taken to mean everything which is not fictional, and if the devices of autobiography seem at times to mimic fiction, what is *not* life writing? The term itself seems to collapse under scrutiny.

In *Writing Lives*, "life writing" means everything from the use of the first person in Shelley's and Wollstonecraft's works in essays by textual critics, to self-reflection on biographical writing of Mary Shelley's life. Some of these essays are very successful at bringing together contemporary scholarship about autobiography with criticism about Wollstonecraft and Shelley's work. Unfortunately, the collection is a bit uneven, particularly when some of the writers decide that making connections between the lives of Wollstonecraft, Shelley and their texts constitutes autobiography criticism. *Writing Lives* does contain enough important essays, however, to make it worthwhile.

J.I. Little's edition of Lucy Peel's Canadian journal continues the work of making available autobiographical texts by women pioneers and emigrants who lived in the Canadas during the early nineteenth century.

Like Susannah Moodie and Catharine Parr Trill in Upper Canada, Lucy Peel was one of the English gentry who accompanied Edmund Peel, her new husband on leave from the British navy, to the colony of British North America as a settler in Lower Canada's Eastern Townships. Little's carefully edited manuscript consists of the letters Lucy Peel wrote to her family, with occasional letters from Edmund, about the experiences she had in Canada. Peel is initially full of enthusiasm for pioneer life. Her loss of enthusiasm is connected to the death of her first child, and to the economic difficulties that the hard-working Peels have.

J.I. Little has written four books and more than thirty articles about the history of the Eastern Townships, which means that she is in a position to provide extensive context for Peel's letters. The introduction carefully lays out the social context of Peel's writings. Little also contests the gendered delineation between public and private, and says that the greater division Peel's letters shows is between classes.

Little's meticulous editing makes *Love Strong as Death* an important addition to our knowledge of the writing of early settlers and to the history of women's writing in Canada, although at times the notes bog the text down. Lucy Peel's breathless style when she discusses things like the price of ribbon does demonstrate how elliptical letter writing can become when ordinary events must be recounted to the relatives as "news," but it does not make for interesting reading. However, Peel's ironic retelling of anecdotes sometimes makes her writing lively, and, with Little's contextualization, stories about events like the death of her first child are memorable and historically significant, making this publication worthwhile.



Genealogy and History

Wendy Cameron, Sheila Haines, and
Mary McDougall Maude

*English Immigrant Voices: Labourers' Letters
From Upper Canada in the 1830s.* McGill-
Queen's UP \$65.00

Reviewed by Adele Perry

Genealogy is big business, and not just in Michel Foucault's sense. Every day, legions of retirees from Burnaby, Scarborough, and Longueuil descend on archives in an effort to find documentary traces of their known ancestors. *English Immigrant Voices* is an example of genealogy writ large. Cameron, Haines, and McDougall have gathered 180 letters and exhaustively documented, cross-referenced, and annotated them. The result is excellent genealogy, but unfortunately, not much more.

English Immigrant Voices has its roots in a transatlantic project on the history of the Petworth emigration scheme, a charitable effort that funded and co-ordinated the migration of poor English people to Upper Canada in the 1830s. This research is funded by the Jackman Foundation; Reverend Edward Jackman, himself a descendant of Petworth immigrants, contributes the foreword to this book. The larger research project has produced two books so far—the narrative *Assisting Emigration to Upper Canada: The Petworth Project, 1832-1837*, and this documentary collection, both published by McGill-Queen's.

The editors begin with an introductory essay that explains how these letters were written and preserved and aims to situate them within the historical context of England and Upper Canada in the 1830s. The bulk of the book—over 260 pages—is made up of the letters of Petworth migrants. These are supplemented by some of the richest documents in the collection, another hundred pages of correspondence and personal narrative from people who

“throw additional light on the experience of the Petworth emigrants.”

English Immigrant Voices bears the imprint of meticulous and sustained research. Each letter is accompanied by text that systematically explains who wrote it, whom they were related to, where they wrote it, where it was found, and what else s/he wrote. Footnotes provide additional information about people, places, and contexts mentioned in the letters. Anyone who has researched the lives of ordinary people in the early and mid-nineteenth century will recognize that the sheer volume and specificity of this information are remarkable. It is not easy to track people who were literally or figuratively “nameless” and restore them to history as Cameron, Haines, and Maude have done.

But it is important to do so. Tracking these people and their words offers us a new and needed vantage point on Upper Canada in the turbulent decade of the 1830s. The almost total absence of First Nations people from the letters suggests that Aboriginal people had been made essentially invisible to settlers. What did matter to the writers was the prosaic stuff of working life. The letters are full of tales of cholera, dying children, and the unceasing character of labour, paid or unpaid, free or bound. They are, as the editors note, emphatically public documents intended to be shared or, in the case of one, “copied and stuck up at the Onslow Arms to let every one see.” By explaining their lives to their families and sponsors in print, these humble and pressed letter writers became a telling counterpart to the narratives penned by genteel migrants like the Strickland sisters, Susanna Moodie and Catharine Parr Traill. *English Immigrant Voices* takes us behind Moodie's famous backwoods.

But however rare and rich, these letters are not transparent or mimetic windows into the past. Cameron, Haines, and Maude are admirable detectives but less willing

analysts. While the introduction acknowledges the cultural and social politics of letter-writing and preservation, the editors never sufficiently reckon with the letters as texts. And highly formulaic, even ritualistic, texts they are. The letters usually begin with a comment about the author taking the “opportunity” or “liberty” to write, go on to discuss travel, the price of necessities, the conditions of wage labour and agriculture, and the whereabouts and state of friends and relations. They generally conclude by advising people to emigrate (or, less commonly, advising against it) and expressing the desire to be known, recalled, and remembered. The letters are remarkably similar to one another not only in content but in style and phrasing.

That most of the letters were found in contemporary newspapers or in the collections of the philanthropists behind the Petworth emigration scheme goes part of the way to explaining their essential sameness. But the fact that the letters were edited and culled by the middle class is, as Cameron, Haines, and Maude suggest, not the only issue at stake. There are many issues: the authors’ limited literacy (by the editors’ reckoning, fewer than one-third of the Petworth emigrants could sign their names to a marriage register), the composite authorship of many of the letters, and the unclear attribution of letters (frequently written in the first person but signed by two or more people or, alternately, written in the third person and signed by one). I wonder if we need to think of these not so much as personal letters but as their own literary form, one that does not quite conform to the usual definitions of epistolary or immigration literature.

I doubt that these issues would be news to Cameron, Haines, and Maude. Their introduction is suitably clear about the letters’ provenance. But this would be a richer volume if the editors had moved beyond noting the letters’ particularities and analyzed

them. Likewise, it would be a more valuable contribution if the editors had not only tracked, connected, and triangulated individuals and families but also offered a broader and more critical treatment of British and Upper Canadian society.

Ornamentalism

David Cannadine

Ornamentalism: How the British Saw Their Empire. Oxford UP \$40.00

Chris Gosden and Chantal Knowles

Collecting Colonialism: Material Culture and Colonial Change. Berg \$103.64

Reviewed by Maria Noëlle Ng

With the resplendent spectacles of the Queen Mother’s and then Queen Elizabeth II’s jubilee, fervour and support for the Monarchy were, for the time being, revived. Public sentiment seems to bear out Cannadine’s thesis in *Ornamentalism*. In his detailed, if at times repetitive, examination of the process of establishing British rule in such places as Tanganyika and Tasmania, the author’s theme is that, more so than race, social hierarchy and the display of its privileges played a significant role in Britain’s colonial history.

This thesis leads to an equally important assertion: again and again, Cannadine suggests that the British saw their conquered people first and foremost in terms of class. Thus the future King Edward VII insisted on King Kalakaua of Hawaii’s precedence at a royal gathering: “Either the brute is a king, or he’s a common or garden nigger.” However, one also must surely question the diction of the future King-Emperor. One does wonder if Edward would have called any of his European male relatives a “brute” or a “garden nigger.” Indeed, *Ornamentalism* consistently points to one inescapable conclusion: the natives needed a king or a governor, but a lesser one. For example, while the Indian Civil Service regularly doled out

honours to civil servants, “these awards were also given to Indians.” According to Cannadine, the British thought that the Indian princes were enamoured with these decorations. Giving them awards and titles would, it was assumed, effectively dampen any anti-colonial sentiments amongst them. This sounds less like equal treatment of colonial subjects than a cynical strategy of containment.

Cannadine is right that the book was written from the “perspective of the British imperial metropolis.” He is equally candid in his challenge of Edward Said’s thesis in *Orientalism*, although he is merely repeating arguments that are already well established. This is not to say that *Ornamentalism* is not an interesting book. It reminds the reader that not all history of nineteenth-century British imperialism is written from post-colonial, post-independence, post-national perspectives. The book also contains wonderful photographs, such as one of Lord Curzon gazing pensively at a dead tiger at his feet, or the prince of Wales, later Edward VIII, “wearing an Indian headdress” during a Canadian tour in 1919. Therefore, it is rather disappointing that Cannadine rarely refers to the photographs. Usually an eloquent writer, Cannadine appears to have hurried over some parts of *Ornamentalism*. Surely using “unprecedented” three times on one page is a bit excessive.

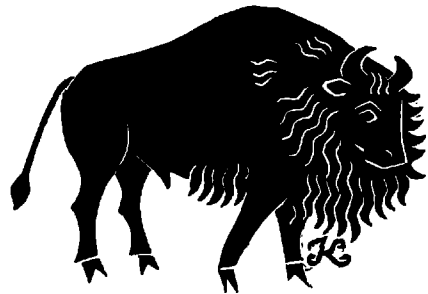
Collecting Colonialism also deals with ornaments. The authors’ aim is “to develop a series of detailed case studies from Papua New Guinea to throw light on the broader historical and intellectual developments” of colonial history in Melanesia. In a thesis not dissimilar from Cannadine’s, Gosden and Knowles suggest that there were more cooperation and interaction between the colonial and colonized cultures than some historians of colonialism would have one believe.

The book begins by discussing material culture in nineteenth-century Melanesia.

As the authors explain, “Objects were at the centre of Melanesian views of their relationships with whites, relationships which had a series of moral and political aspects to them . . . which many whites would not have readily grasped in their dealings with the local inhabitants of New Britain.”

Because of the differences in processing cognitive and cultural information, the exchange of objects between colonizers and colonized acquired what Gosden and Knowles call “a radically performative aspect,” leading to a stress “on both formalization of clothing and comportment, but also of constant negotiation of roles and relations.” A chapter devoted to the history of the colonization of West New Britain, off the coast of Papua New Guinea, follows.

The remainder of *Collecting Colonialism* deals with four collectors and anthropologists: Albert Buell Lewis, Felix Speiser, John Alexander Todd, and Beatrice Blackwood. The most interesting is Blackwood, who won a scholarship to Somerville College, Oxford, in 1908, at age nineteen. An early pioneer of cross-Atlantic scholarly exchange, Blackwood conducted research in North America. In 1929, she began fieldwork in the Pacific in the company of other woman anthropologists such as Margaret Mead and Hortense Powdermaker. A whole book could be devoted to Beatrice Blackwood’s career and life alone.



Women in Western Canada

Catherine A. Cavanaugh and Randi R. Warne, eds.

Telling Tales: Essays in Western Women's History.
 UBC P \$29.95

Reviewed by Janice Fiamengo

Feminist historical scholarship has changed significantly over the past two decades, moving from an emphasis on heroines battling patriarchal oppression to an awareness of class and race conflicts between women, individuals' diverse responses to their circumstances, and the myriad locations of power and resistance. The result, in the best feminist work, is research that attends to the importance of gender as one category of meaning intersecting with many other variables, including race, ethnicity, and class but also age, ability, health, marital status, religious affiliation, educational background, and family context. Often this work is archival, interdisciplinary, and influenced by an eclectic mix of theoretical approaches. Such is the case with the majority of essays in *Telling Tales: Essays in Western Women's History*.

In their excellent introduction to the volume, editors Catherine Cavanaugh and Randi Warne provide a judicious overview of developments in historical scholarship and define their emphasis on diversity of subjects and approaches. The ongoing need, they assert, is for "all kinds of stories to be told and for many kinds of analyses to be conducted." Their collection focuses on the Canadian West, combining the prairie provinces with British Columbia to stress the continuities of women's settler experiences in these provinces, which underwent periods of rapid growth due to immigration at approximately the same time and were marked by ethnic and cultural diversity.

Although most of the essays focus on the lives of newcomer women, the impact of settlement on Aboriginal women's lives is

also considered. Sarah Carter demonstrates that the idea of Native women's licentiousness was promoted as a direct response to allegations, by Aboriginal people and opposition politicians, of Indian agents and NWMP officers' sexual abuse of these women. Her analysis of House of Commons records makes this a fascinating contribution to scholarship on images of Indian women. Consulting diaries and letters of settler women, Nanci Langford contributes a well-written and heart-wrenching analysis of the childbirth experiences of immigrant women in Alberta and Saskatchewan at a time when very few health services were available to them.

In a piece that makes an excellent companion article to Langford's, Beverly Boutilier examines how medical professionals undermined the power of a national women's organization (the National Council of the Women of Canada) to address prairie women's health concerns. Reviewing the records of the NCWC meetings, Boutilier traces the defeat of an initiative to create a corps of midwives to assist prairie women. Articles by Nancy Pagh, Cavanaugh and Frieda Klippenstein are also notable for their accessibility, clarity, and new insights while Sherry Edmunds-Flett and Frances Swyripa have done valuable archival research.

Occasionally, the essays reveal the conceptual limitations that can result when a single category such as gender is taken to be the primary determiner of meaning in all women's lives. An otherwise informative article by Sheila McManus on the work arrangements and political struggles of Alberta farm women is at times weakened by an exclusive focus on gender norms. McManus reads women's attempts to transform tiny wooden shacks into comfortable and beautiful family living spaces as evidence of an insidious gender ideal. That women were expected—and themselves desired—to care for domestic interiors is

hardly a startling feminist revelation, and in this instance it diverts attention from potentially more interesting avenues of inquiry, such as the actual details of house management under such difficult frontier circumstances.

In another example, Myra Rutherdale is so focused on gender that her discussion of male and female missionaries in the North West consistently neglects or dismisses the significance of religious faith in her subjects' lives. In one instance, she quotes a missionary describing how his wife's exemplary Christian death brought about the spiritual conversions of many Native people present at her deathbed. He wrote that "her beautiful and tender words, and patient endurance of agony . . . drew more souls to Jesus than ever." The thinly-veiled contempt with which Rutherdale comments on this passage ("Ridley was using the hyperbole commonly adopted in missionary obituaries, but it appears that he believed that in the theatre of Jane Ridley's death, souls were saved") reveals the inadequacy of secular feminism to explore the multifaceted intersections of gender, faith, and self-sacrifice so central to missionaries' self-understanding.

In contrast, one of the factors that makes Klippenstein's essay on Mennonite domestic servants so astute is her recognition that her subjects' experiences "fit uncomfortably into familiar, contemporary [feminist] categories," making it difficult to define them as protectors or exploiters, agents or victims. Klippenstein's conclusion articulates a salutary warning against presentist judgements and an apt outline of the ongoing challenge confronting feminist historians: "As the religious and self-abasing elements of their discourse becomes [*sic*] embarrassing and even incomprehensible to their own children and grandchildren, we risk projecting onto them our contemporary values and ideologies. But by actively preserving their stories, perhaps we can

learn to listen to and understand these voices on their own terms." *Telling Tales* makes a solid contribution to this endeavour.

Mirrors, Mimics, Myths

Thomas Claviez and Maria Moss, eds.

Mirror Writing: (Re-)Constructions of Native American Identity. Galda & Wilch Verlag n.p.

Dee Horne

Contemporary American Indian Writing: Unsettling Literature. Peter Lang \$24.95

David Leeming and Jake Page

The Mythology of Native North America. U of Oklahoma P \$14.95

Reviewed by Alison Calder

Mirror Writing: (Re-)Constructions of Native American Identity is a genuinely interesting and valuable collection of essays. It originates in selected papers from a conference on "the de- and possible reconstruction of Native American identity" held at the John F. Kennedy Institute for North American Studies in Berlin in 1999, and is divided into three parts. Papers in the ethnology and cultural contact section range from a discussion of the changing nature of the Lakota Sun Dance to an analysis of intercultural racial passing. The second section, on Native American myth and storytelling, treats the challenges of translating oral culture into written form. Papers range from general cultural studies to a more specific treatment of M. Scott Momaday. The final section, on reading/seeing the Other, examines issues in literary and visual representations of Native cultures, and particular attention is paid to self-imagining by Native Americans, whether they work as critics or as artists.

This collection is intensely interdisciplinary, with essays covering anthropology, sociology, oral and written literature, and visual art. Despite this variety, the essays work extremely well together because they

all take as their starting point the assumption that Native American culture, like all culture, is a *process* that changes and adapts as the world does. The essays are united in their rejection of the “declining culture” narrative, which sees contemporary Native American culture as a degraded form of what was once a pure existence. Peter Bolz’s opening essay on the Lakota Sun Dance stresses that even this foundational ceremony “is involved in a constant process of change, development, and transformation to accommodate new social realities.”

Christian Feast argues in “Mission Impossible? Native Americans and Christianity” that though “today the vast majority of Native Americans are members of a Christian church,” anthropologists and historians continue to distinguish between Christianity and “traditional” religions, thus ignoring the complicated issues that Christianity raises for Native American theorists and politicians. Dominique Legros, in “First Nations Postmodern Cultures,” directly challenges the reader: “Why is it that with North American First Nations we never deem their present cultures fully authentic? Could it be that if an authentic Iroquois culture were acknowledged in the present, this would cost the settlers’ society an enormous amount in compensation for seized or lost land and rights?”

The essay-writers in this collection further challenge their own disciplines by questioning the efficacy of applying traditional research methods to Native American cultures methods. Academic research is conventionally divided along disciplinary lines, but the authors in this collection repeatedly stress the inadequacy of those boundaries in a Native American context. In her article on the Inupiat-Eskimo Messenger Feast, Karin Berning highlights the difficulty of translation when seeking background information. Though she attempts to document the “reality” of the Messenger Feast, the impossibility of divining one authorita-

tive version of the Feast myth that underlies the Feast challenges her project. Julie Cruikshank’s essay on oral traditions stresses how storytellers shape and reshape their stories to incorporate new issues and address new audiences. She highlights the difficulty mainstream culture has with assigning a place to these traditional stories: “A definition that equates oral tradition with archival documents necessarily limits what is heard.” Oral tradition cannot be thought of as only history or only literature. Hans-Ulrich Sanner’s article “Confessions of the Last Hopi Fieldworker” confronts anthropology’s conventions in a personal and challenging discussion of his time spent among the Hopi, concluding that knowledge and research are not the same thing, and that the Hopi are better treated as human beings than anthropological subjects.

These essays also work against the idea of an essentialized Native American identity by pointing out differences between Native American critics or artists. Arnold Krupat examines three approaches (nationalist, indigenist, and cosmopolitan) in literary criticism by Native American critics, while Mick Gidley discusses different self-conceptions as reflected by Native American photographers. Such understandings of diversity prevent glib generalizations. Overall, the essays in this collection are marked by a productive self-scrutiny that illuminates each author’s project even as it complicates that same study.

Contemporary American Indian Writing: Unsettling Literature examines a range of works by American Indian authors through a frame of mimicry. Horne argues that these authors employ what she terms “trickster mimicry,” in which they “partially represent the colonial relationship, while also asserting cultural differences, to re-present the language and rules of recognition of colonial discourse.” The result, she argues, is “decolonization.” Her study

includes works by Thomas King, Jeannette Armstrong, Ruby Slipperjack, Beatrice Culleton, Tomson Highway, and Lee Maracle.

Horne's scholarship, while interesting at points, is marked by a too easy acceptance of the postcolonial theorists she cites and an over-reliance on a colonizer/colonized dichotomy. It is unfair of me to single out Horne as a scapegoat, but it seems to be virtually impossible to escape Canadian literary criticism that reads American Indian authors as trickster figures. As Arnold Krupat's essay in *Mirror Writing* makes clear, American Indian critics have bigger fish to fry than only considering who among them is tricky and who is not. It is also worth reflecting on what is lost by reviewing American Indian writing solely in this context. I couldn't help wondering what Horne would make of an author like Eden Robinson, whose incredibly powerful writings blast through worries about colonial mimicry while drawing on creative sources as diverse as traditional Haisla stories and Edgar Allan Poe.

After reading the first few paragraphs of the introduction to *The Mythology of Native North America*, I flipped back to check the publication date. Had this book come out in 1970? No, it came out in 1998. And therein lies the problem. Leeming and Page attempt to link Native North American mythologies to other mythologies—Old Norse, Christian, Greek and Roman, to name a few—and the result is a mishmash of Joseph Campbell-inspired searches for universal archetypes: Aboriginal myths are read through a screen of Jesus, Orpheus, and Loki. The editors also read the myths anthropologically, taking for granted that North American Aboriginal peoples originated in Asia, crossed a land bridge over the Bering Strait, and spread throughout the New World. They reinterpret Aboriginal stories to support this “scientific” view, though the stories themselves

insist on autochthonous origins: the emergence story of Southwestern peoples, where beings gradually move through a series of worlds before achieving their present state, is described as “almost certainly a reflection” of this process of migration. The myths themselves have the power to rise above this context, but there are many other better anthologies available.

Colonial Confessions

Austin Clarke

The Polished Hoe. Thomas Allen \$34.95

Reviewed by Susan Fisher

Through a long night in 1952 on the “Wessindian” island of Bimshire, Mary Gertrude Mathilda Bellfeels confesses to murder. She has summoned Percy, the local police sergeant, to take down her official statement. But in Austin Clarke's Giller-prize winning novel, Mary takes a long time to get to the bloody climax of her confession. Each time she begins to narrate her crime, Mary and the investigating sergeant find themselves digressing. Their separate reveries lead us away from that evening, back into their intertwined histories. Only in the final pages do we find out what work the polished hoe has done.

Since she was eight or nine years old, Mary has belonged to Bellfeels, the plantation manager. She returns on several occasions to the memory of a Sunday afternoon when she was seven or eight: Bellfeels ran his riding crop down her body, assessing her and claiming her for his own. From that day forward, she was his, not available to any other man. In exchange for her services to Bellfeels, Mary has lived in a comfortable house, and her son Wilberforce has been educated in England. Bellfeels has been Mary's lover and protector and the father of her son; he has also been her jailer and her violator. Now, in middle age, she has taken her revenge.

Percy's memories also take up considerable space in *The Polished Hoe*. He has known and loved Mary since childhood. He remembers his first glimpses of her; he remembers especially the shattering realization, when they were just twelve or thirteen, that Mary was Bellfeels's possession. (As various anecdotes from village history make clear, the punishment for coveting the manager's woman would have been, at the very least, a brutal beating.) The sergeant relives the details of his long affair with Mary's servant Gertrude and their trysts in the canefields. He remembers his advancement through the police force, an investigating trip to Trinidad, and his work as a spotter during the war.

Through Percy's memories and Mary's, Clarke reconstructs not just two individual lives, but also the colonial society that contains them. In Bimshire, Englishness—in religion, literature, speech, and blood—represents the only kind of legitimacy. Mary, with her church going, her reverence for literature, and her quiet decorous ways surely “knows England by heart.”

Throughout her memories and Percy's, music, in the forms of American jazz and English hymns, signals their complex allegiances, both to other African-Americans and to the anglicized world of Bimshire. Her son Wilberforce, who as a young man and scholarship winner went off to study in England, has returned as that most respectable of colonials, a doctor of tropical medicine. Wilberforce is a mimic man, fully schooled in English values and tastes but neither “white” nor “native.” He is still the son of a black woman, and he knows that his precious Englishness is only the respectable face of the violence and arbitrary power that dominate life in Bimshire. The hoe, the murder weapon Mary wields in her act of revenge, was “mannufactured up in England.”

This novel demands a great deal of its readers. It requires patience with Mary and

Percy's Shandyesque inability to get to the crime that is the novel's pretext. It also demands a certain effort (at least for those unacquainted with West Indian speech) to understand the dialect Clarke uses. And what does it take—patience or a sense of humour—to accept his random references to Canada (reminiscent of those mandated allusions to Canada in American motion pictures of the 1940s)? Canada, for example, is the source of potatoes (from PEI); it is also mentioned in passing as a country where, over the long winters, sex-starved homesteaders turned to their daughters instead of their worn-out wives.

But readers who persist, despite these obstacles, will be rewarded. Mary is an admirable creation. She is an archetypal colonial victim, whose violation symbolizes all the violence of the slave system; at the same time, she seems a thoroughly believable individual. And when she tells us why she has killed Bellfeels, we, like the sergeant, have no choice but to listen, no matter where her story leads us.

Two Life Stories

Matt Cohen

Typing: A Life in 26 Keys. Random House \$32.95

David Helwig

The Child of Someone. Oberon n.p.

Reviewed by Colin Hill

With the publication of memoirs by Matt Cohen and David Helwig, the life stories of two of Canada's most enigmatic writers are now on record in the first person. Cohen's *Typing: A Life in 26 Keys* was written in the last six months of his life as he was dying of cancer, and completed only a few weeks before his death. Despite the circumstances of its creation, *Typing* is not melancholy, and Cohen narrates his life story in a manner that is warm, humorous, and psychologically revealing. Perhaps surprisingly, given Cohen's penchant for the experimen-

tal and unexpected, his memoirs are frequently self-effacing, and *Typing* does not always give its author due credit: Cohen published more than twenty-five books over three decades, was one of the founders of the Writers Union, and maintained connections to a host of important literary figures in Canada and beyond. The portrait that emerges in *Typing* is that of a writer inescapably bound up in his craft but not always sure of himself: Cohen offers probing insights into his own thought processes, his changing aesthetic preoccupations, and his occasional feelings of neglect by the Canadian literary community. *Typing* explores the philosophical and literary influences behind many of Cohen's works, and tells the story of his struggle to balance a literary career with the often competing demands of personal life. It also charts his creative vocation through alternating periods of literary confidence and intense self-criticism.

Apart from his own life story, Cohen's book reveals much about Canadian society and literature over the past half-century. The multi-generational portrait Cohen offers of his family is vivid and sometimes sad: all four of his grandparents fled antisemitic Russia shortly after the turn of the century, his parents struggled to build lives in Canada that were better than those of their parents, and Cohen wound up, admittedly ambivalent about his past, caught up in the excitement offered by Toronto in the 1960s and 70s, even living for a while at Rochdale College as writer-in-residence. Cohen explores his own subsequent move to the country north of Kingston—the setting for much of his fiction—in an expansive way that makes his experiences reflective of those of his generation. And *Typing* offers penetrating and sometimes irreverent glimpses into the lives of numerous notables in the world of Canadian literature: Margaret Laurence, Morley Callaghan, Jack McClelland, Hugh Garner,

and the groups of individuals clustered around both Coach House Press and House of Anansi. The only complaint I have with Cohen's book is that it is arguably too heavily weighted in favour of his early career. This is unfortunate given that many of his best works were written in his later years—including *The Bookseller* (1993) and *Elizabeth and After* (1999)—and the kind of insightful commentary Cohen offers on some of his first books would offer a valuable context for his later efforts, which have yet to receive the attention they deserve.

David Helwig's *A Child of Someone* is a much less conventional autobiography than Cohen's. In fact, it is a book that is as much about autobiography as a literary form as about Helwig's own life experiences. At first, the author's refusal to treat his own writing career in much detail is disappointing; long-time readers of his work might like to know what he was thinking when he wrote complex and compelling books such as *The King's Evil* (1981), not to mention his more recent achievements. But the point of *A Child of Someone* appears to be, on one level at least, that an autobiography, or an individual's life story, is made up of more than the actual experiences of a single person in a particular time and place. Helwig explores his life as though it were a collection of stories, many of them his own, many of them belonging to other people (there are some memorable portraits of inmates of the Collins Bay Penitentiary where Helwig taught), and some of them never lived at all (his final chapter is entitled "One Unlived Life"). His early section describing his boyhood in Niagara-on-the-Lake, for example, is less a private history than a panoramic view of his community through time. We *do* get affecting and memorable stories from his own past, including one in which he buries a cat belonging to an impoverished and reclusive local spinster, but they are intermingled with snippets from a variety of "official"

sources, including church records, booklets published by the local historical society, and newspaper articles. *A Child of Someone* refuses to draw a rigid boundary between private and communal memory, and this makes it a remarkably engaging book; the sometimes dark, sometimes humorous, often bizarre tales that Helwig relates can be read as though they belong to everyone, and the book encourages readers to see their own lives inextricably caught up in common experience.

Each of Helwig's fifteen sections structurally and thematically reflects a different mode of recording the past: home movies, journals, prison records, photography, painting, even memory itself. As clever and effective as this method is, at times Helwig's book might appear over-conscious of its own structure. Some of his chapters are so preoccupied with the autobiographical method that they nearly forget to tell a story. One chapter entitled "The Art of Photography," for example, explores some of the ways in which childhood memories are recalled almost as if they were snapshots. While Helwig gives us some great images in this chapter, long sections of it read as an essay on photography: "How much of the meaning of the photographs lies in their arrangement . . . and how much lies in the photographic style?" Helwig's musings on such matters do make readers aware that what they are reading has been pieced together, manipulated, and ought not be taken at entirely at face value. But I prefer the ample portions of Helwig's fine book that make readers forget such theoretical concerns, entrancing them with compelling stories that are strangely and paradoxically personal and universal.



National Out-Takes

Wanda M. Corn

The Great American Thing: Modern Art and National Identity, 1915-1935. U of Calif. P. \$107.25

Anne Newlands

Canadian Art: From Its Beginnings to 2000. Firefly \$85.00

Reviewed by Adam Frank

Canadian Art, a coffee-table book arranged alphabetically with page-long entries on artists and (usually) one representative work each, aims to make available a Canadian heritage that would "reflect the enormously diverse history of Canadian art." An encyclopedic introduction to a range of Euro-Canadian and Inuit and First Nations artists from many regions of the country, it aims for coverage at the expense of context or chronology. It's a book to browse in, though I wish it had found some other organization, something more specific and less blandly idealizing ("from its beginnings"?).

The Great American Thing, despite its title, is less idealizing in how it approaches questions of nation and history. Corn introduces herself as an art historian who entered the field in the 1960s and was engaged by the writing of post-war American Studies scholars (like Henry Nash Smith and Leo Marx) who posed the question of "Americanness": what is distinctively American about American literature and art? While such exceptionalist studies are now generally received as offering falsely singular views of the nation—as Corn writes, "today [they] are considered forms of cultural aggression, compelling conformity of behavior and belief and asserting political claims for American national superiority"—they did set the terms for the study of American art history. Corn's book aims to provide a genealogy for this post-war American exceptionalism, to describe its roots in "the practices and

theories of the small modernist community gathered around Alfred Stieglitz in New York City and in international circles advocating a new machine age” in the two decades after World War I.

Elegantly organized and written in a style that is at once scholarly and accessible, this book focuses on seven artists: Marcel Duchamp, Gerald Murphy, Joseph Stella, Charles Demuth, Georgia O’Keeffe, and Charles Scheeler. Each chapter begins with a full-page reproduction of a work which Corn makes a centrepiece and reads throughout the chapter. Her readings of these pieces are careful and thorough, formal and thematic, and open leisurely onto social history, the reception of the work, and the creator of the work. These are highly textured, multilayered interpretations (as she calls them), in which we never lose sense either of the composition in question, or of the various environments in which the piece was created and which it then inhabited. And artists’ lives become cultural texts for Corn: how they dressed, wrote letters, and the relationships they had with others are indispensable parts of her readings.

Corn’s writing very adroitly and generously negotiates between older styles of writing on American literature and culture, which appeal in part because of their flair and passion, and revisionary writing in American Studies. She accomplishes this negotiation through what she calls a “plain style” of writing, one that she locates in her own agrarian roots, and which avoids specialized vocabulary in favor of a more pragmatic and accessible language.

Corn introduces what is at stake in the term “American” at the beginning of the century by describing Alfred Stieglitz and the artists and critics surrounding him who insisted on a “spiritualized America,” a revitalization of the mid-nineteenth-century transcendentalist emphasis on nature and the soil. These critics and artists

responded to the materialism of the smug boosters of the 1920s boom economy with a smug, purist idealism of their own. In the first part of the book on transatlantic modernism (the New York-Paris axis), Corn locates Marcel Duchamp’s famous urinal “Fountain” in deeply embedded relation to *américanisme*, or European fascination with, and at once condescending and rapturous appreciation of, industrializing America, including a love of American spoken language, comics, and plumbing, and an exoticizing of the American girl.

European *américanisme* lets American artists in France shift attention away from the European masters they went to study, and revalue what may previously have been understood as American provinciality. American expatriates in France between the wars could find explanatory power in their “Americanness,” and Corn’s chapter on Gerald Murphy and precisionism introduces a discussion of what will be a major model or object of attention for modernist painters on both sides of the ocean, billboard posters. After a chapter focusing on Joseph Stella’s paintings of New York, which offers a fascinating account of depictions of skyscrapers and “New York-mania,” Corn moves in the next part of her book to treat artists whose work made claims for regions other than New York as the locus of “Americanness.”

Taking Charles Demuth’s portrait of William Carlos Williams in “The Figure Five in Gold” as a focus (this was one of a series of Demuth’s intimate billboard portraits of various artists and writers), Corn offers a brief history of signage, a clear sense of the love-hate relationship many artists had with the intensity of commercialization in the U.S., and some of the debates around vulgarity and the use of the language of advertising as American vernacular. If Corn’s next chapter on Georgia O’Keeffe gives the book its title, and serves in some ways as the centrepiece of the

project, her final chapter on Charles Sheeler clarified for me some of the implications of this book. In this last chapter she argues that the category “folk” helped make the past “safe for modernists” through an emphasis on craft and “the thingness of material goods.” This desire for the creation of a usable past, in the words of Van Wyck Brooks (one of the American critic-historicists she discusses), motivates Corn’s project.

For this reader (not an art historian, but someone who studies American literature and culture), Corn’s extraordinary research illuminates how the terms “American” and “modern” or “modernist” overlapped in twentieth-century writing on art and aesthetics, whether in *américanisme* and New York-mania, or debates between the “new vulgarians” who tried to exploit advertising practices and purist descriptions of “spiritual America,” or the distinct regionalisms she describes.

Fictionalizing the Self

Cyril Dabydeen

My Brahmin Days and Other Stories. TSAR \$15.95

Ludwig Zeller

Rio Loa Station of Dreams. Mosaic \$15.00

Izaak Mansk

Emil Brut. Bayeux Arts \$14.95

Patrick Roscoe

The Truth About Love. Key Porter \$22.95

Reviewed by Emily Allen Williams

Dabydeen’s latest collection of fiction presents another look at his ability to write the self—the self that unflinchingly traces its ancestry back to Guyana and the Indian subcontinent. While this collection of stories is fictional, it is transparently so, with the writer crafting [him]self through the words and actions of his characters. In the title story, “My Brahmin Days,” Dabydeen creates a poignant narrative of going home, only to find that home is not waiting for one after hundreds of years of separation

from ancestors and cultural heritage.

In “Christmas,” Dabydeen’s narrator tells a story of the coming together of cultures and races (East Indian and African) via the narrator’s grandmother (East Indian) and an old man in the community, Dada (African). Their separation from their respective homelands and cultural traditions creates an unspoken bond which manifests itself in the celebration of Christmas, with its emphasis on sharing and togetherness.

Such is the multiplicity and complexity of identity the reader can expect in the twelve stories that make up this collection. While his style is realistic, Dabydeen manages to distance himself through his characters as he tells us stories that he has lived and wrestled with himself for much of his life.

Rio Loa Station of Dreams finds the author searching for the self through a return to the land of childhood, Rio Loa. A journey in search of the self can be presented realistically, but in Zeller’s narrative, the reader is plunged into a surreal version of the past. Zeller, who also figures as the protagonist in the novel, travels to what initially seems to be a writers’ congress in Santa Fe. But when Ludwig boards the train, he is lost to the “real” world. Instead of heading for Santa Fe, the train directs itself to the land of Ludwig’s childhood. From the moment of his departure from Canada (his current home base), Ludwig enters a world of dreams.

Zeller’s surrealism may at times test the reader’s endurance, but this is still a journey worth taking. Zeller’s narrative, which examines the centrality of sensual love in one’s life, crosses into the world of dreams in search of the truth about the past. Zeller, the author/protagonist, declares as he lapses into a dream: “It is the power of the word, I tell myself, it is the possibility of the creative that produces this phenomenon; be alert to the things of the unconscious or the unconscious will remain submerged in

the water.” The bridge between the “real” world and the world of dreams is explored extensively.

Emil Brut is best described as magical realism. The reader discovers right away that this is no ordinary novel. The foreword dismisses any conventional expectations by introducing the “primary” author, Dimi Balien, and his intentions to do “nothing” in the text. Balien contends that doing nothing or at least aspiring to nothing is the true path to freedom, knowledge, and love of self and others.

The mysterious quality of the novel deepens as the reader encounters “M,” who serves as Dimi Balien’s editor and commentator. Yet “M” is much more; in fact, he creates his own novel (within the novel that Dimi creates) through his lessons on how to invent scenarios and develop characters. And who is Emil Brut? He makes no appearance until the end, where we discover that he is the protagonist of Dimi’s novel. Dimi assumes the identity of his own creation: “I’ve taken his name—Emil’s name—and I’ll take on his identity too, and he’ll continue to flourish in air and sunshine—as long as I do—and never be imprisoned in *The Book*, to which I, unwittingly was condemning him by writing Chapter One—putting up the bars of his cage.” Dimi may be an advocate of doing nothing, but the elaborate structure of this novel of ideas seems to celebrate the opposite—that is, the pleasures of making and creating.

In his latest novel, *The Truth About Love*, Patrick Roscoe exhibits a rare ability to access the truth through a brutal and often startling examination of private lives. Initially the reader feels a sense of “knowing” about the direction the narrative will take through Roscoe’s ordering of the material into four sections: “Part One: The Simple Rules of Life”; “Part Two: Before I Was Set Free”; “Part Three: After the Glitter and the Rouge”; and “Part Four: The Truth

About Love.” The table of contents is precisely where all knowing and certainty about Roscoe’s “truth about love” end.

In “Part One: The Simple Rules of Life,” a family in Regina is presented as living a meager and simple life after emigrating to Canada from Europe. Theirs, however, is no simple life; it is coloured by intrigue, complexity, and dark tones of mystery. The narrative escalates from a mere rendition of family life to include scenarios of deception, mild hatred for relatives and in-laws, death, and concealment. So what are the “simple rules”? Fragmentary answers may be lodged in the book of memoirs one character gives to her nephew Mitch as he departs for college. It is simply entitled *The Book of Life*.

The final section, “The Truth About Love,” examines the problems of loving and living together while maintaining separate identities. It is tempting to reveal how seemingly disparate events in the novel—a bloody miscarriage, a buried box of secrets, a child murdered in the snow, a tattoo that seems to have a life of its own, a belly dancer’s life, a lover’s need to murder—eventually meld together. Such a revelation, however, would spoil the reader’s pleasure in discovering *The Truth About Love* for herself.



Re: (St.) George Grant

Arthur Davis and Peter C. Emberley, eds.

Collected Works of George Grant: Volume I (1933-1950). U of Toronto P \$80.00

Harris Athanasiadis

George Grant and the Theology of the Cross: The Christian Foundations of His Thought. U of Toronto P \$60.00

Reviewed by George Elliott Clarke

The life of George Parkin Grant, quixotic conservative and convicted Christian, spanned Canada's twentieth century, from 1918, when we weakened our British bonds, to 1988, when we acceded to American mastery. As a Believer-*philosophe*, as an audacious public intellectual, and as the scion of two clans esteemed in Ontario and Maritime politics and education, Grant assumed a strategic post from which to question Anglo-Canadian submission to an Americanizing liberalism and, beyond that, global subservience to impious, technological capitalism and its homogenizing tendencies. Because Grant was a socio-political crusader—the Jane Jacobs of philosophy—his Left nationalist allies ignored his faith. The Christian Right, though loving his anti-abortion squibs, extended only a superficial fraternity. Few read Grant, then, along the lines that he wrote: as a defiantly Christian opponent of a decidedly secular modernism and its decadent humanist ideology. As a Christian, he bemoaned the lost “Golden Age” of antiquity, when Platonists and prophets *knew* that an eternal, spiritual order promised a grander destiny for humanity than we could fashion for ourselves. As a Tory, he deplored this age when technology allows us to both design and abort fetuses with amoral aplomb, and when triumphalist capitalism overwhelms Canadian sovereignty, Québécois Catholicism, and “local cultures,” in the name of global harmonization.

Two new books clarify the nature of Grant's Christianity and its challenge to liberal ideals, and, happily, one of them is by Grant. Indeed, *Collected Works of George Grant: Volume 1, 1933-1950* compiles debut writings, from a poem written at age fourteen to a book review purportedly written when Grant was seventeen; it includes a journal kept in Autumn 1942 and his “Dphil Thesis” of 1950. We see, then, in embryonic but already elegant form the Ecclesiastes-like manifestos of Grant the public commentator. *George Grant and the Theology of the Cross: The Christian Foundations of His Thought* peruses Grant's texts to assess the strictures and restrictions of his theology.

Invaluably, *Collected Works* yields accounts of experience that prompted Grant's faith and provoked his philosophy. In Grant's journal, we glimpse a love affair in London during the Blitz that gave him “sexual peace and a sense of real manhood for the first time”; it ended when it was “broken into by the shocking suddenness and worse completeness of death”—the result of the Nazi bombing, in February 1941, of a railway arch under which Grant's girlfriend had sought shelter. Grant “found Christ” in December 1941, yet his love's death haunted him lastingly, and it may underlie his reflections on the now and the eternal, contemplation and action, and damnation and redemption.

Along with such personal revelations (buttressed by a comprehensive set of editorial notes), *Collected Works* grants us the first manifestations of Grant's obsessions with the great—as in the second Earl Grey whom Grant calls “a very great human being” in a 1937 review—and with the noble—as in a “noble vocabulary” which Grant cites in a 1945 pamphlet. We also witness the emergence of his aphoristic style—as in a 1943 release, where Canada is “British by tradition” and “American by nature.” Grant's irony—so crucial to his

later demolitions of Machiavellian discourses of power and wealth—appears here in a 1943 review: “Fine and sensitive brains such as [author James Burnham’s] have been pushed back into the cork-lined room of their lonely isolation, there to sneer at the vulgarity and barbarity of their own species.” Such sentences are premonitions of the plangent, but acidic prose of Grant’s poetic masterpiece, *Lament for a Nation: The Defeat of Canadian Nationalism*.

The heart of *Collected Works* is the reprinting, with requisite apparatus, of Grant’s 1950 Oxford doctoral thesis, “The Concept of Nature and Supernature in the Theology of John Oman.” Here Grant censures the overly “optimistic,” nearly sentimental, musings of Scottish theologian John Oman (1860-1939). While Oman is a “great” thinker and a model Christian, he is subject to “failures of analysis.” Thus, he is unable to defend, against rational modernity, the propositions that God’s majesty, Christ’s sacrifice, man’s depravity, and history’s evil are comprehensible only through the grace of Faith, not by humanist reason or “sincerity of feeling.” For Grant, Christianity requires, not philosophy *per se*, but “the belief that a crucified peasant of Galilee reveals to us the very nature of God.”

For Athanasiadis, a Presbyterian minister and close reader of Grant, the philosopher’s central tenets arise from Martin Luther’s phrase, “theology of the cross,” or *theologia crucis*, a concept that Oman shared. Certainly, asserts Athanasiadis, “Even though Oman did not comprehend the full significance of the theology of the cross, it was through him that Grant discovered it.” The meaning of this “great discovery” for Grant was protean. Because “the theologian of the cross recognizes reality as it truly is,” Athanasiadis insists, Grant focused his analyses on the irrefutable evolution of “scientific, technological civilization . . . in North America” and its local and global consequences. Because the *theologia crucis*

rejects arguments that call “good evil and evil good,” Grant’s second task, Athanasiadis finds, was to remind liberal moderns of the gulf between God and humanity, the impossibility of human self-redemption through technology and social engineering, and, through his devotion to the thought and example of Simone Weil, the possibility for a pro-active Christianity even in an epoch of seductive nihilism.

Athanasiadis’s account of Grant’s theology is both clear and—to use a word the author abuses profligately—“deep.” His book would have been stronger, though, had Athanasiadis considered the influence of such “lived experience” for Grant as his wartime affair. Even so, Athanasiadis’s text constitutes a pioneering reopening of—and re-opining on—the organic nature of Grant’s philosophy. It demonstrates that scholars must turn to the primary materials organized so efficiently and lovingly by Davis and Emberley to arrive at anything remotely resembling an articulation of the truths resident—and resonant—in Grant.

More of the Same

Rocio Davis and Rosalía Baena, eds.

Tricks with a Glass: Writing Ethnicity in Canada.
Rodopi \$30.00

Larry Warwaruk

The Ukrainian Wedding. Coteau \$14.95

Janice Kulyk Keefer and Solomea Pavlychko, eds.

Two Lands, New Visions: Stories from Canada and Ukraine. Coteau \$15.95

Reviewed by Lisa Grekul

In her introduction to *Tricks with a Glass: Writing Ethnicity in Canada*, Rocío Davis argues that the study of “literary reflections on ethnicity” is “essential to the ongoing redefinition of Canadian literature.” But because the majority of the contributors to this collection rely on existing notions of ethnicity, their “redefinitions” are more

repetitive than innovative. Larry Warwaruk's novel *The Ukrainian Wedding* similarly reaffirms established constructions of Ukrainian Canadian ethnicity as it revisits the familiar thematic territory of folkloric customs and traditions. In *Two Lands, New Visions: Stories from Canada and Ukraine*, Janice Kulyk Keefer and Solomea Pavlychko attempt a re-vision of Ukrainian Canadian ethnicity, but the formal and thematic differences between the Ukrainian and Ukrainian Canadian stories foreground rather than collapse the "old" world and the "new."

Tricks with a Glass brings together fourteen essays and two interviews (with Wayson Choy and Linda Hutcheon) that explore ethnicity and ethnic minority literature in Canada. While the editors acknowledge that "theorizing on ethnicity is a valuable critical enterprise," the essays "centre instead on the actual inscription of ethnicity in concrete texts." Janice Kulyk Keefer's discussion of her family memoir *Honey and Ashes*—her exploration of the "between-worlds" position of the ethnic writer in Canada, and her insistence on the historical contextualization of ethnicity—introduces some of the key concerns in this collection. Constructions of place and experiences of displacement are central to Aitor Ibarrola-Armendariz's essay on Michael Ondaatje's *The English Patient* and Kathleen Firth's essay on Neil Bissoondath's *A Casual Brutality*. Eva Darías Beautell's discussion of Joy Kogawa's *Obasan* and Sky Lee's *Disappearing Moon Café*, and Ana I. Parejo Vadillo's more general essay on Native women's autobiographies, address the tensions between public and personal history, and the ways in which women writers of colour disrupt official historiography by telling their own stories. María Belén Martín Lucas's reading of Rachna Mara's *Of Customs and Excise* and Rocío Davis's reading of Rohinton Mistry's *Tales From Firozsha Baag* examine the relation

between hybrid ethnic-national identity and the hybrid genre or the short-story cycle.

For the most part, *Tricks with a Glass* provides thoughtful close readings. It does not, however, offer substantially new theoretical perspectives. The relatively conservative nature of the collection is reflected in its editors' embrace of a "mosaic" concept of ethnicity: although they recognize that a "single working definition" of ethnicity is "virtually impossible," they nonetheless implicitly rely on a distinctly multicultural definition that fails to distinguish among various (non-British) groups' experiences within Canada. Although many of the writers home in on the realities of racial discourse, the editorial organization of *Tricks with a Glass* effects a conflation of race and ethnicity. Ukrainian Canadian, Italian Canadian, and Acadian Canadian texts are discussed alongside First Nations, Asian Canadian, and African Canadian texts, with little mention of the specific ways in which race affects experience. That *Tricks with a Glass* concludes with a conversation between Rosalía Baena and Linda Hutcheon (a conversation in which Baena fails to challenge Hutcheon's statements that "immigrant writing has been [here] from the start"; that "as writers of different ethnic backgrounds begin to write, they are quickly integrated into the canon"; and that she would like to "have us all become hyphenated") is not surprising, for Hutcheon gives voice to some of the central (though troubling) assumptions underlying this collection.

In *The Ukrainian Wedding*, Saskatchewan writer Larry Warwaruk tells the story of a rural Manitoba Ukrainian Canadian community in transition. Set in 1942, the novel focuses on sixteen-year old Lena Melnyk whose brother Danylo is soon to marry her best friend Nellie Semchuk. As the narrative unfolds, Warwaruk depicts an impressive array of traditional religious and cultural customs, drawing particular attention to the "Rusalka" figure of Ukrainian

folklore (the water spirit who seduces men to their death); among the host of characters that make up the tightly-knit community, the intoxicatingly beautiful Marusia Budka stands out because, in her ability to enchant the men of the community, she closely resembles the Rusalka. The wedding is central to the narrative not only because Lena's attitudes toward the marriage reveal her rejection of Ukrainian traditions and patriarchal social structures, but also because during the wedding reception, Marusia runs off with Lena's brother-in-law. Marusia is later found dead with evidence beside her body that could implicate several members of the community. When her murderer is found, members of the community sympathize with him, believing that Marusia bewitched him and hence brought about her own end. Lena sees that the entire community, by stifling Marusia's free spirit, has participated in her death.

At once a detective story, a folk tale, and a finely wrought portrayal of a community, *The Ukrainian Wedding* is a compelling read—especially for readers who are unfamiliar with Ukrainian Canadian literature (given its glossary of Ukrainian words, the novel may well be intended for such readers). Behind Warwaruk's deceptively simple prose is a complex rendering of Ukrainian Canadians' social realities during the mid-twentieth century, one that captures the pathos and humour of their experiences at the close of the pioneering era. For readers who are familiar with Ukrainian Canadian literature, the similarities between *The Ukrainian Wedding* and both Illia Kiriak's *Sons of the Soil* (1939–45) and Vera Lysenko's *Yellow Boots* (1954) are striking. And although *The Ukrainian Wedding* seems to me better executed—Warwaruk's characters are more fully realized, his use of folk motifs more sophisticated, his foregrounding of Ukrainian patriarchy more poignant—this novel nonetheless returns

to the pioneering era to explore the themes of cultural loss and inter-generational conflict that characterize Kiriak's and Lysenko's novels (and works by other writers such as George Ryga, Ted Galay, and Gloria Kupchenko Frolick). As in other Ukrainian Canadian novels, realism dictates that Warwaruk conclude with thematic ambivalence: Lena, like many of the novel's young people, believes that her life will get better when she leaves the oppressive, superstitious community in which she has grown up. Ukrainian culture is likened to a brown and yellow bird “with dancing yellow feet and crippled wings,” which will “as best it can... fly away to die.”

In her introduction to the Canadian portion of *Two Lands, New Visions*, Janice Kulyk Keefer addresses the “fossilized and monolithic” models of Ukrainian Canadian ethnicity—the sorts of festive song-and-dance notions of ethnic difference constructed by many Ukrainian Canadians. By drawing together stories by (and foregrounding connections between) Ukrainian and Ukrainian Canadian writers, she hopes to “begin a lively discussion between people who are in the paradoxical situation of being both strangers and intimates” and to reinvent what it means to be Ukrainian Canadian. Solomea Pavlychko, by contrast, in her introduction to the Ukrainian portion of the anthology, provides an overview of the Ukrainian literary tradition, paying particular attention to the dramatic changes that have come about since 1991, the year of independence. According to Pavlychko, post-independence Ukrainian literature has paradoxically “lost its optimistic and romantic tone”; Ukrainian writers have “largely lost interest in social issues,” choosing instead to undertake a “furious destruction of the old form, the old content, the old language.”

With the exception of Myrna Kostash's “Ways of Coping,” Martha Blum's “Two Triangles” (an excerpt from her stunning

debut novel *The Walnut Tree*, 1999), and Kathie Kolybaba's "Lunch Hour with a Soviet Citizen"—three texts that explicitly (re)connect with Ukrainian history and politics—most of the Ukrainian Canadian stories (by such writers as Barbara Scott, Ray Serwylo, Lida Somchynsky, Chrystia Chomiak, and Patricia Abram) return to the familiar thematic territory of immigration, assimilation, and inter-generational conflict. Kostash's text stands out as the only Ukrainian Canadian selection in this collection that moves beyond realist fiction. The real treasures in this anthology are the stories from Ukraine: stories that, to my mind, are very much concerned with "social issues" (the social and political realities of post-independence Ukraine, the role of women within the new Ukrainian society, the psychological aftermath of totalitarianism) and that, moreover, enact ground-breaking formal challenges (Yurii Vynnychuk's "The Day of the Angel," a fantasy story, and Taras Prokhasko's "Necropolis," a complexly layered philosophical metanarrative, are the most striking examples of this shift away from realism). Roksana Kharchuk's ironic portrayal of a post-independence Ukrainian leader and Oksana Zabuzhko's depiction of a Western-style Ukrainian talk-show host's descent into madness are psychological portraits of Ukrainians struggling to make sense of their place in the new nation.

That the Canadian stories in *Two Lands*, *New Visions* largely lack the formal experimentation and thematic breadth of their Ukrainian counterparts suggests to me that Ukrainian Canadian literature requires a radical break from the tired genres and politics it has traditionally articulated. Not unlike *Tricks with a Glass* and *The Ukrainian Wedding*, the Canadian stories in *Two Lands*, *New Visions* fail to conceive of ethnicity in new ways. Given that the most interesting and provocative writing in these three texts emerges from Ukraine

(from writers who exhibit little or no interest in ethnicity), readers are left to wonder about the creative, critical, and theoretical potential of transnational connections between ethnic Canadians and their homelands.

Thirst Unquenched

Sara Jeannette Duncan

The Pool in the Desert. Broadview \$18.95

Reviewed by Janice Fiamengo

The Pool in the Desert, originally published in 1903, is a collection of four stories that illustrates the blend of sympathy and ironic detachment with which Sara Jeannette Duncan portrayed the British presence in India. A new edition by Broadview Press restores the original order of the stories and includes appendices with contemporary reviews and excerpts from Duncan's non-fictional writing on India. The appearance of this beautiful soft-cover volume is cause for delighted re-reading and some criticisms of the press's editorial decisions.

Broadview has a reputation for producing handsome scholarly editions of canonical classics as well as lesser-known works, aimed primarily at the student market. In 1996, Duncan's *Set in Authority* (1906) was ably edited by Germaine Warkentin, making available an important novel that had long been out of print; its publication signaled the press's commitment not only to rescuing early Canadian books from oblivion but also to providing the appropriate scholarly apparatus—critical introductions, explanatory notes, and appendices—to make them accessible in the undergraduate classroom. *The Pool in the Desert* is an excellent companion text to *Set in Authority*. Its reading pleasures are considerable and it yields important insights into turn-of-the-century feminist and colonial politics. Duncan's major themes—loyalty, social taboo, the idealism that enables self-

sacrifice, the challenge of holding to ideals in the face of passion or need—are presented with her characteristic relish for subtle distinctions of meaning, witty social analysis, and character development. Moreover, the stories are exemplary for their complex narrative perspectives and finely conceived moral ambiguity: the first-person narrators in three of the stories wish to believe themselves detached from the dramas they observe but are all to some extent emotionally compromised; their ambiguous proximity creates a fascinating blend of irony and engagement. Despite the occasional flaws in the writing, such as a tendency to coyness, the ethical deliberations of the characters consistently hold our attention and arouse our sympathies.

However, the edition itself is disappointing. One expects a Broadview text to contain a substantial critical introduction and full explanatory notes. But rather than commissioning a new introduction for the edition, Broadview has reprinted, with very minor changes, Rosemary Sullivan's introductory essay from the 1984 Penguin reprint of *The Pool*, which had changed the order of the stories (Sullivan discusses them in the order they appeared in the Penguin edition). The fact that Sullivan wrote the introduction seventeen years prior to its reprinting explains the inaccuracy of her second-paragraph assertion that, aside from *The Imperialist*, "no other books by Duncan are generally available." Given that Broadview itself recently published *Set in Authority*, this seems egregiously sloppy editorial practice and rather poor promotion for Broadview. Peculiarly, the status of Sullivan's introduction as a reprint is not anywhere acknowledged, leading the uninitiated reader to assume that it appears here for the first time.

Sullivan's introduction is more appropriate for a general audience than for students. Although her comments on the stories have stood the test of time, remaining persuasive and highly readable (if brief), they do not

provide the sort of detailed and contextualized background that one expects in a Broadview edition. We learn nothing, for instance, about the conditions of the book's publication, its critical reception, or its subsequent publishing history. Nor does Sullivan make any attempt to situate *The Pool* in relation to Anglo-Indian fiction of the period or, indeed, in relation to Duncan's own later Anglo-Indian books such as *Set in Authority* or *The Burnt Offering* (1909). In these novels, Duncan explores the ethical and practical problems of British rule in India, complicating Sullivan's statement that Duncan "had no difficulty with the lot of the Indians and the ethics of imperialism." Compounding the non-scholarliness of the introduction, Sullivan does not footnote any of her sources, making it impossible for a student to follow up her assessments of Duncan's personal life. I wondered, for instance, on what authority she concludes that Everard Cotes, Duncan's husband, "proved to be an admirable man," but I had no means of tracing her evidence.

A further disappointment are the notes to the text, by Gillian Siddall, which for the most part are brief and not particularly helpful, consisting frequently of short phrase definitions from the OED. We learn, for instance, that glanders is a "horse disease," that the Champ de Mars is "a park in Paris," and that a sepoy is "an Indian soldier under British rule." Designed to provide only very specific information, they do not offer insights into the social and political situation of Anglo-Indian society at the turn of the century or explain the sources and contexts for Duncan's creative process. For example, when reading "An Impossible Ideal," students and teachers might well want to know more about *Aucassin and Nicolette*, which is given a significant symbolic role in the story, than that it is "a thirteenth-century romance written in prose and verse." When, in the same story, a

painting is said to bear a resemblance to “an incident in one of Mrs. Steel’s novels,” the reader might benefit from knowing more about Flora Annie Steel than that she was “a writer of popular Anglo-Indian romances.” In confining herself to the most limited notes, Siddall misses an opportunity to introduce students to the complexity of these stories’ social, historical, and literary contexts.

Broadview has provided instructors with a welcome opportunity to teach this splendid collection but has not produced a first-rate volume.

French Canadian Narratives

Klaus-Dieter Ertler

Der frankokanadische Roman der dreissiger Jahre. Eine ideologiekritische Darstellung. Canadiana Romanica Vol. 14. Max Niemeyer DM 224

Reviewed by Heinz Antor

The author of this study takes as points of departure both the increased global interest in francophone Canadian literature since the mid-1980s, and the paradigm shift away from traditional analyses towards a more constructivist and polyfocal view of how texts operate within wider social and cultural systems. He chooses as his textual corpus nine Canadian novels in French, all first published in the 1930s, and he asks how they use and rewrite the ideologies dominant in Québec at the time. This choice of material is due to the fact that the *roman québécois* of the thirties is often viewed as a rather homogeneously nationalist phenomenon. Ertler tries to show that, on the contrary, an ideological and narratological analysis can uncover the remarkable variety these texts provide.

The first part of Ertler’s study presents the theoretical parameters for the critical readings of part two. In a first chapter, ideology is defined with regard to such epistemological frames as consciousness and

language/discourse, but also with reference to Niklas Luhman’s systems theory and Pierre Bourdieu’s concept of *habitus/champ*. The “spectral heterogeneity” of this phenomenon leads to the central concern of chapter two, namely the question of how the *métarécits* of ideology and the literary *réécits* of these *québécois* novels “interpenetrate” each other. In order to provide an answer, the author uses the narratological categories of character, narrator, and abstract author, and analyses their psychological, discursive, systemic and practical dimensions in order to uncover the main ideological patterns informing the novels. The third and last chapter of part one provides an analysis of a representative sample of journals and magazines in Quebec in the 1930s. This allows Ertler to identify two main ideologies competing with each other: an almost fundamentalist orthodox nationalist *métarécit* based on such themes and values as the land, race, the family, religion, and the French language; and a more liberal and only moderately nationalist ideology advocating close links with the Anglo-protestant provinces in a federal Canada. The latter is to be found in such journals as *Les Idées* or *Le Jour*, while the former has its leading voice in *L’Action nationale*.

The nine novels analysed in part two come in three groups. Damase Potvin’s *La Robe noire* (1932), Alain Grandbois’s *Né à Québec* (1933), and Léo-Paul Desrosiers’s *Nord-Sud* (1931) are all historical novels, while Félix-Antoine Savard’s *Menaud, maître draveur* (1937), Claude-Henri Grignon’s *Un homme et son péché* (1933) and Ringuet’s *Trente arpents* (1938) are typical representatives of the agricultural-rural *roman de la terre*. Finally, Claude Robillard’s *Dilettante* (1931), Jean-Charles Harvey’s *Les Demi-civilisés* (1934), and Rex Desmarchais’s *L’Initiatrice* (1932) are analysed as examples of the discursive ideologies of the urban middle classes in

Quebec. *La Robe noire* privileges a Roman-Catholic value structure and only very tentatively opens itself towards modern urban life. The dominant orthodox nationalist paradigm here allows the reader only fleeting glimpses of a more liberal attitude. Louis Jolliet, the national hero of *Né à Québec*, on the other hand, breaks the fetters of the conservative nationalist pattern by the use of cosmopolitan and Malthusian elements so that a mixed value scheme informs the text. *Nord-Sud* uses the narrative observation of the economic system of 1930s Quebec as a tool for its attack on the orthodox nationalist discourse. Similarly, the three *romans de la terre* analysed by Ertler present very different approaches towards the two main ideologies referred to here. While *Menaud, maître saveur* is the quintessential orthodox nationalist novel, *Un homme et son péché* and *Trente arpents* provide subtle dialogic mixtures, negotiations, and criticisms of both conservative rural nationalism and urban liberalism. Ertler's interpretations of his three liberal middle-class novels also confirm his general diagnosis that, with very few exceptions, francophone Canadian novels of the 1930s are not mimetic and homogeneous fictional renderings of the dominant ideological discourses, but intricate, subtle, and heterogeneous reworkings of a *discours social*.

The Pioneering Wife

Janet Floyd

Writing the Pioneer Woman. U of Missouri P
US \$32.50

Eunice M.L. Harrison

The Judge's Wife: Memoirs of a British Columbia Pioneer. Ronsdale P \$19.95

Reviewed by Gwyneth Hoyle

The pioneering experience continues to attract readers, and many of the autobiographies, letters and journals of early set-

tlers remain in print a century after they were written. Earlier writers, Louisa May Alcott, Willa Cather and some contemporary novelists use the genre, while authentic journals of pioneers continue to appear. Even television's attempt to re-create a year in the life of pioneers by choosing two hardy couples, dressing the women in ankle-length skirts, the men in trousers with buttons instead of zippers, and setting them down on virgin prairie with only nineteenth-century technology, drew a far wider than expected audience.

In *Writing the Pioneer Woman*, Janet Floyd explores the autobiographical writing of women in North America who were part of the emigration movement to settle the frontier. The author has chosen to analyse the familiar texts of three English women with literary backgrounds, Susanna Moodie, Catharine Parr Traill and Anne Langton, who all happened to settle in the area of Peterborough, Ontario early in the nineteenth century. The American women in the study, Elinore Pruitt Stewart, Kitturah Belknap, Eliza Farnham, Christiana Tillson, and Caroline Kirkland migrated within the United States, leaving homes in the east to homestead on the frontier, in some cases only as far west as Illinois. One further group of women under consideration were those who went west to the mining camps.

In each case it is the domestic details which are under scrutiny. Domestic life was one of the few topics available to the nineteenth century female autobiographer. While she might emphasize her self-sacrifice in the domestic sphere, privacy and good taste would lead her to omit many of the details. The accounts range between narratives written for family "back home" and those written for publication, including guides for future immigrants. Their presentations of the pioneer experience vary from expressing freedom, independence and self-fulfilment to recounting a time that is

painful, anxious and character building.

Writing the Pioneer Woman is a scholarly response to the writers of women's history and feminist literary critics, and examines their debates and arguments about the significance of the emigrant housewife. The book evolved from the author's doctoral thesis and assumes the reader's familiarity with the literature of gender politics and feminist theory. It adds a fresh voice to the academic debate on the role of pioneer women but will be of less interest to general readers.

By contrast, *The Judge's Wife* by Eunice Harrison has a much wider appeal. Although not published until 2002, this memoir was written in 1945 when the author was eighty-five. Not finding a publisher, the manuscript ran in serial form in the *Northwest Digest*, published in Quesnel, British Columbia between 1951 and 1953. With the addition of detailed end-notes and archival photographs provided by Louise Wilson, Harrison's grand-daughter, the book contains memories of the privileged life of an attractive, intelligent woman between the years 1860 and 1906, by which time the author believed that the pioneering years were over.

The book opens with a scene of her grandfather Seabrook riding to hounds on his Ontario estate, thus establishing the connections of both sets of grandparents with the upper-class British officers who emigrated to Canada after the Napoleonic Wars. Her father, Roads Seabrook, the youngest son of the family, went to the gold-fields in the Cariboo and was attracted to pioneer life in the West. In 1864, with his wife and four-year-old Eunice, he travelled to the fledgling colony of British Columbia, settling first in New Westminster and then in Victoria where he was employed in a large shipping company, rising to be vice-president.

After completing her education in private schools taught by English gentlewomen,

the author enjoyed several months of freedom visiting family friends in the small mainland communities that would become Vancouver. Her escapades, including forming a small orchestra with friends, and entering and winning the first bathing beauty contest to be held on the coast, have a modern flavour. She returned to Victoria to a conventional and conservative social life, beginning with the formal "coming out" ball. Soon she was engaged to be married to Eli Harrison, lawyer, crown prosecutor and eventually judge, who had crossed the American continent in a covered wagon with his parents.

Lively and spirited, Eunice Harrison is very much the judge's wife of the title, content to submerge her identity in that of her husband according to the conventions of the time, but confident enough to act independently, especially during her husband's frequent absences on court business. Memory is a selective faculty, and Eunice Harrison's memories encompass many life-threatening situations as well as some romantic episodes. Domestic details are remarkably scarce, perhaps prompted by good taste and privacy. We are given a tour of some of their homes, always staffed by Chinese house-boys, but barely told that there were six children in the family.

Particularly interesting is the inclusion of Eli Harrison's description of travel into the interior on roads clinging to precipices above the turbulent Fraser River, and by railway handcar during the building of the CPR. When he invited Eunice to accompany him on a circuit trip to Barkerville by stage-coach in the month of November 1885, she at first demurred and then reconsidered, "several years of close attention to domestic life . . . made me . . . welcome adventure even of the most robust sort."

The book concludes with a vivid description of being in San Francisco with two of their children when the devastating earthquake and disastrous fire occurred. Her

eyewitness account was published in the *Victoria Colonist*, and she was amused to overhear two men discussing the article saying "It was all made up . . . no woman could come through a thing like that."

Eunice Harrison lived to the age of ninety and we are indebted to her for recording her memories, and to her grand-daughter for publishing them. Her picture of the early years in British Columbia is a *chiaroscuro* portrait: high lights and dark shadows over a few sketch lines.

Anatomy of Humanism

Northrop Frye

Anatomy of Criticism. Princeton UP \$17.95

Jean O'Grady and Goldwin French, eds.

Northrop Frye's Writings on Education. Volume 7 of *The Collected Works of Northrop Frye*. U of Toronto P \$100.00

Graham Good

Humanism Betrayed. McGill-Queen's UP \$19.95

Reviewed by Graham Forst

The re-issue of *Anatomy of Criticism* is essentially a photographic reprint of this 1957 classic of literary criticism, with the addition of a disappointing introduction by Harold Bloom. (Frygians can be quite certain that A.C. Hamilton will have much more interesting prefatory things to say about the *Anatomy* when the University of Toronto's edition appears in 2004).

Re-reading the *Anatomy* now, more than forty years after its meteoric appearance, is every bit as tonic an experience as it was in 1957—perhaps less in spite of the domination in the 1980s and 90s of French literary theory than because of it. And this for two reasons: the *Anatomy's* witty and graceful style, and its magisterial architectonic. For Frye combined the elegance and poise of a great prose master with an encyclopedic knowledge of literature to produce nothing less than a comprehensive exposition of the conceptual framework of criticism, based

on "an assumption of total coherence." And consequently, one looks back at the *Anatomy* the way one looks at Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* or Spengler's *Fall of the West*, seeing them as great works that are very much a product of their time (Frye himself called the *Anatomy* "a book of its own period"), but no less fascinating because of that.

But has the *Anatomy* in any sense transcended its time? As a teaching tool, certainly. Rare is the young professor who has read the *Anatomy* early and has not regaled his or her students with the mimetic modes or the high-to-low-to-high structure of comedy or the recurrence of the archetype of the tricky servant or whatever. And it was, and remains pedagogically perfectly valid to do so: since Frye, teachers of literature can choose to go into their lectures with, at least, some kind of system informing their lectures, and, at best, with a valid respect for the values of literary discourse, sufficient to confirm that it doesn't need any "ratification" from history or civics or philosophy or biography or the social sciences. A teacher without a background in Frye is like a philosopher without a background in Kant.

Volume Seven of the *Complete Works of Northrop Frye* contains almost all of his writings directly about education, ranging from undergraduate editorials for the Victoria College literary magazines of the early thirties to some of his last published pieces, which, characteristically, deal directly with issues of pedagogy and the university. As with Volume Four, which contains Frye's writings on religion, one notices here the consistency of Frye's thinking on education as the training of the imagination. The place best suited to such training was "the powerhouse of civilization": the university. Throughout these pages, Frye reiterates his conviction that the university is "society's one light," and the last "fortress" of free thought, of resistance

to “the siren call” of the advertising, entertainment, status symbols, slanted news and eroticism of “the world.”

Consequently, the most bitter of these pages are concerned with what must be considered Frye’s descent into the inferno: the “People’s Park” riots in Berkeley where he was teaching in 1963, which threatened to politicize the university. Those who recall Frye’s antipathy to the rebellious students of the sixties will find their recollections confirmed here: to Frye, they were “bewildered, frustrated, disillusioned egoists,” comparable at their worst to the Hitler Youth and the Gang of Four. Frye never varied from his conviction that universities were to be places of serious, detached studies, not hotbeds of political ideology.

In considering Frye’s educational theories definitively “logocentric” (e.g. “at the centre of literature lie the ‘classics,’ . . . and the university student . . . is there to study them”) it is easy to dismiss them as old-fashioned. But to do so would be facile. Every teacher in the humanities should read Frye on education, if not to adopt his high idealism of the university as “a place which co-originate[s] a vision of the greatness and accuracy of human imagination and thought,” then at least to acknowledge his vision, and realize how high he or she has to aim when conceiving of a better definition.

Unfortunately, a kind of nostalgia envelops the sanguine humanism of Frye’s *Writings on Education* now, after the hegemony of French theory, and it’s a nostalgia that Graham Good, in his *Humanism Betrayed*, feels poignantly. In this book, essentially a compilation of articles written by Good during the nineties, Frye, along with George Orwell, Matthew Arnold, Harold Bloom, John Searle and André Malraux, is looked to as an antidote to the “poison” of “presentism” (postmodernism, poststructuralism and postcolonialism)

and its historical avatars, Marx, Freud and Nietzsche. Good doesn’t exactly show how the old Greeks of humanism can defeat the young Turks of “presentism” except by rather circularly extolling the talents of the former for “clarity, common sense, concreteness [and] balance”.

Overall, *Humanism Betrayed* is, like Roger Kimball’s 1990 *Tenured Radicals* or Dinesh D’Souza’s 1991 *Illiberal Education*, an angry diatribe against everything which seems to the author politically repressive in the modern university: militant feminism, deconstruction theory, the New Historicism, Cultural Studies. One wonders about the book’s intended audience. If it is written for white males like himself, then he is preaching to the converted. But (to choose but one of his targets) few feminists I know would be converted by Good’s insistence that “there is little evidence that women face special difficulties today [in the post-secondary field].” (StatsCan’s *Report on Education 2000* would open Good’s eyes here: men still outnumber women in post-secondary full-time teaching jobs by more than four to one.)

Nevertheless, the hits Good scores against “presentism” are palpable, although most of them have already been made elsewhere by Searle, Rorty and others. For example, it surely is fair to condemn the claim of “theory” to be exempt from ideology, and to condemn its dismissal of the aesthetic dimension, and its fecklessness as a programme of social action.

Good is most eloquent when it comes to totalling up the bill for “presentism.” It is expensive: no more personal or political redemption, as there is no shared sense of a collective imagination, or of an artistic and creative past. Also gone are the virtues of detachment, disinterestedness, taste and liberalism.

Well, these gods may be dead. But if they are not, their survival cannot be ensured by scatter-shot attacks on their enemies.

Doldrum Years

Northrop Frye; Robert Denham, ed.

The Diaries of Northrop Frye: 1942-1955. Volume 8 of *The Collected Works of Northrop Frye*. U of Toronto P \$95.00

Reviewed by Graham Forst

In one of his as yet unpublished notebooks, Northrop Frye, talking to himself in his notebook manner—that is, as Northrop Frye would talk to Northrop Frye—comments, “I have occasionally wondered why I couldn’t keep diaries.” Then, he answers his own question: “The answer is that I’m too busy with other writing—the only times I succeeded in keeping a diary more than a week or two were in doldrum periods of writing.”

The “doldrum years” Frye is referring to are 1942, 1949, 1950-53 and 1955, during which time he kept detailed diaries, meticulously recounting his daily activities, often in a very personal way. The diaries provide an unusual intimate glimpse of Frye, as here, writing for himself (“nobody is going to read this . . . except me”), he is free to react personally and critically to his world: demands at work, his colleagues, his wife, his students, his visits to theatres, concert hall and art galleries in and around Toronto in the early 50s.

Clearly, if these 250 000 words had not been written by “the second most important person in Canadian history and the first among thinkers and writers” (as *Maclean’s* called him in 1998), it is hard at first glance to imagine why anybody would want to read them. They are the musings of a middle-aged recognition-seeking academic with a Methodist’s guilt about idleness, one who has a serious problem with drinking and sedatives, crankily organizes his lectures, juggling embryonic ideas for prospective books and articles and an unborn novel, leching after his “juicy-cutie” female students, and complaining about his

perennial shortage of cash, his grudging social obligations, committee meetings, his deviated septum, his allergies, and his balky bowels.

Even literary voyeurs however will be disappointed in the *Diaries* for two reasons. First, there are no biographical surprises here, as Frye made his diaries available to his biographer John Ayre for his 1989 *Northrop Frye: a Biography*. Second Frye is for the most part circumspect about his feelings (at one point he refers to his emotions as the workings of Satan, tempting him to drop his pose of “detachment”)—even, surprisingly, for his wife Helen. (He was crushed when Helen died in 1986 but in these diaries she comes off as a housemate at best, a millstone at worst.) Similarly, he never speaks in depth about his feelings for his father (who lived occasionally with Frye during these years), or for his colleagues, friends, or even students, even when he was sexually attracted to them. His childlessness is never directly approached. Although he was an admirer of Wordsworth, he never expresses any attraction to nature, and records no “Spots of time,” or epiphanies. And although Frye always bridled when he was referred to as an ivory-tower academic, these diaries rarely refer to such contemporary events as the Second World War, the McCarthy terror, or the Korean war, of which he petulantly said, “I wish it would go away and leave me alone to do my work. I don’t care if people have wars if they wouldn’t bother me. The last war didn’t bother me except when it killed my friends.”

Frye paints his own portrait throughout these diaries as Cromwell wanted his portrait painted: “with roughnesses, pimples, warts, and everything.” And yet, there’s something more here: the sheer plod of the academic life rarely discouraged him, and he always assiduously met his classes (he boasts of “never having missed a lecture”), marked papers, and dealt equally

with both dolts and idolaters. Thus, even more than his letters to Helen, the diaries reveal the enormous price Frye paid for his rise to eminence. In fact, after the last entry is read, the feeling one gets is one of admiration for how this self-confessed “nervous irascible weakling” confronted his demons of alcohol, indolence, disease, shyness, and loneliness, and wrestled courageously enough with them to become what Harold Bloom called “the foremost living student of Western literature.”

Prosthetics of Order

Sander Gilman

Making the Body Beautiful: A Cultural History of Aesthetic Surgery. Princeton UP \$31.25

David Mitchell and Sharon Snyder

Narrative Prosthesis: Disability and the Dependencies of Discourse. U of Michigan P \$28.95

Cynthia Davis

Bodily and Narrative Forms: The Influence of Medicine on American Literature 1845–1915. Stanford UP \$68.40

Reviewed by Ulrich Teucher

As recent studies show, aesthetic surgery has tripled in the U.S. since 1997. *Making the Body Beautiful* provides a cultural history of aesthetic surgery from the nineteenth century to the present. The cover presents the profile of a young woman’s straight, slender nose whose idealized Greek features inspire not only her painter, eighteenth-century François Boucher, but also contemporary artists of the body, the guild of aesthetic surgeons. The centrality of the nose and face on the cover, and in the book, signals our obsession with the face. Its proportions and symmetry are overdetermined with meaning, measured against standards of racial significance, health, beauty, social status and beauty, providing grounds for social exclusion, therefore stimulating desire for physical improvement. Aesthetic surgery helps those

with bodily differences to become invisible—or at least not too visible—and “pass” dominant esthetical judgments. Standards of beauty, however, are socially constructed and can change, providing a rich mine for cultural studies. Gilman argues that racial difference was the first focus of surgical alteration in the nineteenth century, a focus extended in parallel with the unveiling of the body by fashion.

The ambiguities of aesthetic surgery include changes in aesthetic ideals. A patient’s happiness, a key term in Gilman’s book, is the main parameter for success for aesthetic surgery. Gilman insists on a fundamental human need to generate stereotypes for ordering the world and a regressive desire to return to the invisibility of our early lives, but if he is right about aesthetic surgery following trends of fashion, recent esthetical norms boldly assert asymmetry, and, hence, visibility. Abundant illustrations and Gilman’s colloquial style make this book readable and attractive to a popular audience as well.

Narrative Prosthesis provides a history of disability representations in Western literature. The authors argue that such representations are pervasive stock features of characterization and that literature depends “prosthetically” on these representations for their powerful alterity and disruptive potential (hence the term “narrative prosthesis”). Representations of disability are in fact so pervasive that they are often overlooked, for example, in Sophocles’s *Oedipus Rex*. Oedipus’ parents pinned his ankles before they exposed him on a mountain. This disability must have enabled Oedipus to solve the sphinx’s riddle (which involved disability), but Sophocles does not address this issue further. The authors survey various analytical approaches in recent disability scholarship, among them Negative Imagery, Social Realism, New Historicism, Biographical Criticism, and Transgressive Reappropriation. Mitchell and Snyder read

texts as a “play” of multiple meanings that is important to the understanding of disability as an ambivalent and mutable category of cultural and literary investment. Readings of works by Montaigne, Nietzsche, Shakespeare, Melville, Anderson, Dunn and various post-1945 American authors reveal a diverse and uneven history of disability, with attitudes that are less rigid and injurious than is commonly held by scholarship. Disability scholarship is dangerous work, but this book should be a helpful resource for any scholar in the field.

Bodily and Narrative Forms traces contradictory medical and scientific concepts of embodied identity in literary works. Davis argues that literary works, in the era of realism, apply these concepts not only thematically but also structurally, as formal literary devices that are even more influential in shaping bodily representations than a writer’s intentions.

Chronologically organized, *Bodily and Narrative Forms* explores different concepts of embodiment held by the medico-scientific community and a more skeptical public. The five chapters analyze objective distance as required by both doctors and writers, and they discuss feminine stereotypes and conventional sentimental forms, problematic conventions of closure in both physiological systems and narrative forms, the relationship of form and function, and how novels preoccupied with race complicate biological equations of identity with form. Authors discussed include Oliver Wendell Holmes, Louisa May Alcott, Harriot Hunt, Margaret Fuller, Elizabeth Stuart Phelps, William Dean Howell, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Frances Watkins Harper, Charles Chesnutt and Pauline Hopkins. Davis’ detailed readings of these authors are informed by archival research and provide a fascinating exploration of the conventions of literary realism and the ambiguities that result from representing embodied subjectivity.

More Than Nostalgia

Dick Hammond

Tales from Hidden Basin. Harbour \$17.95

Ferdinand Wenger

Wild Liard Waters: Canoeing Canada’s Historic Liard River. Caitlin \$15.95

Dave Preston

Rails and Rooms: A Timeless Canadian Journey. Whitecap \$18.95

Reviewed by Bryan N.S. Gooch

Tales from Hidden Basin, charmingly illustrated by Alistair Anderson, comprises twenty-five short vignettes based on recollections by the author’s father about his youth and adolescence in the early 1900s spent largely at Hidden Basin at the west side of Nelson Island, which lies just north of Pender Harbour and immediately south of Jervis Inlet, facing Texada Island in British Columbia’s inland passage between the mainland and Vancouver Island. A picture emerges of basic homesteading with family of parents, boys and girls coming to terms with land and sea, eking out a modest life. The young learn to read and master practical crafts and skills without the aid of a school, they welcome occasional visitors and derive valuable lessons from some of them. They co-exist for a time with a nearby logging operation, and, in the end, leave the Basin, with the father off to New Zealand and the author’s father working first in a granite quarry and later as a shipwright in Vancouver. These are stories of a land still relatively unspoiled by the mechanical tentacles of industrial society, though the forestry operations, already gathering strength, would grow to mark many of the hillsides for years to come. Characters are neatly drawn, dialogue is handled superbly, the descriptive details border often on the magical, and touches of humour and seriousness emerge naturally through the range of youthful exploits. Without a declared specific intention, this

book offers some powerful lessons about effort, integrity, friendship, and the value of natural resources.

Wild Liard Waters takes one to that magnificent and sometimes lethal river which rises in the Yukon, flows through northern British Columbia, and eventually empties into the Mackenzie River in the Northwest Territories. The narrative focuses on canoeing that portion between Lower Post, near Watson Lake, to the confluence with the Mackenzie at Fort Simpson. On the first trip, there is a short glimpse of the northern end of the Fort Nelson River, and a return to complete the Liard saga, near the end of the book, with the running of the Grand Canyon, impassable on the initial journey. The account, supported by black and white illustrations, is about skill, hardship and endurance, and the reader is rightly in admiration of the group of paddlers who fight their way through dangerous waters and over gruelling portages. It is about waves and rocks and chutes, chilling rain, and campfires, bannock, hornets' nests and bears. But it is also about the river, the rock formations, the vegetation, the animal life, and the efforts of early explorers, Hudson's Bay men who daringly used the river as a trade and supply route, and the Klondikers who also, with massive losses, struggled west against its power. Spliced neatly into the story of the narrator's own forays with his indomitable companions are extracts from journals of earlier venturers, including the remarkable Robert Campbell, Archibald McDonald, R.G. McConnell and Charles Camsell. Old stories of danger and death offer a grim and stirring counterpoint to the modern expedition. The result is a gripping blend of voices and views. Yet Wenger offers a conspicuous concern: is it possible that a river with such hydro-electric potential will be left in peace? As Wenger pointedly suggests, the potential costs of the flooding of canyons and valleys by two massive lakes are unimaginable.

Rails and Rooms, also illustrated by black and white photographs, takes the reader not on a dangerous journey but on a leisurely passage by rail from Halifax to Vancouver, with side trips to St. Andrews, New Brunswick, to Quebec City, and to Banff and Lake Louise. The comfort and delights of Via Rail's modern transcontinental service offer a marked contrast to the accommodations of earlier, steam-hauled equipment, let alone the rough conditions faced by *voyageurs*, fur traders and surveyors. However, rail travel does provide a sense of the vastness of this nation as it unfolds past the windows. Preston describes the journey in detail (lakes, muskeg, grasslands, and mountains all come sharply into view), as well as stops along the way in some of our fabled hotels. The history, decor, and ambience of these buildings is well developed, just as is some of the history of railway construction and practice. As in Wenger's book, the past is nicely blended into present moments.

From Post- to Pre-

Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri

Empire. Harvard U. P. US \$18.95

Alfred J. López

Posts and Pasts: A Theory of Postcolonialism. State U of New York P. \$73.50

Reviewed by George Lang

There are two sorts of birds flocked here. *Empire* has had more resounding commercial success than any university press, even Harvard's, could expect, attracting reviews beyond the compass of academia and inspiring an internet chat group all its own. It claims to open a brave new front in the struggle against global capitalism, straining as it does at the bounds of several paradigms.

Posts and Pasts, despite its express desire to reformulate postcolonial studies and to plant landmarks, is akin to Thomas Kuhn's

ordinary science: the patient application of what is already known by those who toil over the same consecrated problems.

Postcolonial studies remains an evolving field rife with contradictions. Yet many in the generation currently passing through graduate schools in the humanities have “poco” as their orthodoxy. These apprentices are expected to acquaint themselves with its master sorcerers and will probably replicate that orthodoxy for decades once they have obtained “posts” of their own. For these readers, *Posts and Pasts* will be a more useful purchase than *Empire*.

The strengths of *Posts and Pasts*, which flow from its author’s skill at synthesis, are exemplified by the chapter treating the impact of Hegel’s “master-slave dialectic” on Fanon and others. Alfred J. López’s spirited defense and illustration of postcolonial studies is not founded on narrow grounds, but rather embraces several critical angles of approach to this “overused and understudied” term. As his title allows, the postcolonial is tinged with “post-ness,” though the sign *post-* can be reactive (against the colonial) or extensive (as continuation of same). In either case, there is a tendency to essentialize the category, a danger which López addresses. Another theme within postcolonial studies is the degree of agency possible for subalterns, “subordinated populations oppressed by hegemonic regimes.” As López observes, this issue usually converges upon questions of authenticity and voice, often in *ad hominem* or *ad feminam* polemic concerning the academic elite in the “First World” who are of “Third World” origin. The cultural hybridity of this elite is another quandary which he probes deftly.

Although postcolonial studies invariably have political and ethical sub-texts, their orientation is congenitally literary. There is a postcolonial canon of works of fiction read allegorically, as meaning something they do not explicitly say. López demon-

strates his command of that canon (from Conrad to Rushdie to Cliff), refusing as he does to “privilege the literatures of societies colonized in *English* over those from cultures dominated by others” (his emphasis); hence his inclusion of works in Spanish, and his concluding definition of magical realism as “the recovering or reclaiming of cultural discourses dominated until now by the centralizing and suppressing impulses of an *imperial culture in decline*” (mine).

Because of the built-in presence of the sign *post-* there is an elegiac dimension to postcolonial studies, one pregnant in the last quote. *Empire*, for its part, is imbued with a sense of history but utterly devoid of nostalgia for lost cultures.

Unfortunately, the media handlers at Harvard University Press have been able to float the idea that *Empire* is a “new *Communist Manifesto*” and that its authors are the “Marx and Engels of the internet age.” This last quote, one of the blurbs, is from the venerable French leftist *Nouvel observateur*, indication of the reach this book had even before its paperback edition, in no small part due to the celebrity of “Tony” Negri, a lecturer and professor of political science at Paris and Padua who is currently a resident of Rebibbia Prison in Rome, belatedly serving time for what his defenders believe were trumped-up charges concerning his activities in the 1970s.

But *Empire* is no *Communist Manifesto*. Despite superb passages of hortatory polemic, *Empire* is much closer to the treatises of Western political philosophy from which it draws its argumentation: Polybius on the nature of Roman sovereignty, Machiavelli on “the emptiness of the future,” Hobbes on his Leviathan, Spinoza as much perhaps as Marx on the masses or rather the multitude and ontological singularity; and finally, believe it or not, the founding documents of U.S. constitutional history.

Empire has not had an unmitigatedly favourable reception, though it is worth

noting that both the *New Left Review* and *Foreign Affairs* have had positive things to say. Those committed to the perpetuation of postcolonial studies within the academy will doubtless take umbrage at the suggestion that postcolonialism as well as post-modernism “are so intent on combatting the remnants of a past form of domination that they fail to recognize the new form that is looming over them.” Hardt and Negri will not make friends among those who advance, even out of presumed legitimate self-defense, their special cultural interests, including the right to “subaltern nationalism.” They do not lament the demise of any particular nation or nationhood itself, instead turning resolutely away from ephemeral identitarian categories towards a common humanity which will be constructed above and beyond them, ultimately the fully-integrated, self-conscious realization of humanity as the species it is.

Apart from allusions to Robert Musil, the absence of literature high, medium or low from *Empire* is striking. After all, Hardt is nominally a professor of literature at Duke, and Negri is the author of a dense, untranslated, perhaps untranslatable, study of the poet Giacomo Leopardi in which many themes of *Empire* are adumbrated, *Lenta Ginestra* (1987). Not literature but a classic of post-war Italian cinema provides the base allegory of *Empire*: the dazzling conclusion of Vittorio De Sica’s 1950 *Miracle in Milan*, in which, thanks to now clumsy cinematic effects, the inhabitants of a shantytown fly off as free as birds, *vogelfrei* in Marx’s expression, liberated from all material constraints precisely because they have nothing to lose.

Although they call themselves communists, Hardt and Negri apparently exclude the possibility of a vanguard party which might lead the multitude, whose virtuality they decline for the moment to predict.

I would like to register two deficiencies in the underlying argument of *Empire*, at least

from my perspective. The first concerns its profound Eurocentricity. Here, I do not intend to raise a stereotypical postcolonial critique. I agree with Hardt and Negri that there is little purpose in last-ditch campaigns to restore retrograde cultural traditions either already or soon to be abolished by global capitalism. *Tant mieux*, as Marx himself said, more or less. Yet the multitude, constructing the world post-Empire will draw upon concepts and ideas far more diverse than those available even to cosmopolitan American and European thinkers such as Hardt and Negri, to say nothing of the debased cartoonish content the Empire purveys through its media. When this current Empire crumbles, or when it is overthrown in some yet-to-be conceptualized revolution, this process and the cultural energies thereby released will surely not be derived solely from the lore of the peninsula at the western end of the Asian landmass we call Europe, nor from the northern parts of the next continent over.

My second critique is related to the first. As Hardt and Negri make obvious, humanity as the subject of history and for that matter the very notion of subjects, are constructions of Western thought. Yet Hardt and Negri are in the final analysis “speciesist,” like Marx biased by the presumption that human consciousness is the be-all and end-all of the cosmos. True, they approvingly quote Spinoza’s rejection of humanity’s dominion as an *imperium in imperio*, as a sub-regime subject to a different order of rules than Nature as a whole. And in almost the same breath, they go on to define “Man” as having both simian and cyborgian aspects, which Men and Women certainly share. Finally, in their concluding paean to Francis of Assisi, they call for a joyous life “including all of being and nature, the animals, sister moon, brother sun, the birds of the field, the poor and exploited humans....” This is all well and good, though still somehow insufficiently

immanent. A Buddhist worldview, among others, would insist that even these exalted “ideas” are illusory figurations mired in our singularity as humans, to echo back some of their own jargon.

Lives About Poets

Keith Harrison

Furry Creek. Oolichan Books \$17.95

Patrick Toner

If I Could Turn and Meet Myself: The Life of Alden Nowlan. Goose Lane Editions \$24.95

Reviewed by John Lennox

These narratives—Harrison’s self-described “non-fiction novel” and Toner’s biography—work in very different ways. Harrison makes use of a modal structure and the short-story chapters are linked through Patricia Lowther’s violent death which takes place just before the book begins. Toner uses a conventional biographical approach.

Harrison’s chapters cover the period between the discovery of Lowther’s body in Furry Creek in October 1975 and her husband’s trial for her murder in April 1977. Some characters recur in different chapters, but Lowther’s death is the thread that holds the telling together. The narrative is interspersed with poetry by Lowther, portions of the testimony from her husband’s trial, a set piece of exegesis based on a Lowther prose composition published in *Prism*, letters to the author from Lowther’s daughters, and a poem published by Harrison in *Canadian Literature* with accompanying critical notes.

This generic hybridity is intended, I believe, to create a sense of the intricacy of human relations and the impossibility of truly knowing another person, but the mixing of fiction and non-fiction in this work—which takes a real life and death as its point of departure—ultimately obscures the pathos of the Lowther story, however sincere the impulse behind the narrative

and however sincere the approbation of Lowther’s family members, whose letters of support are woven into the narrative. Finally, this story is about the author, not Pat Lowther.

Patrick Toner’s biography of Alden Nowlan, the first full-length study of his life, is based on extensive research and interviews with family members, friends, colleagues, and associates of Nowlan. Toner’s job has involved trying to tease the facts of Nowlan’s life from its myth, and he has done so with skill and sensitivity. In fact, the biography is at times burdened with excessive detail. But as biographer, Toner has two indispensable qualities: sympathy for, and critical detachment from, his subject. He writes from an understanding of Nowlan as a self-created artist/poet. There have been two other male poets like him in our literature—Milton Acorn and Al Purdy. The nature of their creative success—achieved in spite of odds that would have defeated others—marked them for all their lives as both extraordinary and eccentric.

Toner’s biography fully chronicles the various stages in Nowlan’s life and takes into account the tension that yoked Nowlan’s undoubted talents, achievements, and the great good fortune of his marriage, with his considerable emotional need as well as his unpredictable and often irascible temperament. By turns diffident and demanding, congenial and difficult, Nowlan never faltered in his sense of himself as a working writer. Undergirding Toner’s narrative is the biographer’s awareness of the extraordinary courage of a complex individual who faced emotional and physical ordeals that would have overwhelmed most men. Nowlan’s was an intensely difficult life, but, with all its costs, a victory and an affirmation of creativity.



As True a Picture

Alexandra Heilbron

Remembering Lucy Maud Montgomery. Dundurn
\$26.99

Reviewed by Cecily Devereux

To prepare *Remembering Lucy Maud Montgomery* Alexandra Heilbron—former editor of *The Avonlea Traditions Chronicle*, a P.E.I.-based magazine for readers of Montgomery’s fiction, and editor of the very large *Lucy Maud Montgomery Album* (2000)—interviewed thirty-two people who were related to, worked for, lived near, were taught in Sunday school by or had some contact with Montgomery. Their memories “offer one more piece of the puzzle that was Maud,” supplementing the extraordinarily constructed life-narrative of the journals and the official reports allowed by Montgomery in interviews and articles in her own lifetime with some information about how she was actually perceived by others. Some of the accounts in this collection soften the rigid and self-conscious figure who dominates the journals: stories of Montgomery’s generosity, her humour, her politeness to fans who turned up at the door and her work as a sympathetic teacher in Sunday school classes present a much more likeable person than the Montgomery of the journals. Some accounts counter the mythology of Montgomery in other ways: for instance, those who have imputed to Montgomery her many characters’ opposition to corporal punishment for children will be surprised to learn that she carried a “black stick” for disciplining her two sons. The same might be said of the handful of accounts here that indicate something about the Macdonald home: one visitor to the house in Toronto describes a meal during which no one spoke to her; a former housekeeper notes that the entire family would pass a meal in silence, all reading at the table. Such information may not add to

the understanding of Montgomery’s creative work, but it is nonetheless intriguing—although it could usefully be contextualized or balanced here by some well-positioned editorial commentary, which is somewhat skimpy.

While this book is clearly not intended to appeal to a tabloid fascination with the lives of the famous, it does occasionally threaten to move into this territory. Some of the questions seem weighty and intrusive. (“What was Maud like? Did she have you on her lap, hug you?”—in other words, was she affectionate or not? Did she yearn for a daughter, and compensate for that lack by “adopting” girls? These questions could be framed much more directly.) Some, such as those which ask people who were only children at the time what they remember of the relationship between Montgomery and her husband Ewan Macdonald, seem misdirected. Some questions seem rather unproductive: there is a series of questions about baking that seem to be designed to reveal the truth about Montgomery’s work in the kitchen, and several interviewees are asked how Montgomery dressed. Many of the remembrances here, moreover, do little service to her eldest son Chester or to her husband; without adequate editorial commentary and framing, it is not clear how these accounts function in the book as a whole, except to reinforce the representations assembled by Montgomery in her journals.

The interviews occupy about two-thirds of the book. The final chapter presents ten early- to mid-twentieth century articles about Montgomery, mostly from English-Canadian newspapers and magazines. It is certainly useful to bring these pieces together (despite a certain repetitiveness in their accounts of Montgomery), but their relation to the interviews is rather tenuous, since they are not, for the most part, “remembrances.” Indeed, perhaps only her correspondent Ephraim Weber’s 1942 piece from

the *Dalhousie Review* falls into this category.

It is difficult to say how this book might function as a resource for scholarly research into the life and work of Montgomery: like *The Lucy Maud Montgomery Album*, it is something of a hybrid, a collection based on research but directed largely at a non-academic readership. Nonetheless, *Remembering Lucy Maud Montgomery* is sometimes compelling reading, and the collection as a whole will certainly be of interest to any reader of Montgomery's journals and her novels.

As Canadian as It Gets

Stephen Henighan

When Words Deny the World: The Reshaping of Canadian Writing. Porcupine's Quill \$19.95.

W.J. Keith

Canadian Odyssey: A Reading of Hugh Hood's The New Age/Le Nouveau Siecle. McGill-Queen's University P \$65 (cloth); \$24.95 (paper).

Abby Werlock

Carol Shields's The Stone Diaries: A Reader's Guide. Continuum Contemporaries \$9.95 (US).

Reviewed by Donna Coates

In *Carol Shields's The Stone Diaries: A Reader's Guide*, Shields states that the reason so many good writers come from Canada today is that "we're writing from the edge, from the edge of the continent, the forehead of North America."

This position is, she adds, "conducive to emerging voices and views." Yet in *When Words Deny the World: The Reshaping of Canadian Writing* Stephen Henighan argues that, in spite of their "international reputation and commercial viability," few Canadians are currently producing good literature. In Part One of his text, which consists of previously published reviews, essays, and articles, Henighan claims that the best novels in English-speaking Canada were written by Margaret Laurence, Robertson Davies, Alice Munro, Mordecai

Richler, and Margaret Atwood between 1965 and 1975. At that time, he suggests, Canadian writers had broken their ties with Britain and found their own distinctive Canadian voices; they were documenting Canadian historical experiences and focusing on "our own myths and peculiarities." Intriguingly, Henighan posits that these novels appeared in part because Canadians did not participate in the Vietnam War: lack of involvement in an American-driven conflict gave writers time to "stop and think" and to concentrate on Canadian life and history. But once Canadians voted for the Free Trade Agreement in 1988, the creative process "stalled." As a result of our increased "cosiness" with the United States, writers were driven by the desire to satisfy mass markets and so discarded their Canadian subject matter and produced "globalized" or "Americanized" fiction. Among the worst offenders are Shields, whom Henighan labels "a NAFTA writer"; Michael Ondaatje, who turned "history into metaphor" in *The English Patient*; and Anne Michaels, whose *Fugitive Pieces* is merely a "shameless imitation of Ondaatje's metaphor-laden aesthetic and a consolidation of his suppression of Canadian history."

But perhaps it is Henighan himself who has "stalled," for he seems remarkably unaware that the Anglo-Saxon Canada he admired decades earlier has become culturally and racially diverse or, in the words of the 2002 Booker Prize-winning novelist Yann Martel, "the greatest hotel on Earth." Although Henighan makes passing reference to writers such as Tom King, Austin Clarke, Rohinton Mistry, V. S. Vassanji, Shyam Selvedurai, M. Nourbese Philip, and Dionne Brand (but omits Eden Robinson and Lee Maracle), he does not discuss their work in any detail or acknowledge that many of them are documenting the here and now, thereby contradicting his claim that "no one will remember the 1990s."

Moreover, Henighan's insistence that the appropriation of voice "fallacy" has had a "crippling effect on Canadian literature and criticism" is grossly exaggerated and overlooks the fact that much of the most innovative writing in Canada has come from these "minority" voices, whose successes Henighan seems to resent. Though Henighan notes that Alberta, Quebec, and Newfoundland have developed distinct regional voices, he mentions only Wayne Johnston, Alastair Macleod and David Adams Richards; to this list, he might have added Pearl Luke, Fred Stenson, Michael Crummey, Michael Winter, Lisa Moore, Berenice Morgan, and Donna Morrissey, many of whose works are engaged with contemporary Canadian *milieux*. Moreover, Part Two of *When Words Deny the World* offers three previously unpublished essays that cover essentially the same ground, and miss another opportunity to analyze these fictions.

In addition, given Henighan's high praise for Robertson Davies' *Fifth Business*, in which the life of Dunstan Ramsay, "the man forever on the margins of great events, parallels Canadian history in the twentieth century," it seems odd that Henighan should have ignored Hugh Hood's twelve-volume novel-series, *The New Age*, published between 1975 and 2000, for as W. J. Keith remarks in *Canadian Odyssey* (completed shortly before Hood's death), Hood's novels attempt "to chronicle the crucial evolution of Canadian society during the twentieth century." Keith observes that the Toronto-born and fluently bilingual Hood felt that he was well positioned to write such a history because he either knew those at the "center" of Canadian life himself or was acquainted with others who did. In addition, with his one-quarter-Scot, one-quarter-French, and one-half-English ancestry, Hood insisted that no one could be "more Canadian than that." While Henighan may

have dismissed Hood's writing as too "Toronto-centered," and Keith admits that Hood did not strive for complete geographical coverage of Canada in his series (many of the events take place in Toronto and Montreal), Hood nonetheless worked in the 1919 Winnipeg General Strike, situated some of the action in Saskatchewan and the Yukon, and made many references to Nova Scotia. Keith acknowledges that Hood's novel series, though "certainly the most ambitious literary undertaking to date in English-speaking Canada," is difficult to read because it lacks both clear linear and temporal development and experiments with a variety of literary forms such as autobiography, historical chronicle, romance, religious allegory, situation comedy, spy thriller, and science fiction. The need for a "guide" to this challenging work is thus long overdue.

Keith begins the *Canadian Odyssey* with three chapters that provide much useful biographical, formal, and literary-historical information, which he then follows with a detailed, almost encyclopedic, novel-by-novel analysis. Although some readers and critics may have preferred a more thematic approach, those who wish to teach Hood's fiction will find this structure helpful. Also, since Keith tries to avoid "theoretical preconceptions" (there are only forty footnotes in the entire text), his book is jargon-free and hence accessible to a wide range of readers.

Werlock's monograph on *The Stone Diaries*, the first Canadian text in the Continuum Contemporaries series (Michael Ondaatje's *The English Patient* and Margaret Atwood's *Alias Grace* are forthcoming) is also easy to read, but since Werlock, a former Professor of American literature, gathered much of her information during two telephone conversations with Shields, it lacks rigorous scholarship. Werlock is also no doubt hampered by writing to a formula: all of the books in the

series follow the same five-part structure, beginning with a short biography, which is then followed by a study of major themes and ideas, a summary of the reception, a summary of the “novel’s standing today,” and then by a list of discussion questions, suggestions for further reading, and useful websites. Although the series’ editors claim that the monograph is a “wonderful source of ideas and inspiration for members of book clubs and reading groups, as well as for students of contemporary literature at school, college, and university,” good students and academics will find it somewhat elementary. The monograph might, however, make useful reading for Stephen Henighan, whose ludicrous observation that Shields is a “Free Trade” writer overlooks the fact that the American-born writer’s move to Canada in the late 1950s was one of the best “trades” ever made.

A Pocketful of Wry

Aislinn Hunter

What’s Left Us: Stories and a Novella. Polestar \$19.95

Don Kerr

Love & the Bottle. Coteau \$16.95

Karen Smythe

Stubborn Bones. Polestar \$18.95

P.K. Page

A Kind of Fiction. Porcupine’s Quill \$19.95

Reviewed by Medrie Purdham

It is immediately striking that P.K. Page’s *A Kind of Fiction* is the only one of the four books under review *not* promoted on its jacket as “wry.” Page’s concerted, challenging attempts to harmonize the world of appearances with a luminous inner reality downplay the role of irony in short fiction. In a more common contemporary vein, Don Kerr, Aislinn Hunter, and Karen Smythe depict modern experience with a marked taste for idiosyncrasy in short-story collections that are at once witty and

more-than-witty. With each work tapping into the authentic in its own way, these four collections demonstrate the vitality and versatility of the short story form.

What’s Left Us is the debut work (a novella and short story collection) of B.C. writer Aislinn Hunter. It touches the quick of yearning and loss in the unnerving after-hours of love, detailing the emotional remainder in funny, wistful, canny prose.

The novella recounts the quest undertaken by a young London bookseller, Emma, pregnant by a married man. Fatherless herself and about to give birth to a fatherless child, Emma makes an eleventh-hour trip to the family archive in Ireland in a fact-finding mission about love. Intellectually disposed to evidence and inventories, Emma moves through the veritable museum of herself to discover the broad currents of love and loss in her family’s history. Hunter narrates Emma’s shoring-up of her legacy in forty-two short pieces which come across alternately as brief pangs and ordered items, reflecting with subtle discipline the emotional and intellectual labour of Emma’s preparation for childbirth.

The collection’s six short stories convey a poignant arbitrariness in the way lives converge, diverge and mean. An unworldly porn cinema clerk (“Sophie believed she had been called by the Divine to work at the Ormond Quay Triple X Cinema. First of all, she was good with numbers”) encounters a young seminarian. The pair are brought into glancing and, alternately, profound contact by virtue of their “callings” in two versions of an event. A mother and daughter experience their love for and essential strangeness from one another through their fatigued preoccupation with their mentally ill son and brother. A woman’s heavy grief over the death of a sibling (expressed as a recurring vision of a banshee) occludes other relationships. Hunter balances formal variety (including a second-person “you” narration, an occasionally

expressionistic element, and a contemporary hagiography) with a remarkably discreet authorial presence. *What's Left Us* is humane and exquisite.

Love & the Bottle, the first collection of short stories from Saskatoon poet and playwright Don Kerr, serves up twelve tipsy, libidinous rounds of love and talk. Kerr's courtships are negotiations around difficult corners; they are perilous and engaging dramas of approach and retreat, appetite and nerve, the passing of time and the loosening of the tongue.

Banter moves Kerr's book. A writer woos his sulking wife with tequilas in the closet after ignoring her in his search for the *mot juste*; an inarticulate tenth-grade boy endures the sexual taunting of three girls at a pool party; a man in a bar is verbally out-matched by his date until, floundering through alcohol, irony, and literary citation, he pronounces the word "love." Kerr is adept at both dialogue and interior monologue, often showing the mismatch between thought and utterance.

Drawing heightened attention to pacing and perception, focus and distortion, passing and wasted time, Kerr's alcohol motif does something special with the privileged "moment" of the short-story genre. Many of Kerr's stories are marked by the oblique experience of present time. In the intentionally slow, elegiac "Dead Soldier" (i.e. empty bottle), a group of young intellectuals drink, debate, and busy themselves on the surface of time as Kerr builds a powerful cumulative sense of inaction and loss. In other stories, the present moment is treated narratively with the strange distensions of inebriation and desire.

Because it presents twelve stories' worth of alcohol-abetted insecurity, the book risks repeatedly highlighting a merely irritating aspect of character, though variously handled. While Kerr often strikes a note of genuine vulnerability in his characters, it generally takes the space and complexity of

the more developed stories to do so; some of the shorter pieces are less successful. By and large, though, the book is perceptive and entertaining.

Laundry billows on clothespins on the front cover of Karen Smythe's *Stubborn Bones*, a book which itself puts things on the line; the image suggests not only the domestic intimacies but also the powerful underlying disturbances evoked in the collection's eleven stories.

Smythe's stories are modest in the scope of their action, but meticulously realized in their portraiture. The first story is a narrator's running address to an absent ex-husband, which judgmentally recounts their friend Marta's seduction of a man in the wake of her father's death. Though it is Marta whose vitality in the face of mourning most obviously signals the "stubborn bones" of the title, the narrator herself journeys through a figurative underground (trains, subways) to arrive at an acknowledgment of her own persistent longing. Many of Smythe's characters labour to realize what it is they truly want: a trailer-park spinster tries to countenance a marriage proposal; a daughter who is no longer the caregiver of her recently deceased tyrannical father struggles to claim some modicum of happiness for herself. Smythe's stories oscillate between gladness and sackcloth, portraying the attempt to overcome circumstantial hardship, impassivity, and embitterment.

Several stories explore the dissolution of the meaning and foundations of married life, sometimes with apt narrative restraint and non-closure, sometimes with fabulous absurdity. In an unforgettable moment of disconnection, a woman, unable to "claim what [is] hers," phlegmatically watches her caged poodle make three full circuits around a baggage carousel. Smythe's characters try to take what they need from their current relationships and personal histories to perform (often urgent) acts of self-fashioning.

Stubborn Bones is an energetic rendering of the sharpness and rapid obsolescence of feelings, a flesh-and-bones portrayal of real people in all their pain and persistence.

P.K. Page's writing exemplifies Northrop Frye's assertion that "literature is not only the obvious but the inescapable guide to higher journeys of consciousness." Page's recent collection of short stories, *A Kind of Fiction*, is a moving and valuable reminder of her accomplishment in this genre. Dedicated to the memory of the other members of *Preview*, the little magazine in which Page began publishing her short stories as well as the early work of her monumental poetry career, *A Kind of Fiction* spans almost sixty years.

Page's fictions are *fascinations*, efforts by the mind to break out of a separate reality. In the title story, an older woman tumbles down the stairs in front of a younger woman; her brief, private trauma becomes the younger woman's curious *idée fixe* and the subject of an ongoing personal fiction. The question of how fully we are able to get beyond our own private spheres is broached absurdly in "The Neighbour" where an upstairs neighbour's foot breaks through a bellicose family's ceiling, and poignantly in "Fever," in which a married woman's attraction to and isolation from a courtly gynecologist impel her with the force of medical symptoms, illuminating for a time the "entire course of love."

The desire to know another's experience is one motive for self-transcendence—and for fiction-making—in this work. As inductions into other mysteries, a few metaphysical explorations move Page's fiction into different modes: fairy tale, allegory, fable. A villager learns the true nature of time's progress; a prince lets go of his beliefs and attachments to ascend the "Sky-Tree"; an elderly woman feels wings growing. These more overtly conceptual pieces are refined and beautiful, but (necessarily) lack the absurdity, psychological interest

and even menace of the "worldly" fictions. Nonetheless, they suggest a finishing of Page's transcendent vision and lend a satisfying fullness to the collection.

A Kind of Fiction ends with the glorious "Unless the Eye Catch Fire," in which a woman pursues new forms of perception in a landscape which is apocalyptically heating up. She, perhaps like Page, is unerringly determined "to be lost finally in the incandescence of a personal universe" (to quote the title of the cover artwork painted by Page under her married name, P.K. Irwin). In its play of attachments, Page's new collection illustrates how the motivated forms we call fictions aspire sometimes breathtakingly towards truths.

Lives and Letters

James King

Jack: A Life with Writers. The Story of Jack McClelland. Knopf \$34.95

Mordecai Richler

Belling the Cat: Essays, Reports and Opinions. Knopf \$19.95

Judith Skelton Grant, Ed.

For Your Eyes Alone: Robertson Davies. Letters 1976-1995. McClelland and Stewart \$37.50

Reviewed by Gerhard Duesterhaus

Metaphorically speaking, Jack McClelland was born with a number of silver spoons in his mouth. His father left him a firm as well as the necessary social standing in Toronto's society, and relevant contacts with intellectuals so that the young McClelland could make a name for himself in the world of publishing. In his biography of McClelland, James King stresses the connection between the man and his business. John Gordon, called Jack, the youngest of three children, was born in 1922, a sickly, vulnerable child, yet endowed with his father's tenacity and his mother's charm. A decision about his future had to be made at the end of World War II, when he convinced his father to

accept him into the firm, very much against his mother's wishes.

Quite contrary to his father's policy, Jack accepted new authors and new titles, always hunting for hidden talents in Canada. He enriched the literary scene with authors like Earle Birney, Margaret Atwood, Margaret Laurence, Mordecai Richler, and Gabrielle Roy. King portrays McClelland as a publisher for whom authors came first. His flamboyance, charm, and attention to individuals helped him win over aspiring writers, who often became personal friends. His decisions, however, were sometimes too rash for shrewd business and thus did not yield the profits the firm needed for survival. More often than not, he found it difficult to keep the firm afloat and he had to be bailed out by friends, authors, and the federal and provincial governments, which had a strong interest in preventing a Canadian publishing house with so many first-rate authors from going under.

The book is a eulogy for Jack McClelland who, despite his importance in the cultural life of Canada, finally had to accept economic defeat and sell his company in 1985. His rise and fall are narrated in fourteen chapters, which contain a wealth of facts and figures as well as letters of praise and complaint. These letters often express the anger and frustration of McClelland's many authors. King points out that he combined perhaps too many conflicting things in one person: he was a writers' man, a connoisseur of books, a director of his firm, and a businessman.

One of McClelland's authors was Mordecai Richler. Three years before his death, Richler unearthed a collection of articles he had published in various magazines between 1960 and 1994. They were published in book form in 1998, grouped into four sections called "Books and Things," "Going Places," "Sports," and "Politics." A lengthy introduction, "Writing for the Mags," precedes these sections.

The articles, for example "Mr. Sam" (on Bronfman and his family), "Safari" (about a trip to Kenya in 1982), "Gretzky in Eighty-four," and "Bye Bye Mulroney" offer instruction and satire. Richler's sardonic humor, his spicy remarks, his open and often biting criticisms are evident throughout; they seem particularly appropriate when he tackles topics such as the interrelationship of wealth and crime or, as in the article "Woody," the links between personal ambition and artistic achievement. Richler sometimes goes too far. He contradicts himself when he freely admits that rage or condescension are bad guides in rendering one's views but proceeds to write in this spirit himself (for example "Germany 1978," or "Egypt's Eleventh Plague").

Both McClelland and Richler appear in a selection of letters written by Robertson Davies in the years 1976-1995. The editor, Davies's biographer Judith Skelton Grant, has grouped these letters around the publication and/or planning of novels that occupied Davies during this period: *The Rebel Angels*, *What's Bred in the Bone*, *The Lyre of Orpheus*, *Murder and Walking Spirits* and *The Cunning Man*. The recipients of these letters reveal Davies's vast variety of contacts: writers and academics, actors, publishers, reviewers, and politicians, housewives, students and teachers. The famous among his correspondents include John Gielgud, Margaret Atwood, Margaret Laurence (as well as Richler and McClelland). He addresses all with equal civility, erudition, interest, compassion, curiosity, and frankness.



Canadian Antimodern

Alexander Kizuk

A Reassessment of Early Twentieth-Century Canadian Poetry in English. Edwin Mellen \$119.95

Reviewed by Brian Trehearne

A Reassessment of Early Twentieth-Century Canadian Poetry in English argues that Canadian literary history has suppressed a number of “antimodern” poets circa 1900–1930 because they played openly on tropes of Oedipal desire and “bliss” that their audiences validated in “oceanic” enthusiasms and that the “modernist superego” of later criticism—apparently fearful of all forms of “excess”—strove to discredit. Kizuk secondly hopes to prove that these same “antimodern” poets—Frank Oliver Call, Robert Norwood, Marjorie Pickthall, and Arthur Stringer, among others—used a “rhetoric of emancipation” in which the “Chosen Poet,” who may also appear as a “King . . . Good Person, Worker and Everyself,” “bestow[s] upon his Tribe of followers a Glorious Way.” These extravagant claims are laid out in the book’s foreword and in its first two chapters. It is a kind of grace that they return only piecemeal in the readings of eight conservative poets and of E.J. Pratt, W.W.E. Ross, and Raymond Knister that follow.

This slippage occurs because such grandiose (and mutually exclusive) arguments demand a logic that Kizuk does not really pursue. Any claim about audience response, for example, requires some documentation of audience response. With a single exception in the “Foreword,” dealing with a poet who does not reappear, there is none: no reviews, no sales figures, no impassioned correspondence among the *literati*. Second, even readers more responsive than I to Kizuk’s Lacanian and Kristevan jargon will likely be troubled by his unwillingness to engage the terms’ complexity in the French theoretical sources;

jouissance in this usage covers everything from penetration imagery to a pretty night-scape. His archetypal “tropes” (by which, as above, any reference to an honest “Worker” may be read as an allusion to an honoured “King,” and any attractive woman is a desired “Mother”) will be equally unconvincing to most readers. At any rate, both methods surely require support from the most scrupulous exegeses; Kizuk’s are, in a word, unsteady. He can find a phallus with the best of them (see the reading of the dwarf in Bliss Carman’s “The Red Wolf”), but he is strangely silent on the homoeroticism of *Sonnets for Youth* by Call, the only poet in this little canon who really seems to need a reading that exposes illicit desire and sublimated audience longings.

The desire to locate Knister and Ross among these late Victorians was laudable, because the conservative contexts of Canadian modernism need to be kept in mind, but it was unnecessary to figure them all as “antimoderns,” a term borrowed from T.J. Jackson Lears. It identifies poets who sought to sustain cultural authority and spiritual vision in a broad antagonism to the modern world, but it remains unclear whether Kizuk’s “antimodern” poets are anti-*modernist* as well as anti-*modernity*. (Nor does Kizuk document their actual awareness of modernism or of the modern age, with the result that this will perhaps be the only book in its field to escape reference to the Great War.) Certainly most of his poets blithely maintained a conservative prosody. But their distaste for modernity and “yearning for coherence” are notable in much modernist art as well. This obfuscation explains Kizuk’s curious silence on formal matters. Knister and Ross show such skill and seriousness with free verse and Imagism that sustained formal analyses would explode the caricature of modernism as pure “superego,” a “poetry of hollow vessels, sterile frameworks, and scaffolds...”

The chapters on individual poets that make up the bulk of the book are not psychoanalytic or tropological in method but simply descriptive-bibliographical, and Kizuk is at his most useful in fulfilling that duty. We learn about each poet's major publications and themes. It's hard not to conclude that the author's real wish was to mount an evaluative defence of their best work—and one wishes that he had done so openly, sparing us the psycho-tropic asides that anxiously pepper a few of these core chapters.

Images of Selves

Martha Langford

Suspended Conversations: The Afterlife of Memory in Photographic Albums. McGill-Queen's UP
\$39.95

Sabine Melchior-Bonnet, trans. Katherine H. Jewett

The Mirror: A History. Routledge \$35.00

Reviewed by Laurie McNeill

What happens to the stories in a family photograph album when it is stripped of its interpreters and context? *Suspended Conversations* explores such anonymous texts, arguing that family albums preserve the mnemonic structures of oral traditions "for new uses in the present." By paying attention to the "oral-photographic performance[s]" of albums, Langford attempts to recreate the narratives of anonymous amateur albums held in the McCord Museum of Canadian History.

The notion that album memories need to be told to be preserved forms the basis of Langford's discussion, and the McCord material foregrounds the problems when the stories can no longer be shared. Because these albums were not meant for an audience outside the family circle, their narratives are now almost impossible to read without the help of a guide or a context in which to place them, since often "[s]o familiar were these faces, places, and dates

that there was little need for the compiler to write them down." Such gaps, Langford argues, indicate the oral framework that requires close attention, even detective work, to discover. Reading family photograph albums in these closely attentive ways changes the interpretive contexts, turning their daily events into rituals, and their repetition—the same kind of photograph taken over and over—into a signal for how these subjects saw themselves. Langford, picking up on Victor Burgin's and Marianne Hirsch's readings of family albums as legitimizing forces for the "institution of family," in which the past is idealized and "harsh realities" are omitted, sees the family album functioning "as a self-defining instrument—the family talking to itself and others," even when that family, or that conversation, has ceased.

Langford is at her strongest when she discusses particular albums from the archive, demonstrating her methodology by tracing family relationships, different compilers, recurring images, and exploring these elements' significance to the family that the album constructs. She includes album pages in facsimile so that readers can see not only the images but also their arrangement, drawing attention to the entire album, not just the photographs, as a text. In contrast to this close attention to texts and to research methods, her use of theoretical material seems *ad hoc*, drawing on theories of children's literature, portraiture, and colonialism, for example, as well as of photography and orality. Her discussion of dialogism and albums, a central tenet of her argument, would in particular benefit from more consistent application of her theoretical framework.

In the end, though, the point of reconstructing oral frameworks for anonymous albums, an act that Langford acknowledges can only be a reinscription, much of which must be based on intuition and conjecture, remains unclear: what value does this

framework have for photography theory, or for analysis of photographic narratives? How can this method “unlock” these albums, an image that implies a stable meaning that can be rediscovered if only we use the right “key”? Langford’s conclusion, in which she imagines an interview with an album donor, fails to clarify what we are supposed to do with her methodology.

The Mirror: A History examines self-reflections and representations of a different sort. Both a history of the mirror-making industry and its technology, and a study of the mirror’s significance in Western society, Melchior-Bonnet’s text chronicles the mirror’s growing import as a material and metaphorical object. Once worth two-and-a-half times more than a painting by Raphael, the mirror has inspired competing producers to resort to industrial espionage and murder to keep their technologies safe, and has become integral to individual self-conceptions, changing both literally and figuratively how people see themselves.

Melchior-Bonnet devotes more than a third of the book to the history of the mirror, from the metal mirrors of antiquity to the competing Venetian and French industries that modernized techniques for creating mirrors made of glass. Melchior-Bonnet turns from the production of mirrors to their role in Western society, focusing on primarily French and other European literature, painting, and religious documents. The significance of mirrors, and of the related fields of portraiture and confession, is explored under thematic clusters, including chapters on the magic and the malice of mirrors that highlight the ambiguous nature of the looking-glass. On the one hand, theologians and philosophers from Plato onwards saw mirrors as reflecting the divine, and humanity as the self-portrait or reflection of God; looking at one’s reflection thus became a meditation on the divine and the mirror a vehicle for self-awareness and improvement. On the other hand, mir-

rors could be the instruments of the devil, leading women in particular to commit the deadly sins of Pride, Vanity, and Envy. Oddly, given the proliferation of reflecting devices in recent history, and contemporary society’s fascination with self-reflection, Melchior-Bonnet devotes a mere five-and-a-half pages to the twentieth century.

With reference to a range of materials, including literature, painting, government records, and church doctrine, *The Mirror* is ambitious. Its breadth comes at the expense of argumentative depth or consistent critical discussion. For example, in a chapter on women, mirrors, and vanity, Melchior-Bonnet asserts, “Woman awakens to life when she has access to her image.” The footnote attached to this comment refers to a fifteenth-century French story, but the connection is never explained, and the remark, as well as the misogynist church dogma that precedes it, goes unchallenged or contextualized.

Postcolonial Revisions

Margaret Laurence, ed. Nora Foster Stovel

Long Drums and Cannons: Nigerian Dramatists and Novelists 1952-1966. U of Alberta P \$29.95

Peter van der Veer

Imperial Encounters: Religion and Modernity in India and Britain. Princeton UP \$33.00

Reviewed by Wendy Roy

The republication of *Long Drums and Cannons: Nigerian Dramatists and Novelists 1952-1966* again makes available the first detailed analysis of Nigerian literature, and provides scholars with a well-annotated version of the last of the five books based on Laurence’s experiences in Africa during the 1950s. Her study holds up remarkably well thirty-three years after its initial publication. Although her discussion of Nigerian prose written in English is not theoretical, it is a solid introduction to a collection of

literature that had previously been little studied.

Long Drums and Cannons begins with analyses of five well-established Nigerian writers: Wole Soyinka, Chinua Achebe, John Pepper Clark-Bekederemo, Amos Tutuola, and Cyprian Ekwensi. The final chapter deals briefly with six of what were then Nigeria's up-and-coming writers, including Elechi Amadi and Flora Nwapa. Laurence occasionally refers to other analyses of these authors' literary works, and the scarcity of these references emphasizes the lack of critical work on Nigerian literature prior to her own study. In the meantime, many of her own judgments are still sound, such as when she argues that Achebe's *Arrow of God* is "one of the best novels written anywhere in the past decade."

Contemporary readers may be surprised that only one of the authors Laurence studies is female, but Flora Nwapa was at that time the only Nigerian woman who had published a novel. Laurence's commentary makes it clear that few Nigerian plays or novels of the 1950s and 1960s had female protagonists, and that those few tended to be women defined in relation to men. An annotation in the recently issued edition notes that Laurence "often allows moments of potential misogyny to pass without a word, revealing the degree to which her primary concerns in *Drums* are more broadly humanist than specifically 'feminist,' or even 'postcolonial.'" I would argue that such gaps are evidence not of Laurence's lack of feminist or postcolonial awareness, but rather of the fact that her gender critiques are implicit rather than explicit because she does not want to pass judgment on cultural practices of which she is not part.

The most serious criticism that can be made of Laurence's book, and indeed that has previously been made, is about her insistence on the universal nature of Nigerian literature. Laurence repeatedly comments that although Nigerian prose

has regional settings and concerns, it also has universal appeal, giving insight "not only into immediate and local dilemmas but, through these, into the human dilemma as a whole." The question of why literature set in Nigeria must deal with themes that are readily accessible to Western readers is never asked, and the issue of the globalization of world culture, which forces literature from other cultures into the North American or European mold, is never broached.

Laurence is, however, familiar with many of the colonial and postcolonial issues important to Nigerian writers. She focuses on themes of economic and cultural transformation, of self and other, and comments on one of the key aspects of the literature she studies: its use of the English language. She supports Achebe's argument that Nigerian writers must use the language imposed on them by their British colonizers, both because in a country of many regional languages it has become the national language and because it allows writers to be heard worldwide. She points out that English is employed in conjunction with indigenous Nigerian languages for specific effect: Soyinka, for example, uses standard English when characters are meant to be speaking Yoruba; pidgin when they are meant to be speaking English; and Yoruba for religious words, to signal that the cultural language is not in fact English.

The 2001 edition of *Long Drums and Cannons* contains close to 150 pages of additional introductory and explanatory material, written by a number of different scholars under the able direction of editor Nora Foster Stovel. Probably no republished work needs a foreword, a preface, and an introduction, in addition to the author's own preface. However, the book's updated biographical and bibliographical sections are invaluable for scholarly readers, as are the annotations, appendices, and commentaries that place Laurence's book

in its historical context and compare it to the original typescript. Also fascinating are a paper on tribalism that Laurence delivered in 1969 and an essay by Abdul-Rasheed Na'Allah titled "Nigerian Literature Then and Now." Stovel's discussion of the book's original reception is useful, but her detailed chapter summaries are probably unnecessary, and readers interested in world literature might quarrel with her assessment that Laurence's study "illuminates not so much the Nigerian literature that provides its focus as the author's own perspective."

Imperial Encounters examines another aspect of culture in another part of the British colonial empire. As the title indicates, this book focuses not just on the impact colonization had on India, but also on the reciprocal effect of such contact on modernity and religion in Britain. Van der Veer argues against the definition of India as "the land of eternal religion" which exists "outside history," and Britain as "the land of modern secularity" which acts as "the agent of history." His thesis instead is that "modern India and modern Britain are products of a shared colonial experience" and that concepts of modernity such as "secularity, liberty, and equality are created and re-created in the interaction between colony and metropole." Indians thus rightly interpreted British colonial government as fundamentally based on Christian morality, which paradoxically gave a "strong new impulse" to existing Indian religions. One effect was that the religious traditions of Hinduism, which had been interpreted in differing ways and for the most part orally transmitted, became more and more codified.

Van der Veer's examination of the most notorious result of nineteenth-century Western investigations into Indian religions, Max Müller's coinage of the term Aryan (from the Sanskrit *arya*, for "honourable man") is particularly noteworthy. Müller linked the founders of Hinduism—

people who had migrated into India more than three thousand years earlier—to current European populations by connecting Sanskrit to ancient European languages. The subsequent use of the word Aryan in Nazi ideology is well known. Less well known, van der Veer argues, is that although "the Aryan myth" initially had a positive impact on social relations between Britains and Indians, it had a profoundly negative impact on relations within India. He suggests that Hindus took up the discourse on Aryanism to turn religious differences between Hindus and Muslims into racial ones, and that such discourse drove a wedge between the two groups in India that Müller described as "light-skinned civilized Aryans and dark-skinned savages" (the Dravidian inhabitants of southern India).

Van der Veer points out that the mythology of invasion can be used in two contradictory ways: original inhabitants can be seen as having natural rights to the land or invaders can be conceived of as delivering a higher, stronger civilization. Thus while the Aryans were considered by the British to be deliverers of a higher civilization to the Dravidians (as were the British to Indians several millennia later), Hindus were viewed as having greater natural rights to the land than the encroaching Muslims. By analyzing shifting perceptions of such encounters, *Imperial Encounters*, like *Long Drums and Cannons*, offers a thoughtful and often insightful perspective into the effect of colonialism on cultural relations and productions.



Joyce Wieland, in Life and Art

Jane Lind

Joyce Wieland: Artist on Fire. James Lorimer \$45.00

Iris Nowell

Joyce Wieland: A Life in Art. ECW P \$19.95

Reviewed by Sherrill Grace

Wieland once said, "Everything I do is so personal. Personal in the sense that the men and women I draw are both usually me." A remark like this (one of many such remarks) is an important signpost, especially for a biographer. It also presents a major challenge, one that neither Lind nor Nowell has met. To varying degrees both biographers take such comments at face value; to varying degrees they seem constrained by the apparent authority or truth of such remarks. Both treat the life as a chronological sequence of facts, beginning with Wieland's birth as the youngest of three children born into the common-law marriage of a poor, working-class, English immigrant couple, and moving steadily through key moments in her life—her marriage to Michael Snow, her largely unhappy time in New York in the 60s, her return to Canada, her major exhibitions (at the National Gallery in 1971 and the Art Gallery of Ontario in 1987), the enormous strain of making *The Far Shore*, her receipt of honours (like the Order of Canada in 1983), and her slow decline into Alzheimer's.

More regrettable is the unwillingness of either to analyse and evaluate Joyce Wieland by reflecting upon the arts of biography and autobiography. Given the emphatic autobiographical energy in everything Wieland did, that is where her biographers must begin—by addressing the self-creative *fictions* of a compulsive autobiographer. And they must end by acknowledging a nuanced, self-critical awareness of

their own art of biography. My sense is that neither Lind nor Nowell sees biography as art, and that both believe in the assumed truth of both biography and autobiography. With Joyce Wieland, however, these are strategic mistakes or, if they are not mistakes, they certainly obscure the potential ambiguity and rich complexity of Wieland's art.

Nevertheless, these biographies are important because Joyce Wieland matters, and we must begin somewhere. My favourite of the two is Lind's *Joyce Wieland: Artist on Fire*. The book is superbly produced with stunning full-page colour plates of Wieland's art, dozens of excellent black and white photographs, stills from Wieland's documentary films and from *The Far Shore*, and many other colour snapshots of Joyce with family, friends, and pets. Lind is also the better writer of the two, and she does reflect (if briefly) on her role by reminding us that Wieland's life was not tidy but that, as biographer, Lind decided to maintain a tidy narrative line.

Lind's discussion of the Wieland family, of Joyce's affection for her father and of the trauma she suffered when both parents died while she was a child, is important. So too is her tracing of Wieland's passionate relationship with Canada, one she worked out through quilts like *Reason Over Passion* (1968), *Barren Ground Caribou* (1978), films like *The Far Shore* (1975), and self-portraits like *Facing North—A Self Impression* (1973). By the time I reached the final chapters of Lind's story, I was deeply moved and fully engaged with the narrative. Irritations with earlier missed opportunities for analysis and connections fell away. Bringing the narrative to *this* ending could not have been easy, and Lind does it with dignity and compassion, and without sentimentality.

In *Joyce Wieland* Iris Nowell has less success. The book is not well illustrated, which surely an artist's biography should be. Worse still, Nowell's writing is shot through

with grammatical errors, repetition, and frequently disjointed or melodramatic digressions. She tries to psychoanalyze the roots of Wieland's insecurity and vulnerability by speculating about childhood trauma, but Nowell produces vague generalities without any solid theoretical base or informed analysis and interpretation. Other difficult passages in Wieland's life (her marriage to Snow or her struggle for recognition as a Canadian nationalist) are treated in similarly superficial ways. Like Lind, Nowell may proceed chronologically through Wieland's life, but for the reader, nailing down the dates becomes extremely frustrating because there is no chronological list of dates, a common and useful feature of a standard biography (Lind does not provide one either). And yet, Nowell knows the Toronto art scene of the 60s, 70s, and 80s from first-hand experience, so she is able to flesh out a socio-artistic context for Wieland that is both relevant and important. For example, I find Nowell especially helpful on the world of avant-garde, or underground, filmmaking and on Wieland's position as a woman on the margins of that masculinist world.

These two biographies may not be all I could have hoped for as biography, but I am pleased to have them. Each provides a portrait of Joyce Wieland as a complex, compulsive, immensely gifted artist, and each succeeds in celebrating her work as well as her life. Lind and Nowell have done much of the necessary spade work; I hope someone will build on it to create a more definitive, polished, analytical, and capacious study.



Theory Robots

Catherine Liu

Copying Machines: Taking Notes for the Automaton. U of Minnesota P. \$24.80

Wayne Gabardi

Negotiating Postmodernism. U of Minnesota P. \$64.88

Mohammed A. Bamyeh

The Ends of Globalization. U of Minnesota P. \$73.17

Reviewed by Charles Barbour

Catherine Liu begins *Copying Machines* by referring to what she calls “a generalized sense of having overcome the recent past” that she finds pervasive in “the ‘now’ of academia.” With the collapse of deconstruction, it would seem, “the theoretical investments of the past few decades [have] been dissolved.” A few valuable lessons were passed on, the consensus suggests, but it is time for literary scholars to forget the heady days of theoretical abandon, and to return to aesthetic judgments and hermeneutic studies. For Liu, this new consensus barely conceals a fear of the political antagonisms that theory and deconstruction brought to the surface. In the wake of the conflict and turbulence caused by theory, a massive effort is underway to rebuild the foundations of traditional scholarship.

Announcing herself as an opponent of this new consensus, Liu strikes back exactly where the humanists imagine themselves to be least vulnerable—in history, and especially in the literary history of the eighteenth century. *Copying Machines* tells the story of how just before humanism's autonomous subject first arrived on the scene in the eighteenth century, the European aristocratic classes were mesmerized by the phenomenon of the automaton—the “useless machine” built exclusively to mimic human behaviour. Tracing its history through literary, legal and philosophical documents of *ancien*

régime France, Liu argues that the automaton is the repressed condition of the humanist subject: "The machine is framed, in order to establish a ground on which the human being can be represented." The automaton or "copying machine" precedes the autonomous human subject, and constitutes the discursive terrain on which that subject is composed. Historically as well as conceptually, the machine produces the human.

For Liu, the figure of the automaton articulates the promise and the curse of the Enlightenment. Like technology in general, it both offers the possibility of freedom and debases the originality or authenticity of the human individual. But the automaton is more than an exemplary expression of the contradiction between the humanism and scientism of the Enlightenment. It also provides Liu with a language for analyzing the collapse of High Theory and the formulation of the new consensus within "the 'now' of academia." Precisely what today's humanists find so disturbing about deconstructive theory is its incessantly mechanical composition. Theory, according to its opponents, cuts the life out of literature. Theory pulverizes a text's animating intention, and reassembles the component bits into sinister and monstrous creatures. What is more, according to their humanist critics, theorists not only treat texts like machines, but they themselves are also disturbingly mechanical. "Theory robots" like Derrida and de Man have no feeling, no life, no love of literature. They eviscerate texts without compassion. Worse still, they maniacally control legions of followers, and threaten to turn scholarship into a practice of "thoughtless repetition."

Instead of fleeing from these criticisms of deconstruction, Liu faces them. Why are humanists so frightened by the machine—whether it is the automaton of *ancien régime* France, or the "theory robot" of the modern academy? In what ways does it operate as a figure for a whole range of liminal zones—

between life and death, mind and body, original and copy, human and animal? Some of this terrain has been covered by Donna Haraway. But *Copying Machines* is an impressive study, certain to influence those who wish to continue the project of dislodging the humanist commitments of the academy.

Negotiating Postmodernism opens with the eminently un-postmodern question "What is the nature of our present?" Gabardi does not proceed to interrogate concepts like "nature," "ours" or "presence." Instead, he argues for "critical postmodernism." Like Habermas's theory of communicative action, "critical postmodernism" is an attempt to couple the rational foundations of the modernist tradition with some of the more fruitful antagonisms exposed by postmodern investigations. For Gabardi there is no radical divide between critical theory and postmodernism. After a lengthy and helpful survey of recent cultural theory, Gabardi arrives at his destination—an attempt to forge a link between Foucault's later work and social democracy.

The key to Gabardi's approach is his analysis of what, in a very late lecture, Foucault called *parrhesia* or "frank speech." "Foucault was interested in reinventing *parrhesia* under present day conditions," Gabardi writes, "and contrasted it with the modern liberal right of 'free speech.'"

He defined the parrhesiatic act in terms of two key features: the opening up of a new space of freedom and the transformation of the individual speaker [. . .] The act of *parrhesia* placed one on the public stage, a stage where the course of future events could not be determined. The unintended consequences of one's action could propel one in an unanticipated direction. One entered a turbulent environment of power. One's very being was subject to this flux. Thus one's self-identity was at stake.

The suggested strategy, then, is to be a Socratic gadfly—to proclaim those truths

that neither the powerful nor the populace are willing to acknowledge. In this way, one engages in effective social critique, alters the political terrain and places one's own identity at risk.

The question is whether such parrhesiastic gestures actually place speakers at risk, or whether they codify their sense of self. Is not distinguishing oneself from both power and the populace—and thus establishing one's autonomy or self-legislation—the core of the humanist subject? Wouldn't a more radical Foucauldian theory endeavour to expose the imbrication of every individual within a plurality of power relations, split and fractured by an array of unconscious social investments? The lack of attention to psychoanalysis represents a lacuna in *Negotiating Postmodernism*. And the effort to reconfigure postmodernism as a continuation of the tradition of rational critique is a little reductive. That said, the range of references is persuasive, and Gabardi's synoptic readings provide a useful introduction to some difficult social theorists.

The Ends of Globalization is similar to Gabardi's offering, although a little more explicit—a little more “parrhesiastic”—about its presuppositions. Whatever else one might say about *The Ends of Globalization*, it certainly avoids pretensions towards stylish postmodernism:

I use “rationality” not as a venue of “reason” but, rather, as a namesake for an integrated vision of the world: A rational vision for me is one in which the logics of political, economic, and cultural life work harmoniously to reinforce each other. Thus, a rational vision is a total vision, which can only flow out of systematic coherence of the various spheres of social life.

Bamyeh's central claim is that, in postmodernism, the western world has abdicated any attempt to produce totalizing theories of human sociality. We seem to experience,

then, “the exhaustion of the reservoir of theories of universality of culture.” In order to counter this trend, Bamyeh suggests we look to universalizing theories that have emerged in different, non-western cultures. We need, in effect, to mobilize cultural pluralism in pursuit of new totalizing conceptions of human solidarity and homogeneity.

That people still write books championing universal and totalizing conceptions of humanity is one thing. However, as Liu reminds us, it is not only a question of people *still* writing books like this, but it is also that people are encouraged to write books like this—to endeavour to identify a coherent, universal social bond following the retreat of deconstruction and High Theory. If Bamyeh and Gabardi's texts are any gauge of “the ‘now’ of academia,” then Liu may be correct. Perhaps it is time that the “theory robots” resumed their war against humanity.

Dreaming of Nationhood, Writing of Motherhood

Susan Mann

The Dream of Nation. A Social and Intellectual History of Quebec. 2nd ed. McGill-Queen's UP \$27.95

Miléna Santoro

Mothers of Invention: Feminist Authors and Experimental Fiction in France and Quebec. McGill-Queen's UP \$75.00

Reviewed by Jane Moss

At first glance, Susan Mann's history of Quebec and Miléna Santoro's close reading of French and Quebec avant-garde feminist writers would appear to have little in common other than a publisher. In fact they do share a number of things: a feminist point of view, an impressive command of primary and secondary sources in French and English, a remarkable ability to synthesize massive amounts of information, and a self-confident scholarly voice. Interestingly

enough, Mann and Santoro's subjects also share some things: collective memories wounded by past oppressions, resentment of the Other, and identity quests inspired by dreams of autonomy.

When Susan Mann (Trofimenkoff) published *The Dream of Nation* in 1982, she was praised for the soundness of her scholarship, the originality of her articulation of the importance of feminism and nationalism in Quebec, and the clarity of her writing. Twenty years later, the book is being reprinted with only the addition of the author's preface which briefly mentions some of the recent contributions to Quebec historiography and some of the political developments that have occurred since the 1980 referendum. While it would have been interesting to read Mann's analysis of the events of the last two decades, *The Dream of Nation* is still a marvelous historical narrative for anglophones who want to understand the shared past of English and French Canadians. As the back cover declares, it is "essential reading for an understanding of contemporary Quebec" because it explains the political, constitutional, economic, and cultural issues that have long divided the country.

The breadth and depth of Mann's analysis is impressive as she chronicles the history of Quebec from the imperial dream of New France to the sovereigntist dream of the late twentieth century. She goes far beyond the social and intellectual history promised in the subtitle. Various chapters deal with economic history, industrial development, labour movements, emigration, religious history, educational institutions, culture, electoral and constitutional politics. She also offers mini-biographies of people who have left their mark on Quebec—clerics such as Monseigneur Ignace Bourget and Abbé Groulx, politicians such as Louis Riel, George-Étienne Cartier, Wilfrid Laurier, Henri Bourassa, Maurice Duplessis, Pierre Elliott Trudeau, and René Lévesque. The

focus on Quebec does not preclude discussions of francophone communities outside of Quebec and she is always interested in Quebec's relations with English Canada and the United States. Mann also presents the important contributions that women and feminism have made in shaping Quebec society.

The feminist activism of the 1970s which Mann describes in her last chapter is the historical context for the women writers examined by *Mothers of Invention*. In this weighty tome, Santoro proves herself to be a leading voice for a new generation of feminist critics in French and francophone literary studies. Unintimidated by the vast body of criticism written by an older generation of feminist critics on both sides of the Atlantic, Santoro takes on the difficult task of defining and describing what she calls a transatlantic community of avant-garde women writers. After an Introduction, in which the author explains both her goals and her choice of writers, Chapter 1 outlines the history, ideology, and theory that created the context for French and Quebec feminist writing in the 1970s. Hélène Cixous, Madeleine Gagnon, Nicole Brossard, and Jeanne Hyvrard are the foremothers of feminist literary practice selected by Santoro. While the four do not constitute a "school" of writing and some would even reject the label "feminist," Santoro argues that the four share subversive and disruptive writing strategies, a lyrical and playful use of language, and a desire to liberate women from patriarchal oppression. In their works of fiction from the 1970s, Santoro explores the relationships between images of the mother, maternity, femininity, female eroticism, and creativity. The texts she chooses are Cixous's *La* (1976), Gagnon's *Lueur* (1979), Brossard's *L'Amère ou le chapitre effrité* (1977), and Hyvrard's trilogy *Les Prunes de Cythère* (1975), *Mère la mort* (1976), and *La Meurtritude* (1977).

In each of the four chapters focused on

individual writers, Santoro follows the same methodology. She first introduces the authors, outlines their careers, and presents their ideological approach to writing as revealed in essays, lectures, and interviews. Close textual readings make up the second part of each chapter with particular attention paid to themes, intertexts, and images. Since it would be impossible to give linear plot summaries of the texts under discussion, Santoro is obliged to lead us through the texts, giving us reading strategies designed to unpack these dense and difficult fictions. As she performs her close readings and discusses textual practices, she also demonstrates her impressive command of contemporary feminist, psychoanalytical, and literary theory in addition to her knowledge of previous scholarship on these four writers. In the final section of each chapter, she explores the writers' disruptive use of language, including parataxis, ellipses, disturbed syntax, word play, and neologisms. In her Conclusions, Santoro argues that while the feminist literary avant-garde did not survive much beyond the 1970s, their works of fiction/theory continue to have a significant impact on women's writing. What Cixous, Gagnon, Brossard, and Hyvrard wrote in the 1970s opened up new possibilities for a transformative approach to literature and a liberated use of language.

Mothers of Invention makes a significant contribution to French and Quebec literary studies by showing us how the feminist theories, practices, and ethical commitments of four remarkable authors changed the way many of us think about motherhood, femininity, sexuality, and language on both sides of the Atlantic. Showing the same respect for her critical foremothers (Karen Gould, Louise Forsyth, Barbara Godard, Louise Dupré, Verena Conley, Alice Parker, Jennifer Waelti-Walters, Maïr Verthuy, Claudine Fisher, Christiane Makward) as she does for the literary foremothers, she

renews our understanding of the possibilities of women's writing. And she does all of this with intelligence, clarity, passion, and humour.

Views of the postcolony

Achille Mbembe

On the Postcolony. U of California P \$31.25

Reviewed by Titi Adepitan

Achille Mbembe's book will shock many who are familiar with the literature of Western thought on Africa. No, Mbembe does not discuss the literature as such; rather, he appropriates it as a rhetorical point of departure for his thesis on Africa as the postcolony.

The strategy of presenting Africa as the normless, ungovernable Other, by scaling the continent back in time and insisting on beastly non-human attributes, goes all the way back to ancient times. There has always been a reason for such presentations, not least of which is affiliation. Such affiliations enable us to understand why a writer like Joseph Conrad, quoted at some length in Mbembe's introduction, would set out to write a novel protesting Belgian mercantilism in the Congo and end up not sounding in real terms any different from other Europeans of his day.

Mbembe's strategies backfire here. Positioning himself with Europe in a *we/they* opposition not only looks bizarre, but also doesn't take too long to come across as deriving from the same old, age-worn standpoint of the foreign prospector for "radical," "revolutionary" theories who must use the backwaters of Africa as his sounding board. *À propos* of such affiliations, just consider this: "the African . . . belongs . . . to a world we cannot penetrate. At bottom, he/she is familiar to us. We can give an account of him/her in the same way we can understand the psychic life of the *beast*." Or this: "We should first remind

ourselves that, as a general rule, the experience of the Other, or *the problem of the 'I' of others and of human beings we perceive as foreign to us*, has almost always posed virtually insurmountable difficulties to the Western philosophical and political tradition" (Mbembe's emphasis). *Us!*

Appropriately, the blurb writer hails Mbembe for rejecting "diehard Africanist and nativist perspectives," but there isn't much evidence that the book deigns to consider what Africans think of themselves.

Three chapters present a critique of the problems that continue to haunt African development. "Of *Commandement*," the first, reviews the forms and malformations of state power in Africa from the colonial times. Of the colonial period Mbembe identifies four "main properties" of *commandement* that still remain in today's Africa. First, state power is a *régime d'exception* (i.e., it's always a "departure from the principle of a single law for all") Second, it confers "privileges and immunities" on multinational companies and agencies, privileged groups and individuals. Next, it conceives of itself "on the basis of an *imaginary* of the state [as] the organizer of public happiness"; and finally, its instruments and institutions are hardly designed to "attain any public good." The failure of civil society and the ascendance of anomie in national life arise from this lopsidedness in the relations of power and hasten what Mbembe brilliantly locates as "the process of decomposition of postcolonial African states" through an "implosion."

"Violence" and "implosions," as everyone knows, are no longer just occurrences in Africa but tropes that define the vicious, convulsive grip of a beleaguered region caught up in the uncertain processes of transition. Mbembe in the next two chapters weighs the available options and the abuse to which these remain prone. How should the state apportion economic power? What forms of violence are requi-

site for that task? Which ones are needless? A consequence of such choices is "the de-linking of Africa from formal international markets; . . . the forms of its integration into the circuits of the parallel international economy; and . . . the fragmentation of public authority and emergence of multiple forms of *private indirect government* accompanying these two processes." Another is the "fractionated sovereignty" that results from peonage to the "*tutelary government*" of international agencies like the World Bank, the IMF and multinational corporations. The de-linking of the continent from formal international markets is the jeremiad of the ages for the African economy, and it is difficult to separate that development in market relations from the general malaise of poverty besetting a good portion of the continent and its people.

The chapters that attempt to solve such riddles betray Mbembe's alienation from the core of the issues at stake. If intellectual brilliance were the criterion then Mbembe would be an ideal spokesperson for Africa; that office should come from a heart-felt recognition of the continent's travails and cannot coincide with a desire to entertain the West.

At Home and Left Behind

Susan McCaslin

The Altering Eye. Borealis \$15.95

Flying Wounded. UP of Florida \$12.95

Reviewed by Nicole Markotic

In *The Altering Eye*, Susan McCaslin offers one book of poetry in three discrete yet complementary sections. The first section, "Letters to William Blake," includes fifteen epistolary poems ranging from the formal "William Blake, Esquire," to the whimsical "Dear Wm," to the kooky "Hi Blake." These poems pay tribute to an admired poet and visionary, acknowledge a literary mentor,

and engage in self-discovery by looking away from—rather than towards—the self.

At times irreverent and even cheeky, McCaslin nonetheless respects Blake's historical context as well as his unique poetics. Her persona tries desperately in some way to match her own life to his ("It always bowls me over to hear of your singing / on your death bed"), yet she is acutely aware that she is the one reaching back for answers, and that Blake, although a sympathetic listener, can only speak to her through words he has already written and she already knows. These skilful poems engage the reader in many ways—through wordplay and line-break-dancing, through formal and intimate address, through adoration and also frustration. McCaslin makes me, too, want to write to Blake, to demand and hope from him: "Send more briefings for paradise; / keep me informed through the sieve of your eye."

The book's second section, "The Teresa Poems," is more reverent, yet equally engaging. Written primarily in couplets, these poems address St. Teresa of Avila. Although at times a bit too eager to represent St. Teresa in her own words, the poems examine a life that is difficult to understand or relate to, yet still appealing: "Why would anyone want to befriend / illness," the poet asks. These poems work least well when the poet distrusts her reader, or feels she needs to justify St. Teresa's teachings: "Our wealth," she lectures, "can rob us of the inner life." But for the most part, "The Teresa Poems" are delicately rendered and celebrate the mystical life of their subject.

In "Oracular Heart," the third section of *The Altering Eye*, McCaslin mixes the desire for spiritual advice she exhibited in the letters to William Blake with the pious wisdom discovered in St. Teresa's literary legacy. The first poem begins with a helpful hint that reads almost as a cosmic cookbook: "Begin with the fluid body / delicate golden pear." The penultimate poem com-

bines the legend of Persephone with St. Teresa's electrifying conversion—a mixture of dream, passion, and spiritual journey.

In the title poem, "Oracular Heart," McCaslin deftly invokes the goddess Diana, but not to do battle; rather, she has metamorphosed into a mother rat, dangling ten infant rats from her multiple teats. The sacred and the everyday weave through these poems, culminating, always, in sleep—a sleep that promises revival and return to the strange and wondrous "long wet syllables of poetry."

McCaslin begins *Flying Wounded* with a quotation from Jung: "The psychology of creativity is in / its essence feminine because the / creative work of art leaps forth / from unconscious depths, that is, / from the domain of the mothers." This epigraph suggests that we are to view Jung's words ironically (hence the "poetic" line-breaks) as an overly simplistic psychiatric view of women and creativity. As the book develops, however, the irony dissipates, for poem after poem describes—in prose narrative with randomly imposed line-breaks—the difficult, individual, and complicated life of the poet's mother.

Throughout this book, I asked myself why the line-breaks occur where they do; in fact, why do these poems have line-breaks at all? The speaking voice—clear, strong, and direct—tells the reader exactly what happened, and exactly what to think about what happened: "for wives / are discouraged anyway from talking politics." These words could easily be one line (and, indeed, they are one breath line, simply cut in two visually), and the break does not seem to offer a change in rhythm or even momentum. For most of the poems in the book, the line-break is simply ornamental—there to let the reader know that this is not simply reminiscence, but "art."

McCaslin might be aestheticizing a "life description" for the very purpose of not letting the reader simply and only read the

factual into these poems; perhaps she chose a "poetic" form to avoid the kind of medical or historical explanations that might slip into, for example, the prose poem. But I could find no consistency in her tone. The poem "Schizophrenia" begins with a parenthetical aside explaining that the title means "a kind of mental Diaspora / with no one home to pick up the pieces." This is an intriguing definition, yet the actual poem disappoints.

The poem explains that most people dismiss a schizophrenic woman as silly, but God would call her beloved; mental illness, the poet declares, is like being locked in an Inquisitional convent. This final image struck me as a fascinating image of antithesis, but the poem left me longing to read about the "mental diaspora" of schizophrenia. If the mentally ill woman has "left home," where has she travelled? In what (poetic) ways is schizophrenia like cultural dispersal? And what are the intriguing "pieces" left behind for someone else (or no one at all) to discover? McCaslin has a marvellous sense of ragtime rhythm, especially when she stops explaining and lets the poem wander off on its own: "Don't mess with Mr. In-Between / He the Devil see-saw mind." But all too often she requires the reader to follow the script, rather than listen to the words, and the potential of the poem shuts down mid-lecture.

This series ends with "Postscript," a poem from daughter to mother. "I cannot ask you for the facts," the poet laments, "for what are facts to you / who would be annoyed by this / pestering of the past." One can't help sympathizing with the mother who has grown weary of medical and familial demands to explain a life too complicated to contain in one single diagnosis.

McCaslin, too, must be dissatisfied with her own delving, as she does not leave the book with this final poem, but turns to a short series, "Issues of Light," that explores medical "issues" concerning middle-aged

women. These are much more playful. "Menopausal Poem," for example, is a three-line poem that enacts its topic as it performs it: "A pause in the menses, / catching breath."

Much like *The Altering Eye*, this final section engages the reader's sensibilities, especially in her rendering of persistent phobias. In "Disembarrassed," for example, she expresses relief at being diagnosed "actually ok," yet stubbornly holds her recent dread close, as proof not of illness but of unsubstantiated fear that "makes you if not normal / then as ordinary as / humble pie." Such a subtle expression of satisfaction, unease, and confusion delivers what the earlier poems attempt, but do not achieve. Unfortunately, these sparks appear too late to relieve the *ennui* engendered by the rest of *Flying Wounded*.

Why Family Matters

Rohinton Mistry

Family Matters. McClelland and Stewart, \$26.00

Reviewed by Eva-Marie Kröller

In a 2002 edition of its *Books* supplement, the *Globe and Mail* heralded the arrival of yet another set of Canadian books that broadly fall under the heading of historical fiction, among them novels by Guy Vanderhaeghe on the 1870s West, Austin Clarke on 1950s Barbados, and Katherine Govier on the nineteenth-century naturalist James Audobon. Equally remarkable, however, is the re-emergence of another nineteenth-century genre with a strong historical backbone, the "family saga," in which characters must cede to their children their seemingly assured places in the generational hierarchy, and adjust to a changing world while they are at it. Indeed, one comes away from Rohinton Mistry's remarkable *Family Matters* with the conviction that the old are required to undergo changes at least as revolutionary as the

young, and that they must do so despite failing mental and physical strength.

Set in Bombay, Mistry's novel tells the story of Nariman Vakeel, a retired professor of English literature gradually deteriorating from Parkinson's disease, and his children who take turns looking after him. At first, this is the duty of his step-children Coomy and Jal, who share his spacious, if dilapidated flat with him; then, after he injures his ankle and requires bedrest, he is unceremoniously passed on to his daughter Roxana who cares for him in an apartment already so overcrowded that one of her children must sleep under a make-shift tent on the balcony when Nariman occupies the settee. Not until the last few pages of the novel do we find out that Coomy's apparently gratuitous callousness towards her helpless stepfather is triggered by her recollection of a liaison from which he found it impossible to extricate himself even while he was married to her mother, and by the trauma of her accidental death together with her husband's deranged former lover. This late and sensational revelation urges the reader to reconsider Coomy's character and brings into sharp focus the ways in which leisurely story-telling allows Mistry's cast a complexity that cannot be determined by any one factor, such as age or gender or class. Indeed, some characters completely reinvent themselves over the course of the novel, especially Roxana's husband Yehad who first recoils fastidiously from the old man's bodily functions and then tenderly attends to his needs, while at the same time transforming himself from a nonchalant Parsi into an obsessive one. Most of the novel is told in the third-person omniscient mode, but the epilogue features the first-person narrative of one of Yehad's adolescent sons who observes how his father's religious fanaticism is beginning to push his older brother into the same sort of confrontation that, the reader knows, ruined their grandfather's first love.

The characters' cultural environment is similarly mongrel, and Mistry's humour shines in his virtuoso descriptions of several traditions grafted on top of each other. "All along the street, establishments seemed to have taken their cue from the Bombay Sporting Goods Emporium," he writes apropos of Christmas in Bombay: "The Jai Hind Book Mart featured a barefoot Santa in padmasana, an English translation of the Bhagavad-Gita open in his lap; perched upon his nose were half-moon reading glasses. Rasoi Stainless Steel had an aproned Santa stirring a large cooking utensil. The Bhagat Opticals Santa wore stylish reflector sunglasses." The book abounds with allusions to Parsi culture that sometimes only the initiated will understand, but on nearly every page there are also allusions to western culture, both high and popular: the children read Enid Blyton and learn Tennyson by heart, their grandfather cites Shakespeare and listens to Bach, while others whistle tunes from *Fiddler on the Roof* or *White Christmas*, causing Yehad to erupt with irritation — "Don't you have any Indian sources to quote, for a change?" — when his eccentric boss Mr. Kapur cites *Othello* one time too many. Sometimes, the symbolism called upon to synthesize some of these interconnections (the jigsaw puzzle, the spider-web, the letter-writing, the historical photos) is a little creaky, but these moments are richly compensated for by others in which Mistry's purpose couldn't be clearer. Thus, while the narrative lingers lovingly over some of the more outlandish hybridities of Bombay, Mistry has as little patience with the policing of purity as he has with the rhetoric of multiculturalism. One of the stories his sons like to hear concerns Yehad's unsuccessful application for immigration to Canada, a bitter and eloquent commentary on the emptiness of its official policies. Indeed, together with Carol Shields's *Unless*, this may be one of the angriest books of 2002, Mistry's trademark

burlesque humour notwithstanding. It is also one of the most exceptional novels of 2002, and I read through the night to finish it.

Double Vision

Alice Munro

Hateship, Friendship, Courtship, Loveship, Marriage. McClelland & Stewart \$34.99

Reviewed by Coral Ann Howells

It is impossible to begin reading (or in some cases re-reading) the nine stories in Alice Munro's new collection without remembering all her other stories, just as it is impossible not to be perpetually surprised by their extraordinary combination of strangeness and ordinariness. There is the same ambiguous relation to realism and romantic fantasy across familiar landscapes from southwestern Ontario to British Columbia, as Munro maps intricate emotional geographies, but the focus of her work has shifted. Now Munro is taking a longer view, illustrated by her concern with the lives and deaths of elderly people as their stories scroll out over many decades. More important is the pervasive sense of a double principle at work, where the apparent unpredictability of individual lives is shown to be contained within wider patterns beyond our immediate apprehension—intimated through literary allusions, through landscape, or through moments of lightheartedness and grace, as if (as one old woman remarks), "it was all according to script, if you know what I mean."

Every story contains seismic shocks; identities are reinvented and relationships change over time, yet through these fragmented narratives Munro introduces great overarching historical or mythic patterns which coincide with the anecdotal present. These wonderful stories contain an awareness of parallel worlds where things happen differently, but there is no suggestion here of anything supernatural, for everything is grounded in place and time and characters'

psychology—though there are moments of slipping sideways within the same textual spaces. That double vision is eloquently suggested in "Floating Bridge," set in familiar Ontario landscape on the edge of a swamp, where an older woman dying of cancer walks out on the bridge at night with a young man whom she has just met; they kiss, then walk back the way they came. That moment in a space between the dark water and the reflected stars releases a "swish of tender hilarity" with which the story ends. Its immense structural poise is characteristic of the collection as a whole.

Indeed this is more a story sequence than a collection; contained by the first and last stories, the others take up the same emotional and thematic resonances. The title story sketches a traditional pattern of female destiny, though "hateship" disturbs that pattern, and it soon becomes apparent that there is no pattern but only a series of possibilities that may occur in random order. A marriage does happen but offstage, for the focus is not on the young woman who goes out to Saskatchewan to meet her lover but on a forged romantic correspondence that led her to take that dramatic step. It is the unlikely news of their son's birth and its effects on the schoolgirl who had made up the letters that is highlighted. Dismayed by the "whole twist of consequence," she catches a glimpse of the dangerous powers of storytelling (not for the first time in Munro) and sees in her Latin homework a coded warning written two thousand years ago about tempting fate. That sense of limited vision and of contrivance is set against the wider prospects of retrospective knowledge or imminent death in many of these stories, as Munro balances tales of women's romantic fantasies stopped in their tracks ("Nettles," "What Is Remembered") against stories of loss and vanishings where no explanations are ever offered ("Queenie," "Family Furnishings," "Post and Beam"). The word "chill" occurs frequently, as

unsettling to the narrative surfaces of elderly people's lives as one wife's "little hum of hate" or another's spasms of anger. However, it is with the final story, "The Bear Came Over the Mountain," that everything comes unravelled as an elderly woman succumbs to Alzheimer's. It is the story of a wife's departure and a husband's mourning, but it is also full of jokes and secrets which in the end shimmers like a mirage. The narrative is always slipping sideways between different places and periods of time via shifting points of view, and the strange sly ending elides divisions between present and past as the woman with her old "bantering grace" suddenly makes a joke to her husband. But is this real warmth or only imagined? And does his reassuring response just repeat his old marital betrayals? Perhaps there are strange continuities in this marriage after all. As so often with Munro there is no way of knowing, and this last story opens out "on distances you cannot imagine."

Canadian Panorama

William H. New, ed.

Encyclopedia of Literature in Canada. U of Toronto P \$75.00

Reviewed by Coral Ann Howells

A mari usque ad mare is the first entry in this new encyclopedia, promising an extensive view of literary and cultural terrain which is identifiably Canadian. It is a promise which is splendidly kept in this handsome volume, referred to in the Preface as a "resource book": "It looks at the storytellers, the writers, the writings, and the cultural history that in one way or another are associated with Canada, and at the images, the attitudes, and the mythologies with which, in some instances, Canada is identified."

Running into 1347 pages, the *Encyclopedia* contains over two thousand entries, the work of a team of three hundred international Canadianists, all orchestrated and

edited by W.H. New. The design is clear and this mass of information is easy to access: entries are in alphabetical order and bold type, there is an extensive system of cross-references, and it is extremely well indexed (by contributors, authors, plus a supplementary index). There is also a cultural chronology beginning in prehistory back in 11000BC with the first evidence of human settlement in the Yukon and becoming increasingly more detailed from the seventeenth century with European exploration and settlement, the Jesuit *Relations* (begun in 1632), and just over a hundred years later, the first printing presses in Nova Scotia and in Quebec. This chronology includes all kinds of fascinating juxtapositions like the death of Shawnadithit, the last of the Beothuks, in 1829, the same year as the Methodist Book Room was opened in Toronto. It ends in 1999 with the establishment of Nunavut and Adrienne Clarkson's appointment as governor general.

This is very much a book which establishes a broad cultural and historical context for Canadian writers and writing, though refreshingly in what may be seen as a revisionary project, it makes no explicit attempt to define "Canadian author" or "Canadian identity," preferring a pluralist and open-ended construction of literary history. Of course the majority of entries are author-centred and follow a conventional format of biographical information, accounts of significant publications, evaluative commentary and suggestions for further reading. Yet in significant ways this book is a radical departure from traditional literary reference works in its breadth of contextual reference, for individual author entries are intermeshed with long survey articles on Anglophone Canadian Writing, Quebec and Motifs in Quebec Writing in French, Francophone Writing outside Quebec, First Nations Literature, and Multicultural Voices. There are entries on Buddhism, Hinduism, and Islam as well as

the United Church of Canada, and on Religion and Literature. There are also “small courses of general education” on Film, Television, and Literature, on Historical Literature and Historiography, on Technology and Communication, on Reference Guides to Canadian Writing (containing some useful websites), Nationalism, Regionalism, and Landscape, definitions of rhetorical terms and discussions of genre categories like the Long Poem and the Animal Story.

So, how to use this extraordinary compilation? I began under A, with Acadian Writing, and my own experience was a kind of “cluster reading,” following the network of pathways indicated by the capitalised cross-references. One moved to Antonine MAILLET via signposts pointing to POST-MODERNISM, ORAL traditions, PASTORAL, ELEGY, then via NATIONAL FILM BOARD and LANDSCAPE to QUIET REVOLUTION, FOLK-ROCK, UTOPIA, FEMINIST, EXILE and PERFORMANCE ART to end with George Elliott CLARKE. This brief sketch suggests how a reader builds up little independent narratives around one entry, in a mode which like Sterne’s *Tristram Shandy* is “digressive” and “progressive too,—and at the same time.” One could pursue similar lines with Algonquian Oral Literatures or entries under any letter of the alphabet up to Z. Indeed, there are seven writers’ names here, four of whom were born outside Canada and one who writes in Spanish, while the cross-references point to MULTICULTURALISM, SEMIOTICS, MYTHS, METAPHOR, and ECOLOGY.

It comes as no surprise that W.H. New should have edited this anatomy of Canadian diversity, given his innovative *History of Canadian Literature* published in 1989 and now available in a revised edition. As editor of *Canadian Literature* he was a pioneer in changing preconceptions about Canadian writing, like his 1989 issue dedicated to “Slavic and East European Con-

nections” and the 1990 special issue on Native Writers, also published as *Native Writers and Canadian Writing*. Always against what he called “attitudinal definitions of culture,” New has now brilliantly succeeded in constructing an extremely complex image of Canadianness and of Canadian literary identities within it. This is an invaluable “resource book” for students and for general readers. On a supplementary note, it would be excellent if this *Encyclopedia* were to be made available—and its information easily updatable—electronically.

Framing Women’s History

Adele Perry

On the Edge of Empire: Gender, Race, and the Making of British Columbia, 1849-1871. U of Toronto P \$24.95

Sharon Anne Cook, Lorna R. McLean, and Kate O’Rourke

Framing Our Past: Canadian Women’s History in the Twentieth Century. McGill-Queens UP \$45.00

Reviewed by Lindsey McMaster

Canadian women’s history is a lively field of studies where scholars are frequently challenging disciplinary boundaries. *Framing Our Past*, which represents significant archival research, cheerfully refuses to hierarchize the academic over the popular, while *On the Edge of Empire* positions race and gender relations at the very centre of historical inquiry.

In *On the Edge of Empire*, Adele Perry explores the ideological friction between mid-Victorian ideals and British Columbia’s turbulent social conditions. In the mid-nineteenth century, B.C.’s race and gender relations were influenced by demographic factors: white men far outnumbered white women, and mixed-race unions of white men with First Nations women were standard. The transformation of B.C. from a colonial outpost to a permanent settler society involved the concerted efforts of

reformers to replace a white male homosocial culture and mixed-race relationships with Victorian norms of upright middle-class masculinity and the respectable family. The imperialist impulse of reformers to clarify racial lines and segregate white and First Nations communities was troubled by the widespread existence of mixed-race unions and complex gender relations which defied easy classifications.

Part of the reformist impulse which Perry describes involved attempts to balance the gender ratio by encouraging the immigration of British women. It was hoped that these women, as symbols of Victorian respectability, would have an improving influence on the heterogeneous social scene of B.C. But the discrepancy between colonial rhetoric and the experience of female immigrants only further underscored B.C.'s liminal position in regard to traditional Victorian standards. Perry points out that despite the belief that white women were an inherently uplifting force for society, a series of institutions and reform efforts were designed to regulate them: girls' schools, reform societies, and the rhetoric of protection for women all betrayed the deep anxiety that for women to exert a naturally improving influence on society, they would require vigilant supervision.

The book is extremely well researched, and Perry combines historical detail with a highly developed analysis of race and gender relations. Indeed, for Perry, understanding the management of race and gender is not merely a useful addition to the historical study of B.C. On the contrary it is utterly fundamental: "Notions and practices of manhood and womanhood were central to the twinned businesses of marginalizing Aboriginal people and designing and building a white society. To probe the role of gender in British Columbia's colonial project is thus not to quibble with a minor historical matter. It is to reckon with the very process that put British Columbia

on the edge of someone's empire."

The selections collected in *Framing Our Past* do not have the critical and analytical depth of Adele Perry's work, but this project is much different. Drawing on archival sources from across the country, *Framing Our Past* brings to life a wide range of women's experience in twentieth-century Canada. It is a large and attractive volume consisting of a carefully assembled collection of eighty-five written submissions and over two hundred images which together illustrate the diverse everyday lives of Canadian women during the last hundred years.

In creating this collection, the editors set out to appeal to a wide audience, both academic and popular, part of their project being to challenge traditional divisions between academic and popular histories and to valorize connections between the ivory tower and the community. Their contributors are therefore varied. Many of them first-time authors, they include archivists, curators, students, and independent scholars in addition to recognized historians. This lends the volume a variety of tone and perspective that is refreshing, though occasionally I found myself craving a bit more analysis to complement the rich archival material.

The variety of subject matter is a great strength of the book. From dressmaking patterns to peace activism and from arts and crafts to wartime work, this volume demonstrates in detail the enormous diversity of women's experience in the last century. The articles are organized into six categories, each with its own introduction to situate the contributions within a larger social and historical context. Veronica Strong-Boag introduces a section on "Living Women's Lives" in which she comments on women's distinctive cultural artifacts—textual documents, homemade objects, works of art—all of which lend concrete expression to the distinct cultural worlds of women's everyday lives. The ensuing articles then take up more particular

subjects such as the single woman artist, Inuit arts and crafts, and women's spirituality. Alan Bruce McCullough introduces a section on women's work, outlining the complexities and contradictions that surround women's paid and unpaid labour. He notes that the decision by Statistics Canada in 1996 to include a survey of unpaid work indicates the increasing acceptance that many kinds of unpaid work done by women—like child-care, housework, and the building of community—are in fact essential tasks in need of new assessment. The articles that follow address topics such as domestic work, dressmaking, journalism, and wartime work, many of them exploring the issues of culture and identity that arise for women entering non-traditional fields.

The editors made a great effort to be inclusive in their selection of articles, but they admit that there are omissions; issues of women's sexuality, for instance, are not addressed, an omission attributed to the recent scholarly development of this area, but still a noticeable absence. On the whole, though, the breadth of subject matter represented is remarkable and illustrates the variety of scholarship that exists in women's archival research.

Tricultural Landscape

Joseph Pivato, ed.

The Anthology of Italian-Canadian Writing.

Guernica \$20.00

Marisa De Franceschi, ed.

Pillars of Lace: The Anthology of Italian-Canadian Women Writers. Guernica \$20.00

Antonio D'Alfonso and Pasquale Verdicchio

Duologue: On Culture and Identity. Guernica \$12.00

Reviewed by Gundula Wilke

Antonio D'Alfonso, one of the contributors to *Duologue* asserts that "to write is to remember the voices of your people, the

voices of those who came before you." Three recent books on Italian Canadian literature and culture demonstrate how crucial this kind of cultural memory is in fashioning an ethnic identity. Joseph Pivato describes his *Anthology* as an attempt to explore Italian Canadian writing in its historical context, and to represent its linguistic and regional diversity. Many of the texts included in this anthology have not been previously published. Works in English, French, Italian and dialects such as Friulan reflect on the various regions of the place of origin as well as the cultural heterogeneity of the host country. For the sake of an anglophone readership, all texts are presented in English, though frequently interspersed with Italian and French or other phrases; a few poems are presented in both the original and the English version. The anthology is arranged in three sections. According to Pivato, the beginning of Italian Canadian literature can be dated at about 1975 when Pier Giorgio Di Cicco saw the potential for a distinct body of literature and started collecting texts for *Roman Candles*, the first anthology of Italian Canadian poetry (1978). But, the first section of *The Anthology of Italian-Canadian Writing* covers the period from 1653 to 1953, and opens with Francesco Guiseppe Bressani, the first Italian visitor to Canada to write about his experiences for an Italian audience. The works in this section explore the tensions between old and new world, and the familiar issues of identity, ethnicity, displacement, and diasporic situation. The second section investigates the transition from migrant status to establishing a new home in a different culture. Rosanna Battigelli in "Francesca's Ways" describes the point of view of the older immigrants: "She may have adopted a new country forty years earlier, but she had chosen to remain in the old country emotionally. Sure, she had adapted somewhat, learning the language by watching television and enjoying

the conveniences she had never experienced in post World War II Italy, but her heart had remained in the old country, *l'Italia bella*, and so she had continued the traditions and expected her children to keep them alive as well." This description of the older immigrant's vision is contrasted with the younger generation's adaptation of North American mainstream values in their striving for social and economic independence. The final section of the book, "Ironies of Identity," explores hybrid vs. hyphenated concepts of identity in the adopted French and/or English Canadian cultures.

In his introduction, Pivato asks: "What stories and poems represent authentic experiences of real people in the Italian communities of Canada?" He provides an enormous variety of work: poetry, short fiction, excerpts from novels, plays and film scripts, essays among others. There is prose and poetry by established writers as well as down-to-earth peasant narrative and functional non-fiction. The strength of the collection is the variety of perspectives it presents: visitor, migrant, struggling newcomer, integrated Canadian; different generations; various ethnic groups. While the anthology offers an interesting overview of Italian Canadian writing as a distinct literature, it also suffers from the ambition to do justice to all of its facets. Frequent misspellings and an incomplete table of contents are additional shortcomings.

Pillars of Lace opens with prefaces by Monica Stellan, Vera Golini, and Licia Canton who place Italian Canadian women's literature within the frameworks of Italian, English Canadian and Québécois cultures. In her introduction, editor Marisa De Franceschi argues that "we cannot escape our heritage, our roots. Intentionally or not, they seem to infiltrate our writing, and so be it. They add the delicate spice and flavour to our work which makes it stand apart." These notions of text and context,

of the writers' identity, are shaped by language and ethnic background. Breaking the bounds of gender, class, language and age, the writers explore universal issues of love and sex, motherhood, neglect, loss and death; language and translation are key issues. Cultural dualities serve as an inspiration for the creative process. The voices in this anthology range from displaced Italian immigrants to integrated Canadians of Italian descent and they provide a feminine perspective on the cultures of Italy and Canada. The inclusion of different narrative and poetic styles as well as of interviews, life writing and other forms offers an interesting variety of approaches. *Pillars of Lace* concludes with the biographies (including bibliographical information) of the writers included in this volume.

Duologue is a very unusual book of criticism: in the casual form of a dialogue (a conversation taped in June 1996 and published as an essay) Antonio D'Alfonso and Pasquale Verdicchio explore Italian immigrant culture, the complexities of cultural duality, universality, and minority discourse. Their discussion is loosely structured by six subtitles, under which a number of key issues are explored: Italic culture, language and translation, the theory and practice of successful ethnic minority writing, publishing and marketing from a marginal position, the role of "The Association of Italian Canadian Writers" and other ethnic organisations. The authors attempt to argue both within and between national and transnational frames of reference. As Verdicchio puts it, "Everyone is conditioned to expect something from so-called 'ethnic' writers. Unless the expectation is fulfilled by the product, it will create yet another region of marginality within an already marginal cultural space." If the contributions of these "ethnic" writers to Canadian literature are ignored by general readers, by teachers and critics, or if they are merely subjected to stereotypical analy-

sis, a major part of culture in Canada is silenced or misrepresented, and the focus remains limited to the dominant groups. D'Alfonso emphasizes the importance of ethnic minority writing: "Our view of Canada is unique and almost subversive. It is neither French nor British, it is Other." This stimulating book uses a specific context, D'Alfonso's and Verdicchio's private and professional experience, to draw some important conclusions about culture, identity, and related issues.

Surfaces and Margins

Linda Rogers and Barbara Colebrook Peace, eds.

P.K. Page: Essays on Her Works. Guernica Writers Series \$10.00

Ruth Panofsky, ed.

Adele Wiseman: Essays on Her Works. Guernica Writers Series \$10.00

Reviewed by Diane Stiles

P.K. Page: Essays on Her Works is a collection of tributes from fellow poets and friends. The editors characterize Page's "truth" as a gem, and each contribution to their collection as reflecting a different facet of this gem. About half of the contributions are concerned with the poet, the other half with the poetry.

The information and impressions in the various memoirs and biographical essays will be familiar to readers of an earlier volume dedicated to Page, *The Malahat Review's* special edition of winter 1996. The notable exception is Patricia Young's account of attending a creative-writing class taught by Page in 1977. Years afterwards, Young is astounded to learn that Page refused to teach again after this experience, that "she could not bear the thought of more students who had already decided they had nothing to learn." This story strikingly illustrates the standards of honesty and intellectual openness to which Page

holds herself. It also speaks volumes about other people's responses to Page's integrity, in that not one but two of the admiring tributes in this volume are from ex-students of the class that had so "disheartened" its instructor.

Of the essays on Page's poetry, some offer an introductory overview. In "Seeing With the Eyes of the Heart," for example, Kelly Parsons and Barbara Peace find instances of "Praise, Shadow and Dimensions of Eternity in the Poetry of P.K. Page." Praise is signalled by Page's many references to gold, which are balanced in other poems "by images of grief, loss, the denaturing of the earth, the vanishing of colour and warmth." In the third category of poems the "golden and the shadow" are interwoven, "moving us toward the dimension of eternity." Besides the overview essays, a few other pieces discuss specific works, for example Brian Bartlett's investigation of the ethics of naming in "Only Child."

What this volume does not offer is a view into Page's poems, beneath and beyond their dazzling surfaces. This omission is intentional. When Young asks Page what the poem "Arras" means, Page replies "a poem should not mean, but be," a somewhat ironic reference to Archibald MacLeish from an ex-teacher who had previously told Young that her poems were "fuzzy, unfocused, not sure of what they are trying to say." Editors Rogers and Peace take a stand against the related question of "how" a poem means. They characterize contributor Travis Lane as "the one [frustrated] child in the front row at a magic show who must know how the magician performs his tricks," and they insist on the right of "all magicians" and "alchemists" to "protect their secrets."

In actuality, Lane does not ask in "Hologram Dimensions" how the tricks work, but rather what their philosophical implications might be. She characterizes Page's poems as holograms themselves,

having “no inside,” and worries that the absences of the personal and of material reality in this poetry result in the mythologization of real people and the equating of dream with waking reality. Ultimately, however, Lane’s questions about these absences dissipate into a diplomatic final assertion that we should all “enter the hologram of appearances and become one with Projector of Light, the Life Force.” But close analysis of Page’s poetry does not have to reveal the absence of the personal, or glimpses into Page’s own carefully concealed life experience. It can instead lead to insights into the nature of what we call the personal, and the myriad ways we define and experience it. (These insights are explored in some of the critical studies listed in the bibliography of this volume, by writers such as A.J.M. Smith, John Sutherland, Northrop Frye, George Woodcock, Rosemary Sullivan, John Orange, and Suniti Namjoshi.)

Whereas Page’s poetry enchants her readers with gorgeous surfaces, Adele Wiseman confronts her readers with the ugliness lurking at the margins of experience, an ugliness that mainstream society must embrace in order to reintegrate what Elizabeth Greene says those margins also contain, “heroism, love, caring, things the mainstream has lost.” The protagonists of Wiseman’s novels commit “the worst acts for the best reasons,” murder and incest. The emotional energy generated by Wiseman’s dualisms is reflected in the critical responses to her work, which also tend to be organized around clearly articulated dualisms.

Donna Palmateer Pennee, for example, examines the conflict in *The Sacrifice* (1956) between post-war feminism and traditional Jewish patriarchy, and Francis Zichy reads *Crackpot* (1974) in terms of Lurianic concepts of fragmentation and wholeness. Editor Ruth Panofsky traces the development of the female subject in Wiseman’s novels by

contrasting the narrative “complicity with patriarchy” in the earlier with the feminist “subversion” in the later. In his study of the non-fiction work *Old Woman at Play*, Jon Kertzer complicates the prevailing dualistic pattern of the essay collection by investigating two oxymoronic critical terms that resist easy alignment with each other: “the structure of enigma,” Wiseman’s characterization of aesthetics, and “epic romance,” his own characterization of Wiseman’s book. To me, the most interesting concept in the collection comes out of Donna Bennett’s discussion of Wiseman’s essays, exploring not specific thematic dualisms, but the structural dualisms that lend to “fiction” its peculiar and somewhat paradoxical power to approach “truth.” For Wiseman, truth arises through an interaction between abstract ideas and facts in the context of a narrative: “[facts] alone have no framework out of which to work, generalizations alone seem empty and unproductive.”

Greene’s account of the genesis of Wiseman’s wonderful last story, “Goon of the Moon and the Expendables,” serves to unify the whole essay collection by tracing the development of key themes and motifs as they arise out of the earlier works. An interview with Wiseman by Bruce Meyer and Brian O’Riordan rounds out the representation of the intellectual and artistic development of a writer, a teacher of creative writing, and a friend who helped so many other writers along their own paths.

Knowing Sam Selvon

Roydon Salick

The Novels of Samuel Selvon. Greenwood \$67.95

Reviewed by H el ene Buzelin

Over the last ten years, the Trinidadian novelist Samuel Selvon (1923-1994), one of the leading figures of the Caribbean literary Renaissance, has received increased critical attention. Yet, none of the numerous full

length studies, doctoral researches and articles published so far compares with this one. The originality of Salick's research resides in its methodology and focus. A Trinidadian friend of Selvon, Salick relies on his intimate knowledge of the author's life, the Trinidadian language-culture, and on first-hand data acquired through private interviews and "liming" with Selvon just as much as he consults academic and published works. This inside approach not only gives a very personal touch to the book, but also offers a necessary counter-balance and insightful complement to any preceding accounts. Deliberately leaving aside issues of language and style already dealt with extensively elsewhere, and dismissing theoretical—post-colonial or Bakhtinian—frameworks, this study focuses on the philosophy underlying Selvon's fiction; more precisely it aims at showing that "Selvon's ten novels . . . are written to establish Selvon's interpretation of, generally, West Indian man, and specifically, of Trinidadian man."

The book consists of ten chapters, one for each novel. They are organized in three parts distinguishing between peasant, middle class and immigration novels. From his analysis of the four peasant novels and their reflection of Selvon's views on the politics of identity, Salick draws out an archetypal heroic figure for Trinidadian peasantry. The second part reveals the autobiographical character of Selvon's middle-class novels and points towards discrepancies in narrative structure that suggest his failure in convincingly positing Creolization as a social and political ideal for Trinidad. The part dealing with the four immigrant novels could be divided into two unequal subsections, the first one comprising *The Housing Lark*, the second one the so-called "London Trilogy." In line with previous commentators, Salick shows Selvon's growing cynicism towards his migrant hero, Moses, who becomes a

pathetic mimic man "hopelessly deracinated from the safe shelter of his island home."

Salick's book is excellent in many respects: it carefully re-replaces the novels that had received less attention, provides many insightful details on their origin, writing and publication, and makes original critical claims. One will also appreciate the critic's success in elucidating the relation between fiction and Trinidadian reality while linking Selvon's epic heroes and narratives to masterpieces of the English literary Canon. The only slight weakness lies in Salick's relative inability to avoid the pitfall of his otherwise fascinating perspective: the search for "true" meaning. Indeed, confident in his "proper," "accurate," and "correct" reading of Selvon's fiction (these adjectives appear repeatedly throughout the study) the author gives little credit to other interpretations, except those by K. Ramchand, and tends to present his views in a rather dogmatic tone. That said, there is no doubt that this study, unique in its style and quality, will not only be extremely valuable to any reader of Caribbean literature, but will also pave the way for a new, more empathetic and culturally specific approach to the analysis of Caribbean creative writing, an approach that is more than welcome.

New Postcolonialisms

Rowland Smith, ed.

Postcolonizing the Commonwealth: Studies in Literature and Culture. Wilfrid Laurier UP \$44.95

Keya Ganguly

States of Exception: Everyday Life and Postcolonial Identity. U of Minnesota P \$29.50

Srinivas Aravamudan

Tropicopolitans: Colonialism and Agency, 1688-1804. Duke UP US\$21.95

Reviewed by Diana Brydon

Postcolonizing the Commonwealth documents new trends in that hybrid discipline, Commonwealth/postcolonial literary and

cultural studies. *States of Exception* marks its encounter with theories of everyday life to construct a revitalized agenda for ethnography. And *Tropocopolitans* registers the impact of postcolonial theory on eighteenth-century studies to argue ultimately for “a pluralization of prerequisite literacies.” Each is essential reading for the student of Canadian literature.

Postcolonizing the Commonwealth presents the edited proceedings of the 1997 “Commonwealth in Canada” conference, a conference designed to bring together three generations of participants (pioneers, consolidators, and new investigators) to survey and advance the field. The result is a valuable and engaging book, with more consistency of focus than one would expect from conference proceedings. Not surprisingly, perhaps, given its Canadian location, attention to what Stephen Slemon terms “the question of how we are to understand the social productivity of writing that seems framed within this complicity/resistance dialectic” can be seen as a compelling through-line linking many of these diverse papers.

Alan Lawson and Stephen Slemon provide the theoretical frames through which to engage this question in two strong papers that focus in different ways on the containing and disruptive forces of symbolic management. In “Climbing Mount Everest: Postcolonialism in the Culture of Ascent,” Slemon argues that the “language of triumphalism in climbing Mount Everest is predicated on an allegory of symbolic management for actual colonial relations.” In “Proximities: From Asymptote to Zeugma,” Alan Lawson employs Freud on the uncanny to consider “the affective functioning of repressed knowledge,” revisiting the “unfinished business” of settler cultures and more specifically the tropes of postcolonial Australia, to theorize the necessity for elaborating “a grammar of unequal proximity” in the wake of the Wik decision. Four chapters in the middle of the book

consider writing in South Africa in its engagement with such conditions of “unequal proximity.” Other papers address the unsettling of settlement through the trope of the unhomely and the unhousing of the subject (Susan Spearey in a fine reading of the rhetoric and implications of Salman Rushdie’s *Shame*; J. Edward Chamberlin on the ambiguities of the saying: “There’s no place like home” in “Cowboy Songs, Indian Speeches and the Language of Poetry.”) The problem of subaltern representation receives original and groundbreaking treatment in Nima Naghibi’s “Five Minutes of Silence: Voices of Iranian Feminists in the Postrevolutionary Age” and in Cheryl Suzack’s “FAS and Cultural Discourse: Who Speaks for Native Women?” Both texts demonstrate the continuing need for vigilance in attending to the “problematics of representation” and of theorizing agency in ways that will not prove continuous with the stereotypes of colonial discourse. While Suzack critiques the ways that Fetal Alcohol Syndrome circulates as a “crisis” narrative, enabling a “politics of blame” and a “distancing of Native American communities from the American public,” Nima Naghibi demonstrates how “the agential power and the subject position of the anti-imperialist Iranian feminist is elided in the moment of collusion between the two dominant discourses of international feminism and anti-imperialist patriarchy.”

These two essays face the challenge that Keya Ganguly sets herself in *States of Exception*: “redirecting conceptual thinking toward an analysis of concrete experience.” Ganguly takes her title from Walter Benjamin’s eighth thesis on history: “The tradition of the oppressed teaches us that the ‘the state of emergency’ in which we live is not the exception but the rule.” Seeking to “redirect attention away from exceptionalist discourses that categorize postcoloniality as enviably, if impossibly,

other," Ganguly focuses instead on rethinking "the possibilities of dialectics" through a case study of a middle-class diasporic Indian community living in the suburbs of New Jersey. After two chapters of methodology, chapters on memory, food and ethnic spectatorship ground her detailed demonstration of "the multiple inequations between ideas and their experiential components." Ganguly argues that her book "involves thinking with the paradox of theorizing the abstract concretely and the concrete abstractly," and she does so brilliantly in a study that advances materialist critique in the human and social sciences.

Whereas Ganguly challenges accepted wisdom in dominant strains of postcolonial theory and cultural studies, Aravamudan takes issue with those who "argue for the institutional merits of literature as a reified category." Proposing the term "tropicopolitan" as a name for the colonized subject who exists both as fictive construct of colonial tropology and actual resident of tropical space, object of representation and agent of resistance," Aravamudan argues for the importance of geocultural concerns in literary history. In his view, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries should "reimagine . . . communities of readers rather than . . . take those communities to be already imagined." In some ways, then, their projects are similar. Both Ganguly and Aravamudan take a previously invisible category—everyday life, an imagined reading community—and explore the implications of making visible the modes of its construction and maintenance. Employing the linked concepts of "virtualizations," "levantinizations" and "nationalizations," Aravamudan concentrates on the "laborious task of reading" work by numerous eighteenth-century authors, from Aphra Behn, Defoe, Equiano, Swift, and Mary Wortley Montagu to Addison, Bedford, Burke, Johnson, Abbé de Raynal, and Toussaint L'Ouverture. The result is a densely argued, richly suggestive text that amply

demonstrates its multi-pronged thesis, that "a postcolonial eighteenth century becomes disciplinarily relevant and critically meaningful if we shift our focus from texts to the reading formations through which those texts are perceived and institutionalized."

Ganguly and Aravamudan take postcolonial theory beyond the insights of those theorists now associated with the field (Bhabha, Said, and Spivak) back into earlier paths of materialist critique not fully explored by these three. In testing the "possibilities for dialectical thinking" (Ganguly) and the paradoxes inherent in the Enlightenment enterprise (Aravamudan), they chart fresh routes for postcolonial engagements with the challenges of the present.

Evolutionary Visions

Nora Foster Stovel, ed.

Embryo Words: Margaret Laurence's Early Writings. Juvenilia Press \$8.00

Christian Riegel, ed.

Challenging Territory: The Writing of Margaret Laurence. U Alberta P \$24.95

Reviewed by Angela Spreng

These two very different works both contribute to an extended understanding of Margaret Laurence's life and her oeuvre. *Embryo Words* is a compilation of her early writings collected for the first time. These poems and short prose pieces were published between 1944 and 1946, during her high school and college years. Although Margaret Laurence's genius is in her fiction, the editor asserts that the thematic and stylistic groundwork for her mature work was laid in her juvenilia: "her apprenticeship in verse made her prose poetic." *Challenging Territory* consists of essays that give various insights into her fiction as well as her journalistic and political work. The contributions, carefully selected and organised, reflect a wide range of issues, from coloniality and postcoloniality, gender and

power, to psychological, cultural, and socio-political aspects that affected Margaret Laurence's writing.

In *Embryo Words*, Stovel emphasizes Laurence's early concerns such as her love of nature, her loathing of war, and her interest in the individual voice. Stovel elucidates the interdependence between Laurence's life and oeuvre, and between her early writings and her mature fiction. Particularly interesting is the juxtaposition of war with the peace of nature; this affirmation of life is a recurrent theme in her early poems, for example in "Song for Spring, 1944/Canada," "Thought," and "The Imperishable," or in her first published story, "Goodwill Towards Men." Laurence's strong relationship with nature and her insistence on the protection it provides is also evident in her later political work as an opponent of nuclear arms and as an environmentalist.

Challenging Territory discusses highly diverse aspects of Margaret Laurence's fiction and nonfiction. The first three articles concentrate on her African writings. The contributors emphasize that while being completely aware of her limitations as a colonial white author representing African experiences, Laurence managed to recognise the cultural complexities that deal with current postcolonial debates. Mary Rimmer discusses language as a site of cultural conflict. Gabrielle Collu's focus is Laurence's representation of the Other. Working with the trope of woman-as-land to underline the link between imperial and patriarchal oppression, Collu argues that Laurence subverts this concept, thus empowering the Other. Barbara Pell's article provides an interesting connection between Laurence's African and Canadian heroines. According to Pell, the empowering image of the African heroine anticipates Laurence's representation of equally strong Canadian heroines.

The next section of *Challenging Territory* discusses Laurence's Canadian novels.

Brenda Beckman-Long defines *The Stone Angel* as a feminine confessional novel, and argues that Hagar's achievement of self-perception provides the confessional novel with a feminist angle. Christian Riegel concludes that in *A Bird in the House* the very act of composing a text is a liberating process of mourning. Working with Kristeva's discourse of analysis, Méira Cook's rather complex paper examines constructions of the maternal in *The Diviners*. Jill Franks explores how Laurence's Canadian protagonists use irony and parody to deconstruct male-dominated culture. Franks describes the escalation of irony in three of Laurence's Canadian novels, and concludes that Morag in *The Diviners* uses language most convincingly as a form of feminist resistance. Nora Foster Stovel compares the two "sister" novels *A Jest of God* and *The Fire-Dwellers* and analyzes their structural, symbolic, and thematic parallels as a reflection of the psychological developments of the two solipsistic protagonists. Dick Harrison, in his comparison of Wallace Stegner's novel *Angle of Repose* with Laurence's *The Diviners*, reminds us that all literature benefits from being read in a comparative context.

Angelika Maeser Lemieux's socio-cultural analysis of Laurence's Scots Presbyterian upbringing is followed by two articles on Laurence's career as a journalist and political writer. Denez Xiques draws attention to Laurence's early concern for Canadian cultural life, which she advocated through her various supportive articles and reviews of Canadian radio drama, literature, and film. Her political commitment, especially her dedication to social justice, is reflected not only in her newspaper articles but also in her numerous essays, letters, and speeches, and in her memoirs, in which she spoke out against nuclear arms and violence toward women. According to Thomas M.F. Gerry, Laurence's social and political concerns share important characteristics with her fiction.

A Red River Epic

Margaret Sweatman

When Alice Lay Down With Peter. Alfred A.

Knopf \$34.95

Reviewed by Reinhold Kramer

After publishing a chapbook and two excellent novels with Turnstone Press, Margaret Sweatman has gone up-market, signing with Knopf and bringing out a big historical novel. It's roomy. Gone is the polished claustrophobia of *Sam and Angie* (1996), gone also the formal experiments with voice that made *Fox* (1991) even better than its Ondaatjean models. Whereas *Fox* had painted an intimate portrait of two young upper-class women during the 1919 Winnipeg General Strike, *When Alice Lay Down With Peter* takes as its subject nothing less than the history of Manitoba, from Riel through the Age of Aquarius, tracing four generations of women and their piece of property along the Red River.

The results are mixed. Sweatman's lyrical, blue-eyed style is there from the beginning, making a gift of each sentence: "With her innate genius for polyglossia, she was speaking to the fast, mucky river-flow and it was teaching her the terrible imperatives of water, flood, birth." This is Alice, who comes to the Red in 1869. Blondie McCormack, Alice's daughter and the novel's narrator, speaks with the same metaphorical elegance of her own interest in Big Bear: "I was in love with the Cree chief; he was my version of a beat poet." For Sweatman, each life is a complex knot of event and lyrical meditation.

Set against lyric, however, is the post-modern historical novel. Part of its cachet is that it allows the reader to approach historical cruxes obliquely: to remember the moments that made us, and to play among them. Ever since *The Tin Drum* and *Midnight's Children*, novelists such as Wayne Johnston have treated the past with

un-Tolstoyan lightness, pushing their characters shamelessly into a whole series of historical crises. For Sweatman, not so friendly to satire or the grotesque, such lightness works less well. Her postmodernism has never abandoned a romantic depth of feeling; thus, when she attempts to invest historical cruxes with emotion, the results are often politically predictable. In *When Alice Lay Down With Peter*, one need only be the right sort of white person to be instantly comfortable among the Métis. With marvelous ease, the Scots Peter and Alice join Riel's provisional government, and Alice even helps to execute Thomas Scott. Subsequently, the family appears on the right side of the immigration question, female suffrage, the Winnipeg General Strike; is counted among hoboes during the 1935 Regina Riot; becomes friendly to hippies in the 1960s. Thomas Scott returns as a ghost, an Orange ghost for an Orange province. During Riel's trial he grows eight feet tall, his jacket becomes a judge's robe, and he pronounces the death sentence. Insisting upon nothing less than the Passion of St. Riel, such magic realism is a miscalculation: the scaffolding shows. One may agree that Métis land claims ought to be settled without agreeing that historical novels must function as didactic defenses of those land claims.

When Alice Lay Down With Peter is best when it veers away from history's big moments and instead brings us private, felt lives. Blondie's daughter Helen, "a desperado of luxury" who reads "biographies of great courtesans," and granddaughter Dianna, who draws the beautiful sub-dermal anatomies of living things, are quite compelling: "Helen learned that war is inside people and we must go to the lap of the strongest man with the quietest body." Attracted to the wealthy Richard, she is intriguing, but when she leaves him to become a hobo and then joins the International Brigade in Spain, she

becomes little more than a vehicle for political allegory—while Richard of course turns into a capitalist bogeyman.

In the struggle for female emancipation, Sweatman's women—who all live, for a time, as men—are less predictable than in their political struggles. Sweatman's real skill is as a poet of manners, of women and men across the living room from one another, of the complexities of human emotion. During the General Strike, Blondie says, "The white collars on men are political forces never to be underestimated. Richard was in his element. Everybody was his father." It's clear that her truth comes convincingly from domestic nuances and their political implications, rather than from direct political choices. And it is almost as if Sweatman recognizes, through her artistic surrogate, Dianna, how little she belongs to the early twentieth-century stridencies of party politics, and how much she owes to the late twentieth century sense of private politics: Sweatman, like Dianna, "is a war artist. . . . Only, the war has become more subtle and dangerous."

Elegiac, Worldly Eyes

Rhea Tregebov

The Strength of Materials. Wolsak and Wynn \$15.00

Wendy McGrath

Common Place Ecstasies. Beach Holme \$12.95

Wendy Morton

Private Eye. Ekstasis \$14.95

Reviewed by Jeanette Lynes

At a time when global crises are never very far from our minds, and when Lyn Hejinian's claim that "the world requires improving (reimproving) every day" resonates with particular force, these three collections reflect Canadian women poets' commitment to the ongoing project of confronting a world that often destabilizes certainties and poses ontological dilemmas concerning who we are, where we are, and

how we might, as poets, negotiate a position from which to speak.

In her fifth collection of poetry, Rhea Tregebov enlists that venerable poetic disposition, the elegy, to explore how far we have to go in making "the world one just place," and to foreground, what is ultimately, for her, an ethical project.

Tregebov's collection possesses an admirable degree of structural and thematic cohesion; its thirty-five elegies (discrete poems combined with serial poems) could be read as a long poem. The project of making the world better, for Tregebov, involves a rigorous assessment (and reassessment) of the self: to "know my own extent, / know where to stop. Me, / not me. Who do I love and / where do I stop loving?" How workable is the notion of an atomized, autonomous self, Tregebov's poems ask, in an era when the world impinges, in frightening new ways, on our consciousness. The woman in Sarajevo who lost her son, Tregebov writes, "*could have been me*" (Tregebov's emphasis), a terminal, monosyllabic hammering home of what must be confronted—disaster can no longer be located elsewhere.

Tregebov's language is eloquent, yet unpretentious, very much, to cite Hejinian, a "language of inquiry." "What are we containers of, what / do we hold?" she asks in "Teacup Elegy." Holding her elegiac lens up to life, Tregebov shows how, in our fragile world, even traditionally joyful subjects are compromised, tinged with loss: "Those mornings, even babies make me sad: / the way they love the world, the way / they let it filter through them." This moment's enjambed, edgy, *provisional* joy exemplifies Tregebov's poetic skill; she is clearly equal to the emotional demands of the elegy. With *The Strength of Materials*, Tregebov joins the ranks of distinguished Canadian elegists such as George Bowering, Dennis Lee and Jan Zwicky.

Wendy McGrath's strategy for confronting the world's fragility is to resist closure. Her striking, image-driven lyrics refuse the

systemizing conventions of grammatical authority. McGrath's poetic is an intensely personal, located one, grounded in working-class, domestic life and popular culture. Fragility, in McGrath, is frequently realized at the level of image—the kitchen shelf, for example, “lined in glasses engraved with ALCB,” or the perishable foods in the book's strong, central sequence, “preserving.” McGrath energizes her poetic language by means of vernacular, “worldly texts” (recipes, folk wisdom); canning “lore” provides an enabling discourse for “preserving.” McGrath's dialogic style, in this section, is somewhat reminiscent of Robert Kroetsch's “Seed Catalogue,” and like Kroetsch, her engagement with oral culture is frequently startling, clever.

McGrath's markedly gendered awareness of the world's inequities comes through in poems like “waitress suite” (“she is invisible”). Important to McGrath's negotiations with the world is the act of writing herself *into* its warped surfaces, its constructs that pass as history, memory: “let me leave a handprint on this grey surface,” she writes in “properties of cement.” Of these three poets, McGrath is the most experimental with form, the materiality, physical presence, of words on the page. Her formal restlessness enhances her work and will, hopefully, continue.

Wendy Morton's first collection begins with a manifesto: “Poems are everywhere.” This claim, is, happily, borne out in the ensuing forty-nine poems' broad range of subjects. Like Tregebov and McGrath, she is very much in the world—at the bank, patisserie, Superstore. Morton's elegies to friends lost to cancer are powerful in their blunt refusals of sentimentality: “You call to tell me you're bleeding in Palm Springs,” she writes in “91 Degrees.” A striking aspect of Morton's work is her willingness to take emotional risks—to reveal anger—still a tricky business for a woman poet. The stigmatizing language related to terminal ill-

ness, in our culture, is just *wrong*, Morton proclaims bravely, bitterly, in “Death's Necklace,” where she sets the “blurred words/of oncologists” against a metaphoric, alternative vocabulary: “My friend wears death's necklace,/she says she thinks of white butterflies flying in her blood.” A similar challenge to negative, clinical discourse is evidenced in some of Lorna Crozier's recent work. Morton's ecological consciousness is strongly revealed in poems like “Kitkatla,” a elegy on the decline of the spiritual dimension in a Native community and “Falling Boundary,” an indictment of clear-cutting on the west coast. Morton's exhaustive “everywhere” extends to Kosovo and Cambodia. Her “private eye” sees much. Of the three poets, Morton's work exhibits the most unwavering commitment to the traditional lyric. Structurally, her poems' almost exclusive left-margin formats would benefit from variation.

“To improve the world, one must be situated in it, attentive,” says Hejiniian. Tregebov, McGrath, and Morton are well equipped to undertake their discursive, worldly projects.

“Notes to Self”

Christl Verduyn, ed.

Marian Engel's Notebooks: “Ah, mon cahier, écoute.” Wilfrid Laurier UP \$54.95

Jo Fraser Jones, ed.

Hobnobbing with a Countess and Other Okanagan Adventures: The Diaries of Alice Barrett Parke, 1891-1900. UBC P \$85.00

Reviewed by Laurie McNeill

From the age of ten until her death at fifty-one, Marian Engel kept diaries, what she called *cahiers*, creating a mass of personal writings encompassing over forty notebooks. Christl Verduyn has whittled this substantial archive down for publication, and provides a thorough and scholarly introduction that situates Engel's texts

within contemporary theories on the genre of the diary and establishes the *cahiers*' public value as literary and social history. The eclecticism of the notebooks, which include draft fiction, drawings and memoranda as well as personal reflection, presented a daunting challenge for Verduyn, particularly since the *cahiers* rarely fit public expectations of the diary as a chronological and personal narrative. Engel did not always date entries, and often wrote in old notebooks because they had empty pages. In a style evocative of Katherine Mansfield, Engel switches seamlessly between "real life" and the fictional worlds she is creating. A recipe for gumdrop cake follows pages of draft fiction, and the *cahiers* include hundreds of lists—of names, flowers, groceries, towns—that Engel may have planned to incorporate into her fiction, or that may have served a merely domestic purpose.

This blurring of the real and the fictional, the domestic and the writerly, points to the multiplicity of functions that the contemporary diary fulfills as well as to the competing identities of Engel herself, who was both an award-winning novelist and a mother-wife, and who often felt torn between these roles. Throughout her diaries she comments on the problems the woman artist faces, describing her own guilt, anger, and frustration at trying to combine two seemingly disparate worlds. While her love for her children is evident, her fatigue and sense of constriction also resonate. "Need a holiday," she sums up in 1969, a feeling echoed later that year: "Early to bed w [sic] wild dreams of escape and freedom." Engel's struggle with and for identity comes to a head in entries from 1982, during the diarist's fight with cancer. She imagines the conflict between the competing sides of her personality as a sort of psychomachia, with her "dark" persona emerging as "Ruth" (Engel's real name at birth) and her "good" half as "Marion" (the name given her at adoption). The reader's

knowledge of how little time Engel has left heightens the drama of her search for self-insight and resolution; this awareness also adds poignancy to Engel's entries from hospital. The immediacy of the genre, and its foregrounding of the diarist's day-to-day shifts in attitudes and circumstances, make these final entries painful reading.

Of particular interest to literary historians will be the entries that emphasize Engel as writer, the role for which she wished to be most remembered. In an interview given shortly before her death, Engel noted that, despite having sold her personal papers, "I'd rather people read my fiction." After finishing her *cahiers*, some of which consist entirely of draft fiction (her novel *Monodromos* goes through several metamorphoses), readers will indeed want to revisit her published works. Her notebooks position Engel as a writer engaged with theoretical and national issues, passionate about the status and future of literature in Canada. The *cahiers* chronicle her involvement with the Writers' Guild of Canada, of which she was a founding member, and include her observations on Canadian authors and their works. In 1969, Engel writes enigmatically, "Checklist of what is to be done in Can. Lit—possible points of view." Unfortunately, this list never materialized.

Hobnobbing with a Countess and Other Okanagan Adventures: The Diaries of Alice Barrett Parke, 1891-1900 is the public diaries of a private citizen. In 1891, at age twenty-nine, Alice Barrett Parke moved from Ontario to the Okanagan Valley to live with her brother Harry, a rancher. At his urging, she began a daily record of their lives, which she regularly sent back to the family in Port Dover. Though she started this task begrudgingly, she continued it for the next ten years, carrying it over into her marriage and subsequent relocation to Vernon; once she and her husband returned to Ontario in 1900, she discontinued her chronicles. Though Parke's diaries were public, created

for readers beside herself, her diaries—because she wrote for intimates—remain personal, even confidential, recording her homesickness, fears, anger at relatives and neighbors, and love for her new husband, in addition to her accounts of her daily activities. Parke wrote daily, even having her husband fill in for her when she was out of town. Harold Parke's quite comic entries, penned by command from "The Boss," offer rare insights into the dynamics of their turn-of-the-century marriage, and contribute to the autobiographical nature of Parke's text. Since her diaries give minute details of life in British Columbia during a formative and fast-changing period, from a perspective rarely recorded by traditional history books, they also make a much-needed contribution to the domestic history of Western Canada.

Editor Jo Fraser Jones, faced with the daunting task of paring down Parke's writings from their original half-million words, has focussed on the diaries' historical value, perhaps at the expense of their autobiographical aspects. She has organized the diaries into thematic units, grouping entries from across the ten years into such categories as "Health and Social Issues in the 1890s" and "Religion in the West." This thematic approach disrupts the diaries' chronology, causes repetition (Jones reuses pithy entries that fall under several headings), and needlessly limits the text's scope. After the first chapter, which produces Volume I of the diaries almost in entirety, the change to entries collected under headings is particularly disappointing, and cancels the opportunity to watch Parke's diary persona develop over time. (The complete transcripts of the diaries, held in the Greater Vernon Museum and Archives, are available to the public.) Jones' approach reflects, perhaps, her concept of the diary, outlined in her introduction though not explored or substantiated, as a genre that does not deliver a "sense of personal iden-

tity." Given Jones' own sentimental identification with her subject, this observation needs qualification.

While Jones' introduction becomes repetitive and mired in detail, overwhelming the reader with a history of the Barrett family, for example, that extends back to 1170, the prefaces to each thematic section are clear and concise, situating the entries that follow in biographical context. Jones has also provided substantive endnotes that provide excellent historical background and make the diaries accessible to readers unfamiliar with British Columbia and its history.

Transumptive Acts

Craig Stewart Walker

The Buried Astrolabe: Canadian Dramatic Imagination and Western Tradition. McGill-Queen's UP \$27.95

Reviewed by Len Falkenstein

Craig Stewart Walker's *The Buried Astrolabe* is a weighty (411 pages, plus notes, bibliography, and index), rich, and meticulous new study of contemporary Canadian drama. Although Walker's introduction gestures toward surveying the field as a whole, particularly in its overview of the evolution of "poetic" and "mythopoeic" drama in Canada, the book is by and large a focused study of the works of six major playwrights: James Reaney, Michael Cook, Sharon Pollock, Michel Tremblay, George F. Walker, and Judith Thompson. Each dramatist is accorded a single substantial chapter, wherein Walker offers a close reading of the writer's *oeuvre*, chronologically charting the development of his or her "poetics."

The chief merit of the work, given the relative paucity of book-length studies of Canadian drama, is the considerable depth of analysis devoted to each playwright. Walker complements existing criticism on the six (whom he admits to choosing somewhat arbitrarily, but primarily according to

the criteria of established reputation and “excellence”) perhaps most helpfully by offering substantial discussion of some of their more obscure and neglected works. In addition to providing illuminating commentary on numerous plays that have become standards of the Canadian theatrical canon, works such as Pollock’s *Blood Relations*, Walker’s *Nothing Sacred*, and Thompson’s *I Am Yours*, then, this is a book that might well encourage readers to seek out lesser known, but equally fascinating, texts such as Pollock’s *Generations*, Walker’s surreal and blood-spattered early “cartoon” plays, or Thompson’s chaotic *White Biting Dog*. Another strength of the book is the lucidity of Walker’s prose. His style is simple and direct, finding a nice balance between the academic and the colloquial (at one point we find Foghorn Leghorn in the same sentence with Goethe and Schiller), no mean feat given the relative complexity and allusiveness of some of his arguments.

Walker’s major critical imperative, and the main argumentative thread unifying his analysis, concerns the six dramatists’ individual contributions to the development of distinctively Canadian modes of “poetic drama.” Each, he suggests, has engaged in a process that he calls “transumption,” appropriating and reimagining European dramatic traditions to fit the Canadian context, “establish[ing] a mythopoeic context within which a dramatic imagination could reconfigure Canadian experience in its own image rather than a conspicuously borrowed disguise.” Accordingly, Walker’s analysis foregrounds the “poetic” elements (often quite liberally defined and categorized) of each writer’s work and explores how they both derive and deviate from their perceived wellsprings within the Western literary tradition. As might be deduced from this précis of Walker’s project, his critical-theoretical approach is decidedly traditional, drawing heavily on archetypal criticism of the school of Frye, notions of

inherited literary tradition, and the privileging of thematic approaches to texts rather than a strictly of-the-moment materialism that he rejects as too limiting: “To identify oneself electively in terms of such materialist categories [as “race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, social class, etc.>] is one thing; but to universally ascribe identity to others wholly in terms of ‘standpoint politics’ is not only illiberal and dehumanizing but demonstrably inaccurate.” Distressingly, Walker also accords scant regard to the performance context of theatre, discussing plays first and foremost as literary texts.

While the book initially seems to promise a comprehensive provisional overview of the development of poetic drama in Canada, it literally has no conclusion and includes virtually no comparative discussion of the dramatists, each of whom, we might be led to believe, lives and writes in hermetic isolation not only from each other, but also from Canadian drama as a whole. For those amenable to Walker’s critical approach and interested primarily in close studies of the works of one or more of Reaney, Cook, Pollock, Tremblay, Walker, and Thompson, however, *The Buried Astrolabe* offers much rewarding reading.

Modern Canadian Plays

Jerry Wasserman, ed.

Modern Canadian Drama 4th ed. (2 vols)

Talonbooks \$29.95/vol.

Reviewed by Ric Knowles

Fifteen years ago the time was ripe for a national anthology of Canadian drama. The first edition of Jerry Wasserman’s *Modern Canadian Plays* appeared, together with *The Penguin Book of Modern Canadian Drama*, edited by Richard Plant, and *Major Plays of the Canadian Theatre*, edited by Richard Perkyns—after the first issues of *Canadian Theatre Review* and *Theatre*

History and Canada and the founding of the Association for Canadian Theatre History inaugurated Canadian drama and theatre as an academic field, and eighteen years after Wasserman's "key date," 1967, with which his collection begins. The virtually simultaneous publication of these first three national drama anthologies registered as a culmination of the nationalist movement in Canadian theatre, and went a long way towards the belated and inevitably controversial solidification of a national canon at a time when national canons had come under suspicion, partly over imbalances based on gender, race, class, and sexual preference.

Since then, Plant and Perkyns have been eclipsed by Wasserman, which, expanded to two volumes and updated now to its fourth edition, has become the anthology of choice for most courses. But times have changed, and Wasserman, left substantially alone with the responsibility of representing Canadian drama on a national scale to a new generation of students, has adapted his anthology to reflect those changes. Wasserman speaks here, refreshingly, with considerably fewer claims to authority than he did in 1985. Accepting a responsibility to assemble his material "with as much care and transparency as possible," he acknowledges in his introduction that his choices reflect "first of all" his own tastes, together with a more diverse range of styles and cultures than did his first collection. (What he doesn't acknowledge is that Talonbooks, his publisher, is also the publisher of more than two thirds of the playwrights in the anthology—surely a misrepresentation of the roles of others, pre-eminently Playwrights Canada, in the publication of important Canadian plays.) Wasserman has maintained continuities with his earlier editions—of the twenty-four plays in these volumes (the first edition published twelve in one volume, the third, twenty in two), seven remain from the first edition, and

fourteen from the third. Most of those retained from the first edition, albeit all by white men and now included as the bulk of an overwhelmingly masculinist first volume, are retained for good historical or pedagogical reasons: *The Ecstasy of Rita Joe*, *Fortune and Men's Eyes*, *1837: The Farmer's Revolt*, *The St. Nicholas Hotel*, *Zastrozzi*, *Balconville*, and *Billy Bishop Goes to War*. Those dropped—*Creeps*, *Walsh*, *Jacob's Wake*, *Jitters*, and *Automatic Pilot*—significant in their time, will not be seriously missed.

The new selections, while one can always quibble with individual choices, are easily defensible, although I myself wonder about the inclusion of Kelly Rebar's somewhat slight *Bordertown Café*, or of anything by Morris Panych (here *7 Stories*), whose work I always find pretentious. I wonder even more about the exclusion of so dominant a figure as Jason Sherman, who would bring not only accomplished writing to the collection, but also a welcome political voice and explicitly Jewish perspective. I wonder whether it might have been possible to include more formally experimental work by writers like Margaret Hollingsworth or John Mighton, collectives such as The Anna Project, performance artists such as Lori Millan and Shawna Dempsey, cultural and linguistic minority writers such as Betty Quan, challenging Maritimers such as Kent Stetson or Brydon MacDonald, or anyone (other than "expatriot" David French) from Newfoundland. I wonder, too, whether Sally Clark is best represented by *Moo* rather than more substantial work such as *Life Without Instruction* or *Saint Frances of Hollywood*; whether one of Daniel MacIvor's monodramas, such as *House*, *Here Lies Henry*, or *Monster*, might merit a place alongside or instead of *Never Swim Alone*; or whether Wendy Lill's *The Occupation of Heather Rose* is the best example of either her own work or the monodrama form as it has developed in Canada.

But these are matters for collegial debate. Welcome since the first edition are such challenging plays as Sharon Pollock's *Doc*, Sky Gilbert's *Drag Queens on Trial*, Robert Lepage and Marie Brassard's *Polygraph*, Michel Marc Bouchard's *The Orphan Muses*, Tomson Highway's *Dry Lips Oughta Move to Kapuskasing*, Joan MacLeod's *Amigo's Blue Guitar*, Judith Thompson's *Lion in the Streets*, Guillermo Verdecchia's *Fronteras Americanas*, Djanet Sears's *Harlem Duet*, and George F. Walker's *Problem Child*. Also welcome, for pedagogical purposes, are Rick Salutin's diary/preface to *1837: The Farmers' Revolt*, John Gray's preface to *Billy Bishop Goes to War*, and Tomson Highway's "Note on Nanabush," prefacing *Dry Lips Oughta Move to Kapuskasing*—although Djanet Sears's "NOTES OF A COLOURED GIRL: 32 SHORT REASONS WHY I WRITE FOR THE THEATRE," her illuminating introduction to *Harlem Duet*, is sadly absent.

Wasserman provides brief introductions to each play, which, if critically conservative and somewhat formulaic (crisp opening, playwright's resumé, and thematic introduction to the play), are engaging and informative. He also provides "A Selective Bibliography of Source Material," which is extremely useful, although the selection principles sometimes seem random, and many entries, particularly the "Selected Reviews," will be difficult for students to find.

What does this fourth edition of *Modern Canadian Plays* say about, or constitute as, Canadian drama at the turn of the millennium? Clearly, the anthology bears witness to a vibrant, serious and competent, if still—because of Wasserman's choices and because of the material conditions for play production and publication in Canada—a somewhat conservative and literary body of dramatic writing. Nevertheless, this edition marks a significant broadening of the field since 1985, both formally and culturally. It's

difficult now to imagine a collection such as the first edition of *Modern Canadian Plays* that included only two plays by women, no work by Native people or people of colour, nothing by Judith Thompson, Djanet Sears, Guillermo Verdecchia, Sky Gilbert, or Daniel MacIvor, and no self-consciousness about its own omissions. Both hearteningly and disturbingly, the fourth edition of *Modern Canadian Plays* does represent a consensus about what matters in Canadian Theatre in 2000. What is unquestionably heartening, however, is the willingness of both Jerry Wasserman and Talonbooks to continue to expand, update, and broaden the representational range of the standard teaching anthology in the field. One can only look forward to the fifth edition, and all those to follow.

High-Stakes History

Herb Wylie

Speculative Fictions: Contemporary Canadian Novelists and the Writing of History. McGill-Queen's UP \$75.00

Reviewed by Kevin Flynn

Herb Wylie makes a strong case for our need to reclaim space for social history and for historical fiction's power to help us reclaim it. A sort of literary-critical version of Gerald Friesen's *Citizens and Nation*, *Speculative Fictions* examines how contemporary Canadian fiction has mined this social space for its own purposes, transforming historical fiction—and our concept of history—as it has done so. Wylie covers some familiar ground but sets out in ingenious directions while doing so with an unerring grace and clarity of purpose.

The book's first section maps the requisite theoretical terrain to show how historical fiction has reimaged itself in the face of postmodern historiography. Wylie's discussions of Derrida, Foucault and Hayden White, among others, are so clear as to be

palpable, and he seamlessly grafts theories of narrative and intertextuality onto a model of postmodern subjectivity. Although Canadian historical fiction, Wylie argues, resists “a homogenous, cohesive view of the past,” his own narrative here is remarkably cogent and cohesive.

Wylie maintains this cohesiveness by conducting pointed discussions of Canadian historical fictions such as *The Englishman's Boy*, *Burning Water*, *In the Skin of a Lion*, *A Discovery of Strangers*, and *Icefields*, among others. The book is organized thematically, rather than textually, with Wylie repeatedly picking up and setting down a novel as the course of his argument demands. However, this approach unifies, rather than fragments, his discussion. The second through fourth sections of the book cover, respectively, three main themes: how fiction supplements, questions, and revises “official” history in order to address historical imbalances; how the formal experimentation of postmodern fiction amounts to a “search for ways of avoiding the perils of the assumptions about representation, rationality, contingency, reality, and writing that govern traditional history and the traditional historical novel”; and how the dual investment of historical fiction in the past and the present allows it to “speculate” in/on history by simultaneously professing uncertainty about it and “investing in history as the raw material for the production of marketable fiction.”

The “speculation” metaphor is apt and inventive. On the one hand, historical fictions engender speculation about the reliability of received histories; on the other hand, by speculating (in the financial sense) on history, such fictions commodify it, “making it readily consumable.” Wylie acknowledges that providing the public with a readily consumable history may disburden it of the desire to “cultivat[e] a historical consciousness or an engagement with how history is constructed”; indeed,

an uncritical consumer might be skeptical about a previous version of history but willing to buy a “new-and-improved” fictionalized version without a second thought. However, the popularizing bent of this approach does have its advantages, to which Wylie alludes in reference to Mircea Eliade’s argument that the public consciousness transforms historical events into archetypes in order to remember them. Surely this is precisely what the best historical fiction does as well, albeit on a smaller, market-driven scale: it helps us to remember.

But are all things worth remembering, or equally worthy of historical remembrance? Wylie never addresses this question head-on, but his book implicitly suggests that the answer might be an emphatic and surprising “No.” There is a danger that granting too much credence to social history lets too much into the historical record, so that a sense of historical proportion is lost. The circumstances concerning the shooting of a pig are not likely to merit the historian’s attention—unless, of course, that pig was owned by the Hudson’s Bay Company and its killing led to the 1859 Pig War. Here, Wylie’s two-page discussion of *Obasan*, where the fictional account of the internment of Japanese Canadians during the second world war demonstrates how social history can enrich its more “official” counterpart, seems disproportionate in comparison to the ten pages he devotes to *Alias Grace*, where the story of a murderess is long on social interest but short on public import (except, of course, insofar as it affords Atwood the opportunity to rehearse a theory of historiography). Histories are like newspapers, and wedding announcements should only appear on the front page if they are news. Likewise, social history *is* important, but the less closely Wylie ties it to public events, the less compelling are his arguments in this admirable book.

Researching Sara Jeannette Duncan in the papers of A.P. Watt and Company

Misao Dean

The late John Matthews used to say that one thing he had learned from his research on Benjamin Disraeli was that if someone tells you there are no more papers to be found, don't believe it. So far I've found that this is good advice. When Marian Fowler's biography of Sara Jeannette Duncan appeared in 1983, most Duncan scholars thought that, by building on the previous work of Rae Goodwin and Thomas Tausky, she had found pretty much everything that could be found. That was little enough: a handful of letters, mostly from Duncan to other Canadians, notably John Willison and Archibald MacMechan; some business correspondence with Chatto and Windus, one of her British publishers; a note addressed to Lord Lansdowne in a presentation copy of one of her novels. But, in the twenty years since *Redney* appeared additional documents and biographical sources have surfaced.¹ The most important of these is the correspondence between Duncan and her literary agent, A.P. Watt and Sons, discovered by Germaine Warkentin in the Wilson Library of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

Duncan engaged the firm of A.P. Watt as her literary agent in 1894.² In a bantering interview published in *The Idler*, she

refused to discuss her new novel, claiming archly that "Mr. Watt says that all inquiries regarding MSS are to be referred to him" (Burgin 117). Duncan had published seven books in the previous four years and her business arrangements must have been time-consuming; Watt would take care of all of that for his standard ten percent fee. Watt had practically invented the job of literary agent, and in twenty years he had risen "from the anonymity of a publisher's reader to the center of the publishing world," according to Mary Ann Gillies (21). By 1892 *The Bookman* proclaimed that through his office the "most important periodicals in [Britain] America, Australia, and elsewhere [were] supplied with the greater part of the novels and stories so necessary to their existence" (qtd. in Gillies 21). By this time A.P. Watt was representing such authors as Gilbert Parker, Rider Haggard, Rudyard Kipling, Wilkie Collins, and Robert Barr.

Professor Warkentin had learned from Australian scholar Elaine Zinkhan that many Canadian authors, including Sara Jeannette Duncan, were represented in the Watt collection, which includes some 270.5 linear feet of records including correspondence, contracts, copyrights, private account books and ledgers, spanning the operations of A.P. Watt and Company from 1888 to 1985. In the course of preparing her edition of Duncan's *Set In Authority*, Professor Warkentin was able to identify a previously unknown article published under a pseudonym: "A Progressive

Viceroy," which had been placed by Watt in the *Contemporary Review* and signed "Civilis." This important article was reprinted in Professor Warkentin's edition and has materially influenced the way scholars read this work, as well as suggesting some intriguing depth in the relationship between Duncan and the Curzons. The idea that there were traces of more pseudonymous articles or even books in the Watt collection was intriguing.

I went to Chapel Hill in June of 2000 to do some research for a *Dictionary of Canadian Biography* entry on Duncan, planning to sift the Watt collection for anything that might be useful. (If you are used, as I am, to Pacific breezes and sunburn easily, as I do, Chapel Hill in June is pretty miserable. But the local specialty is shrimp and grits, and this, with a cold beer, makes the place almost bearable.) In the Watt collection under "Mrs. Everard Cotes" (Duncan's married name) I found some twenty-seven Private Account Files, containing copies of business correspondence between Watt³ and Duncan, between Watt and Duncan's various publishers, and between Watt and Co. and their American agent, Harold Paget.⁴ These folders also contain copies of contracts for book or serial publication rights to many of Duncan's works, and inquiries regarding royalty accounts and the retail price of books. Letters from Watt are usually unsigned copies; in the 1890s, these are handwritten copies, but the later letters are unsigned carbons. The correspondence is by no means complete; the extant files often quote from substantial letters, usually from Duncan to Watt, that are not in the files.⁵

Disappointingly, my diligent examination of the Duncan files revealed only one unknown publication: "The Argument," published under the pseudonym "Jane Wintergreen" in *The Queen* in 1918. This fifteen-hundred word sketch was part of a second series of autobiographical essays

similar to those Duncan published in 1908 entitled "*Two in a Flat*, by Jane Wintergreen." In "The Argument" the narrator persuades her servant to allow two colonial officers to billet in their small London house, suggesting that, like *Two in a Flat*, this unpublished collection explored the relationship between a Canadian woman living in London and her eccentric housekeeper. In a letter to Duncan, the assistant editor of *The Queen* reports that he cannot use the entire series but says he would be glad to see a few more excerpts; in a handwritten addition Duncan suggests that if Watt has had no luck selling "the series" he might return one to her to submit as an "occasional contribution" (*The Queen* to Duncan to Watt 28 Nov 1917, folder 187.18).

While my search for new publications in the Duncan folders was relatively fruitless, I did enjoy sifting the papers for information about Duncan's working life. Copyright is an issue that pops up repeatedly; its prominence is not surprising, given the frustration Duncan expressed on the topic in her Canadian journalism and in articles like "Copyright in Canada," published in *The Athenaeum* in 1890. Watt endeavoured to protect her copyright by selling British and American rights to her work separately, but arranging as nearly as possible that the two publications should appear simultaneously. Many British periodicals circulated in the U.S., and their contents were not protected from piracy unless specifically copyrighted in the U.S. as well (by being deposited in the Library of Congress). Duncan appears to have lost the U.S. copyright on her story "The Hesitation of Miss Anderson" (which later appeared in *The Pool in the Desert*) when it circulated in the U.S. in the Christmas 1897 number of the London periodical, *Ladies' Pictorial*, before Watt had succeeded in selling the U.S. rights (folder 33.12).⁶ The second issue that seems to have concerned Duncan was the quality

of the publications in which her articles, short stories, and book serializations appeared. Her early novels (before Watt) had appeared in "ladies' papers" like *The Queen* and the *Ladies' Pictorial*, and in the humour magazine edited by Jerome K. Jerome, *The Idler*. Duncan instructed Watt to try magazines that she considered to be higher quality with the articles and short stories she was writing around the turn of the century. In a letter in which he announced the sale of "A Mother in India" to *Scribner's* at a rate of £6 per thousand words, less than the £8 he was asking, Watt hopes that Duncan will approve the lower rate because she had expressed a desire to see her work appear in "better class magazines, such as *Scribner's*, *Harper's*, *Century*, etc." (Watt to Duncan 21 September 1900, folder 50.16). Watt reports that *Scribner's* found the length of the novella difficult (a concern that persists for modern editors) but accepted it because of its "excellence." By way of contrast, the folder containing this correspondence also contains an offer from the *Illustrated London News* to buy a story by the (Victoria, B.C.) popular novelist and writer of adventure stories, Clive Phillips-Wolley, at the rate of just two guineas per thousand words, slightly more than one-third of Duncan's rate of pay.

Serial publication both of stories and of novels seems to have been lucrative. The payment Duncan received for "A Mother in India" is equal to the advances on royalties Watt negotiated for some of her books, and surpasses the royalty advances of many of Watt's other authors.⁷ Serial publication of her novels was even more lucrative: Duncan received £315 for *The Imperialist* from *The Queen*, much more than she received as an advance for its book publication by Constable (£175); for *Cousin Cinderella* she received £215, only slightly less than the £225 advance she received from Methuen for the same book. By publishing her novels serially before they

appeared in book form, Duncan not only created publicity and a ready market for the release of the book; she also approximately doubled the income she received from any one book.

While the contracts for books included in the collection specify how much Duncan received as an advance against future royalties, the extant documents are less clear about how successful these books were. Duncan's files do not include the half-yearly statements of sales and royalties earned which are required by the contracts, and some of the correspondence suggests that Duncan asked that these statements be sent directly to her. However, the files contain several multi-book contracts, which suggest that, especially at the height of her career, publishers were eager to gain access to "Mrs. Cotes' new novel." In 1907 Methuen signed an agreement for three novels, with advances increasing in size with each book. Multi-book contracts were also signed in 1912 with Stanley Paul and in 1922 with Hutchinson. Although in none of these cases were all three novels delivered according to contract, they do indicate that Duncan was planning her work far in advance of publication: her 1907 contract with Methuen specifies the titles of the three novels to be delivered: *Cousin Cinderella* (1908), *The Burnt Offering* (1910), and *The Consort* (1912, referred to in the contract as "Mary Pargeter"). But they also suggest the falling off of interest in Duncan's work later in her career; the Hutchinson contract does not seem very advantageous, offering only £60 (or the amount of the first six months' royalties earned by the first book) in advance; Hutchinson published *The Gold Cure* posthumously in 1924 with an advance of only £40.

Duncan seems to have terminated her contract with Watt in 1903; the files contain an agreement between them whereby Watt sells his 10% interest in books published between 1894 and 1903 to Duncan for £5,

returns to her all royalty statements concerning those books, and instructs publishers to forward payments and royalty statements directly to her. The reasons for this break can only be matter for speculation; however, the number of magazine publications by Duncan during the years 1900-1903, for which there is no correspondence in Watt's files, suggests that she might have been placing works directly, in breach of their agreement. When she re-signed with Watt in 1905, she asked him to intervene in negotiations already underway to place *Set in Authority* with Doubleday, Page in New York, but reserved the right to collect the stories she had placed in "the American magazines" as a volume without reference to him.

In addition to these details of Duncan's work life, the papers in the A.P. Watt collection offer interesting tid-bits of information to flesh out what has been a fairly thin set of biographical facts. For example, it is clear in the correspondence about *Set in Authority* that Duncan knew the Hamilton-born author, Jean Newton McIlwraith, who was working as a reader for Doubleday in New York. McIlwraith had spent much of her early adulthood living at home in Hamilton with her mother, and writing novels, travel articles and works for children. She is perhaps best known today for the short story "The Assimilation of Christina," which was included in McMullen and Campbell's anthology of short stories by women, *New Women*. McIlwraith moved to New York in 1902 after the death of her mother and seems to have gone to work immediately for Doubleday, where she eventually rose to become head reader while continuing to publish commercial and historical fiction. Duncan seems to have sent her MS for *Set in Authority* directly to McIlwraith, and then wrote her a note of apology when Watt took over negotiations.

Another interesting biographical detail drawn from the correspondence is

Duncan's penchant for changing the names of her novels, sometimes three and four times before they were published. *The Path of a Star* (1899) is referred to in the correspondence by two titles, "Kind Circumstances," and "In a Harbour City," in addition to the two titles under which it actually appeared, *The Path of a Star* in England and *Hilda, a Story of Calcutta* in the U.S. Duncan seems to have preferred the title *The Crow's Nest* for the book that she wrote under the title "Turned Out," and that appeared in England as *On the Other Side of the Latch* (1901), but she was worried that something else had already been published under that title in England. *Set In Authority* (1906) began its life as "The Viceroy," and *Those Delightful Americans* (1902) had no less than three titles after it was sold to the periodical *The Ladies' Field*. In a letter to Watt acknowledging Duncan's request to change the title from "Our Delightful Summer" (it had been bought under the title "Verona's Summer"), editor P.C. Parr writes, "it is fortunate that Mrs. Cotes is more successful in her writing than in her choice of titles" (Parr to A.P. Watt, 29 August 1901, folder 52.13).

In the case of *Cousin Cinderella* (1908), Duncan's penchant for changing titles has some relevance to the interpretation of the novel. Duncan seems to have strongly favoured the title *Cinderella of Canada*, and engaged in a protracted negotiation with Macmillan, the publisher of the US edition, who wanted to change it to *Cousin Cinderella*. Macmillan objected that *Cinderella of Canada* would give readers the wrong idea about the novel: "novel readers here will consider it as a sort of fairy story in which they are not at all interested, and it wont, either, help the sale of the book in Canada, as there readers will, I am sure, be offended by the title and be inclined to resent it" (Watt to Duncan 12 June 1908, folder 94.12). When asked for alternative titles, Duncan suggested "The Maple

Prince” and “Two from Arcady,” both of which are revealing: the former focuses attention away from Mary Trent onto a description of her brother as “The Maple Prince,” underlining the original conception of the book as a sequel to *The Imperialist*; the latter refers to Minnebiac, Ontario, the home of Graham and Mary Trent, as Arcadia, a mythical ideal place. Clearly Macmillan’s won this battle, and both U.S. and British editions were published under their preferred title. Macmillan’s also won another battle: they refused to make the changes and corrections Duncan wanted so that the book would be uniform with the British edition, claiming that as the book was already set and plates made, the changes would cost them £180. The correspondence makes it clear that the British edition incorporates later revisions and has authorial sanction, a surprising discovery since the changes in the British edition significantly mute the witty and challenging criticisms of the British which make the book so much fun.

The Duncan files in the A.P. Watt collection thus offer a significant body of new facts about Duncan’s work and personal life. Little of this information is immediately apparent; it is the result of days of trying to piece together the narratives that organize the bits and pieces of notes, letters, and contracts that are preserved in the files. Few of these narratives contradict what is already known; rather, they add to the biographical work done by Goodwin, Tausky, Fowler and Warkentin, and suggest new avenues of research.

NOTES

1 Two additional letters located in the MacMechan papers at the University Archives, Dalhousie University, indicate an on-going friendship. Two previously unknown interviews with Duncan appeared in the *Globe* (“Not Quite The Unchanging East” [14 November 1903]: 21, and “A Distinguished Canadian Woman: Mrs. Everard Cotes” [15 July

1911]: 10). Additional articles by Duncan that have not appeared in previous bibliographies of Duncan’s work include: “A Fiction-Maker of Tokyo” in *The Athenaeum* 3228 (Sept 7, 1889): 320-21; “Copyright in Canada” in *The Athenaeum* 3252 (Feb 22, 1890): 244-45; “Peter Linnet’s Interview” in *Cosmopolitan* 15 (October 1893): 732-737; “The Entertainer” in *Smart Set* 8:2 (October 1902): 87-101; “The Argument.” By Jane Wintergreen (pseud.) in *The Queen* 143: 3709 (26 Jan 1918): 95.

- 2 Duncan referred to her relationship with Watt in an interview with G.B. Burgin published in *The Idler* in 1895. Marian Fowler comments on correspondence with Watt about Duncan’s work in the Chatto and Windus (publishers) archives.
- 3 One difficulty in working with the correspondence is the problem of determining which Watt is which. The founder of the firm was Alexander Pollock Watt; his son, Alexander Strahan Watt, inherited the business when his father died in 1914, and brought his sons Hansard, William and Peter into the business. Duncan’s notes to her agent invariably begin “Dear Mr. Watt,” and make no distinction between the various Watts handling her affairs, which at different times seem to have been A.P., A.S., and Hansard Watt. Some letters identify the correspondent by the initials [HW], [ASW], or [APW] handwritten on the pages before they were filed, but often the only way to identify the author of a letter is to search the files for a reply and try to determine to whom it was addressed. Publishers and editors who knew the Watts well, such as George Webster of Methuen, adopted the masculine convention of addressing them by their surnames only, which further confuses things. I will adopt Duncan’s convention and refer to her various correspondents at the firm as “Watt.”
- 4 Watt consistently referred to Duncan as “Mrs. Cotes”; she signed all her correspondence with him “S.J. Cotes.” However, this article will follow Canadian academic practice and refer to her as Sara Jeannette Duncan.
- 5 As a rule, business and personal letters between A.P. Watt and the authors he represented were filed in bound correspondence books that are not included in the collection. Twenty-five volumes of these letters are located in the Berg Collection at the New York Public Library, but they only go up to 1891; I haven’t located the ones that span the years that Duncan dealt with the firm, if they survive. See MacDonald, “The Adventures of the Literary Agent: Conan Doyle,

- A.P. Watt, Holmes, and *The Strand* in 1891.”
- 6 “Previous to 1909, [U.S.] copyright was secured by complying exactly with the statutory requirements of (1) the delivery to the Librarian of Congress on or before the day of publication, in this [the US] or any foreign country, of a printed (including typewritten) copy of title or description of the work, (2) the insertion in every copy published of the prescribed copyright notice and (3) the deposit not later . . . than such date of publication . . . of two copies of the best edition of a book or other article . . .” (Bowker 125). Since these steps were not taken prior to the circulation of the *Ladies’ Pictorial*, with Duncan’s story in it, in the U.S., the U.S. copyright was lost.
- 7 For example, Gilbert Parker seems to have received only £25 advance on royalties for his first book, *Pierre and his People* (folder 22.2), and three years later £6 of that was still owing.

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Editing 2002

W.H. New

After about twenty-five years of writing an annual review of Canadian publications (for *JCL* and then *CL*), I’m giving fair warning here that this review is likely the last in what has come to be a regular series.

Consider: Canadian writers write repeatedly *across* genre, even dispute the borders that conventionally describe genre. Variation in perspective matters, and so does the emergence of a shared and personal history. Some of the foremost accomplishments of 2002 also reconstruct the past, selecting from among disparate and competing versions of events a narrative voice (or narrative voices) that will give history the resonance of lyric and that will represent time as the conflicted medium in which people make choices. Irony is not absent from these pages, nor is nonsense any less familiar in most people’s lives than passion or pain. Humour is political even when it constitutes an escape. For just enough seriousness can invite a listener to pay attention, and too much earnestness induce a listener to forget. Cadence can mean everything.

More than a hundred new works of fiction appeared in 2002, many of them remarkable in their imaginative reach, their stylistic skill and intellectual independence. Many more followed well-worn routes (not necessarily dismissible just because of that) into narrative and print. Still others proved inconsistent: some books grasped a clichéd idea with vivid prose; some wrestled an original observation into cliché; all pressed for attention. My comments here are consequently selective; they focus on a few of the books that I responded to, and try to suggest why. In addition to fiction, my comments refer to noteworthy books of prose and poetry, the visual arts and criticism, anthologies and writings about lives and life. I acknowledge in advance, though, that

they scarcely mention children's literature and drama: there isn't space, there wasn't time.

Begin then with fiction, and with a few generalizations. I suspect that the year's work was directed more by publishers' sense of what the public would buy than by a consistent striving for achievement: why else the automatic advertising of established names, the quick publishing of a second, third, or nth book by someone billed as a fresh voice, a new star? And why the lack of serious editing? (I said these were generalizations.) I am not making the tired old distinction between capital-A Art and Mere Literary Fluff here—some of the genre fiction was as good in what it attempted to do as were the books that ordinarily earn the adjective "serious" and invite extensive rereading. Will Ferguson's *Happiness* (Canongate), for instance: here is a laugh-aloud satire of the public enthusiasm for self-help books—a narrative about what happens when an effective self-help book makes all others unnecessary and the publishing industry falls on Serious Times. The characters are cardboard types, but so effectively crafted (every office worker, every tv-watcher, every guru-doubter will recognize the people they skewer) that they carry the narrative from one unexpected turn of events to another: it's a delicious comedy. So (in a different format, a part-nostalgic and part-tongue-in-cheek exchange of attitudes and remembrances between George Bowering [newly named the country's first poet laureate] and Ryan Knighton) is *Cars* (Coach House). So is Terry Griggs' *Rogue's Wedding* (Random House), a picaresque romp of a book, about marriage bed nerves and woman's revenge, which (if it somehow lacks the sad and humane dimensions of great comedy) nevertheless engages with its wit and its skill at sketching vividly idiosyncratic characters.

As with satiric comedy, so with genre mystery: Gail Bowen's *The Glass Coffin* (McClelland & Stewart) takes a conventional plot but embroiders it with one of the

Grimms' fairy tales and ends with an engaging narrative—more stylish than Ian Waddell's *A Thirst to Die For* (NeWest), a cautionary book about political treachery and the sellout of Canadian water, by a former MP, better paced than Joe Fiorito's Tom Thomson mystery *The Song Beneath the Ice* (McClelland & Stewart), more sustained than Andrew Pyper's Amazon thriller *The Trade Mission* (Harper), less obvious than Laura Cuthbert's *When It Rains* (Turnstone), and an enjoyable few hours' reading.

But what does one make of the editor who let this sentence pass in F.G. Paci's serious novel *Italian Shoes* (Guernica): "In safari pants and black top, her face was a study in concentration"? Who let Lisa Appignanesi's *Paris Requiem* (McArthur) start by declaring something "imminently rational"? Who let Helen Humphreys' otherwise wonderfully evocative novel *The Lost Garden* (Harper), about longing, lost love, war, and the ghosts of the past (Woolf's suicide moodily haunts the 1940s narrative), rely on a scene in which an effective topiary garden is created in a matter of hours? Why, in connection with Katherine Govier's *Creation* (Random House)—likely her best novel so far, about Audubon and the paradox that, as a naturalist-painter, he destroyed in order to create, just as "explorers" *find out* in order to *claim*—why does the novel begin with the promise of a narrative that it does not deliver, especially when the narrative that *is* in place could stand on its own? It is sentence by incremental sentence that a fiction builds, and then scene by scene, and an attentive editor will try to prevent readers from stumbling along the way. Or will try to help a writer shape his or her resistance to "standard" sentences (Wendy McGrath's *Recurring Fictions*, UAP, depends on fragments: while I don't personally connect with this book, it is consistent in what it does, and another reader might engage more readily with its politics and technique.) Not that good sentences alone will suffice: David Helwig's

The Stand-In and Jane Barker Wright's *The Understanding* (both from Porcupine's Quill) are full of effective sentences and yet somehow the fiction fails to develop; one composes what happens when a stand-in takes a lecturer's place, the other unlocks the secrets behind an ostensibly happy marriage, and at the end the reader still asks *So?*

Even some of the most (justifiably) read and praised novels of the year could have benefitted from a sterner editorial eye. Consider Guy Vanderhaeghe's historical epic, *The Last Crossing* (McClelland & Stewart), Wayne Johnston's historical morality tale *The Navigator of New York* (Knopf), and Rohinton Mistry's *Family Matters* (McClelland & Stewart), which won the Kiriya Prize for contributing to transPacific understanding. Mistry's novel tells of an old man's dying time and his children's differing reactions to age and decay: cruel in one case, self-interested in another, tender but economically paralyzed in a third. While the book is steeped in detail and earnestly prevails on the reader to empathize with the victims, it is so burdened by its stylistic passion for modifiers, and so repetitive about bodily functions, that one yearns for the red pen.

Vanderhaeghe's novel goes back into nineteenth-century prairie history, to an electrifying time when the American west was opening violently, conflict between the Crow and the Blackfoot was continuing, European settlement and mission activity were extending disruptively across the continent, and the figures who stood *between* "cultures" came to have special roles and power—the Métis guide Jerry Potts, drawn from history, for example, or the *berdache* or *bote* figure, the cross-dressing, gender-ambiguous oracular healer, drawn from Native practice. (The *berdache* figure also appears in Susan Kerslake's *Seasoning Fever* [Porcupine's Quill], though this novel reads finally as a more conventional tale than Vanderhaeghe's does, about adolescent

rebellion, male jealousy, and a kind of frontier triumph.) Despite this premise, Jerry Potts, of all the characters in *The Last Crossing*, is the least realized, the one with the least individualized voice. The others all have an extensive back story, even to including long accounts of Protestant cultishness and the U.S. Civil War. Of course, the *absence* that surrounds Jerry Potts perhaps *is* the book's central concern—perhaps absence *is* Jerry's "back story"—but if so, the absence itself needs to be dramatized more than it is here (as *choice* was dramatized in Vanderhaeghe's earlier and more fully imagined novel *The Englishman's Boy*, for example). There is much to admire in *The Last Crossing*: the narrative engages the reader in moral dilemmas, fast action, history itself, and a few surprises: but the villain is never anything more than an unredeemable villain, and for evil to be so absolute in a novel about moral relativities raises interpretive problems.

Not so with Wayne Johnston's *The Navigator of New York*, Carol Shields' *Unless* (Random House), Nino Ricci's *Testament* (Doubleday), or Austin Clarke's *The Polished Hoe* (Thomas Allen), the last of which received *extensive and positive* editorial advice before it finally appeared in print, and all of which invite partisan response—Ricci's novel perhaps most obviously. It deals (bravely, ambitiously) with the life of Christ, emphasizing Jesus' human role as teacher rather than the clerical identification of the man within the trinity of godhead. Through four perspectives (those of Mary and Peter, for instance), four reasons for following the teacher become apparent (Peter's narrative being, to my mind, Ricci's most effective), but those readers expecting a religious tract will go away disappointed. Generally more affirmative, the reviews of Johnston, Shields, and Clarke focussed respectively on historical context, contemporary social issue, and the effectiveness of narrative strategy. Johnston's tale of a Newfoundland

boy with a troubled past turns in part into an encounter with urban temptations: the power of deceit, the appeal of showmanship, the force of wealth and display. The boy's quest to discover his father takes him into the real-life rivalry between the Arctic explorers Frederick Cook and Robert Peary; each (as fictionally reconstructed) has a history marked by hoax and murder, and as the narrative progresses, the boy (named Devlin Stead) must recuperate his individual identity and his capacity to love. While the Arctic scenes perhaps never chill the reader as much as one might hope, and perhaps go on too long, it is in New York where the main drama plays out. The scenes involving the building of the Brooklyn Bridge are rendered superbly; they punctuate Devlin's quest, the trope of connection given life in image as well as theme.

The novels by Shields and Clarke are quite simply the best works of their respective careers. Shields' book addresses the terrible condition of paralysis and distress that parents feel when their child is in pain, and in the instance that *Unless* portrays, the situation is made more complex by the fact that their daughter's pain is to them at once palpable and incomprehensible (she sits, ragged and wordless, on a Toronto street corner, holding a sign silently inscribed "Goodness"). The wordlessness is key, for Shields constructs a novel about writing as well as a novel about goodness and pain: the title word, *unless*—the worry word—spells out one of the challenges of connection, that of conditionality, the difference between what is and what could be, what might be, what might have been: the possibility of better, or of worse, yet to come. Other prepositions and conjunctions (the language's connectives) structure the rest of the novel, as the girl's mother tries (against a number of obstacles) to complete the writing she has set herself to do. Some readers might find the ending too arbitrary; others will celebrate its deep humanity; still

others will recognize the work's acutely gendered message, about the power to reach out past arbitrariness and random acts, into the celebration of life, giving life, and living.

Clarke's Giller Prize-winning book takes a quite different narrative tack, recording the confessional testimony of a middle-class woman (of mixed racial heritage) in a Barbados that still remembers, and relives, its slave past. Oral in form, powerful in its handling of different speech registers, it is a book to be *heard* as much as read, and the reader who cannot lift the language from the page might well have problems following the narrative thread. But for those readers for whom the language resonates, the tale is as intricate as history itself: full of apparent asides that turn out to be important, mixed messages (the narrator represses one of her names because it is also her maid's name: colour does not guarantee lack of status-consciousness here), and searing social ironies (her son's name, Wilberforce, celebrates freedom from slavery, but the boy-become-man has been educated to behave as an Englishman and is now constrained in another way), the novel bristles with the violence of the slave past it remembers and abhors. Nor is Canada free from responsibility in this portrait of social will. But character is central. The book is testament as well as testimony, depicting the sacrifices people will make for love, and the determination that carries them as far as they can go, into the future.

Among other novels, some sail along for awhile but then one way or another start to flag. Grant Buday's *A Sack of Teeth* (Raincoast), for example, with its carefully crafted point of view, tells of a child who must come to terms with the people around him, a cast that includes a seemingly benign boarder who turns out to be a Nazi émigré, a tyrannical teacher, and a sleaze of a school janitor—but the teacher is such a caricature that the intensity of moral choice that faces the boy gets side-

tracked. Other books are just *over-written*, like Maureen Moore's *Not the Orient* (Oberon), in which the "poor immigrant family" sounds like a cliché; or like Mary Swan's *The Deep* (Porcupine's Quill), where twin sisters get caught up in the First World War and ultimately drown in a prose Atlantic; or like Russell Smith's *The Princess and the Whiskheads* (Doubleday), where a fable about learning the value of high culture turns coy instead of witty. To such a list could be added Donna Morrissey's *Downhill Chance* (Penguin), because its ear for Newfoundland speech cannot overcome its reliance on a romantically well-worn plot, and Susan Haley's *Maggie's Family* (Gaspereau), which gets stylistically stranded while pursuing theatrical and sexual types. Much-hyped as new voices, Marnie Woodrow in *Spelling Mississippi* (Knopf), Lori Lansens in *Rush Home Road* (Knopf), Rui Umezawa in *The Truth About Death and Dying* (Doubleday), Makeda Silvera in *The Heart Does Not Bend* (Doubleday), Rick Salutin in *The Womanizer* (Doubleday), Ann Charney in *Rousseau's Garden* (Véhicule), and Guillaume Vigneault in *Necessary Betrayals* (Douglas & McIntyre, tr. Susan Ouriou) all appeal more for their take on a contemporary topic—lesbian love, black history, the atom bomb, Jamaican inheritance, masturbation, and pregnancy and betrayal—than for stylistic effectiveness.

Some established writers enliven their topics more: Keith Maillard, writing about alcoholism, young love, and dancing in West Virginia, in *The Clarinet Polka* (Thomas Allen); Ivan E. Coyote, penning visceral satiric social observations in *One Man's Trash* (Arsenal Pulp); Robin McGrath, skillfully rendering Newfoundland idiom in her novel about the unseen vitality of a stroke victim's real life, *Donovan's Station* (Killick). With Nancy Richler's first novel *Your Mouth Is Lovely* (Harper), style comes into its own: here a narrator, as it were "speaking" (hence the title) from a Siberian

prison to a child, reimagines the Russian rebellions of 1905, the process of politicization that activates "ordinary" people in a repressive society. The novel thus becomes a reaffirmation of heritage, a gift of remembrance to a subsequent generation. With Robert Alexie's first novel, *Porcupines and China Dolls* (Stoddart), moreover, there is a conscious effort to be socially proactive: the book adapts the oral tale-telling strategies of Gwi'chin society to probe the rhythms of repetition that perpetuate social dysfunction (a tale of a "stolen generation" turns the residential school narrative into a social morality tale: the lack of models of good parenting in one generation leads to inadequate parenting in the next)—but in this case (Alexie performing a social role as a Gwi'chin leader), though the narrative is tangibly and even wearily repetitive for an "outside" reader, the act of repetition finally articulates a process of healing. In contrast, Sharon Butala's *Real Life: Stories* (Harper) tells too much and enacts too little; Josef Skoverecky's *An Inexplicable Story* (Key Porter) enjoys its own Latin cleverness to the detriment of story; Tim Wynveen's *The Sweeter Life* (Random House) tries to tell a John-Cage-influenced story about the art of silence and the life of three siblings, but despite its promising beginning, the book tips over into young-adult-fiction strategies, overexplaining and ultimately sentimental. These are disappointments.

Still others books remain in the "promising" category; look for more from these writers: John Miller (*The Feather Bed*, Dundurn), Rob Budde (*The Dying Poem*, Coach House), Priscilla Uppal (*The Divine Economy of Salvation*, Doubleday), Shaena Lambert (*The Falling Woman*, Vintage), Mark MacDonald (*Home*, Arsenal Pulp), Paulette Dubé (*Talon*, NeWest). There's good writing here. Perhaps there's also a sort of *under-writing*: a recognition that a large issue asks to be addressed, though the book doesn't reach for it yet, or reach consistently

for something beyond incident; sometimes a book, that is, gets caught up in detail, which (interesting as it might be) is not equivalent to an engagement with the world. Cynthia Flood's *Making a Stone of the Heart* (Key Porter) doesn't quite animate early Vancouver the way it suggests it's going to. Neil Bissoondath's worthy character in *Doing the Heart Good* (Cormorant) stumbles in stilted conversations. Dianne Warren's seven novella-length stories in *A Reckless Moon* (Raincoast) deal with people's desire to turn reality into personal symbol; effective in the first story, "Hawk's Landing," the collection subsequently drifts. So does Paulette Jiles' *Enemy Women* (Harper), which (slow to start) evokes a vivid sense of the ravages of the American Civil War, and then closes in a vapid romance. Even Ann Ireland's *Exile* (Dundurn) I would place in their company, for though it won much praise for its subject (a Latin American refugee in Vancouver wins instant support from do-gooders, but comes to learn that he'll have to deal with the fact that he'll be dropped as soon as the next wave of refugees becomes flavour of the week)—but for me the narrative point-of-view narrows what the book is ultimately able to accomplish.

And consider the many books about the topic of the year: young person dealing with drugs, sex, violence and boredom (the author contriving a snappy contemporary idiom to demonstrate the generation's rejection of everything orderly and old). It's the topic of many a first or near-first novel, and in many cases it comes this year with authorial thanks to the creative writing school class that offered support and enthusiasm. A list would include Christy Ann Conlin's *Heave* (Doubleday), Mary-Lou Zeitoun's *13* (Porcupine's Quill), Camilla Gibb's *The Petty Details of So-and-So's Life* (Doubleday), Laisha Rosnau's *The Sudden Weight of Snow* (McClelland & Stewart). David Bergen's *The Case of Lena S.* (McClelland & Stewart) differs from

these in that one teenage liaison involves a Sikh girl, another a girl who is mentally disturbed, but the novel is most alive not when arguing for (or against) social barriers but when dealing with the confusion of the teenage boy. All won reviewers' praise for being young and in-your-face, but none (even Bergen's novel, which one jury lauded) fulfilled its potential. Compare these with Lynn Coady's *Saints of Big Harbour* (Doubleday), Michael V. Smith's *Cumberland* (Cormorant), or Mary Lawson's *Crow Lake* (Knopf). Each of these gets about as much as it can from its imagined plot: young people facing difficulties, struggling past the limits of their elders and those of the community that would constrain them, finding a sort of understanding later, when they have to come to terms with growing up. Lawson's rather straightforward narrative deals with orphaned siblings, one of whom blames herself for the fact that her brother stays at home while she goes off to become "successful"; only in time does she discover that her brother is happy, and that she is the one who has to sort out her priorities. Coady tracks the competing models that face an intellectually gifted boy growing up in the Maritimes: the girls who attract and mock him, the uncle who ridicules him, the teacher who encourages him—yet, while the novel seems pretty clear on what it wants to argue, it seems less certain about what it wants the reader to feel: Coady's challenge is to bring her insight into character and her skill with dialogue into concert with whatever idea it is that matters to her most. Tolerance for differing sexual choices is one nascent theme. "Froot" is a conventional term of abuse in the uncle's mouth, just as "lezzie" is an insult in Zeitoun's *13*, where a character casually announces that her drug-using friends are "not as pervy as those Catholic schoolteachers." But Zeitoun's dialogue is easy, contrived. Beside it, Smith's *Cumberland* shines, one of the discoveries

of the year. It tells of a gay youth growing up in a small Ontario town that has been weakened by industrial closure and economic woe; and Smith's focus (taking the boy's sexuality always implicitly into account, matter-of-factly, without judgment) falls on the town, on the way the town's mindset derives from its economic preoccupations, and on the ramifications of this mindset: the paralysis of ambition that interferes with living. Smith celebrates an active alternative, but he does so with the town's past in mind, appreciating (as George Elliott's work does) whatever is worthy of being remembered.

A different group of books appeals because of the *range* of skills that each book reveals. Watch for more from Sean Johnston, for example, whose *A Day Does Go By* (Nightwood) brings together different kinds of sketch and story about house and family, not yet sustained, but on the way. The American writer D.R. MacDonald seemed to win reviews during 2002 more because he is a summer resident of Cape Breton than because his story collection *All the Men Are Sleeping* (Doubleday) was significantly fine. In fact it was significantly less interesting than the short fiction produced by Rachel Wyatt, say, in *The Last We Heard of Leonard* (Oolichan), which is a wittier, more sustained collection, with stiletto insights into the speech that people use to communicate with others (or to savage them)—but which received less press. Other story collections also shimmered with talent: Timothy Taylor's *Silent Cruise* (Vintage), stylish stories with abrupt endings, including tales such as "Doves of Townsend," about the habit of collecting, or a wonderful novella called "New Start 2.0™"; Lee Henderson's inquiries into the irrational, devastating edges of suburbia in the stories of *The Broken Record Technique* (Penguin); Kevin Armstrong's play with the male modes of sea-story storytelling in *Night Watch* (Penguin), most persuasive in the closing narrative about

rivalry during a Pacific storm; or the 22 selected stories in Diane Schoemperlen's *Red Plaid Shirt* (Harper), where the style grows progressively more elliptical and the recurrent topic is self-obsession.

Four other remarkable story collections stand out: Bill Gaston's *Mount Appetite* (Raincoast), Nancy Lee's *Dead Girls* (McClelland & Stewart), Lisa Moore's *Open* (Anansi), and Tamas Dobozy's *When X Equals Marylou* (Arsenal Pulp). Lee's collection is perhaps the most uneven, but the strongest stories here startle by the intensity of their detail; the recurrent subject is the violence of ordinary youth, but hovering in the background is the violence of real life, that which has been recorded in contemporary newspapers. The strategies of style bring the violence home. Moore's work, too, communicates through style, the strategy here being that which derives from the sparest of observed detail. In "Natural Parents," a day that is full of danger and random accident—the accident of being 'in the moment'—is seemingly neutrally called "ordinary." In "Grace" a wedding reception serves as a venue where various categories of moment can be retold. Each moment in this powerful book comes alive in the sequence of its arranged and resonant details; each painted moment, moreover, asks readers to understand not just its significance in the abstract but also the importance of *seeing* whatever there is to be seen. While Gaston's world is related to Moore's and Lee's, it fastens more on the appetites of men, their hunger for sex, power, fame, and other attractions; the book appeals because of the author's range and because of his clear skill with a variety of styles, from a comic account of a man who claims to be Malcolm Lowry's illegitimate son to *grand guignol*, from a story about the sources of a faith healer's power to those that confront alcoholism and the paralysis of perfectionism. Dobozy's world ranges still more widely in setting, from ancient Alexandria to modern Canada, remembered

Hungary to travellers' Russia; it shapes its sentences wonderfully, at once casting a critical eye on the world and engaging delightedly in its idiosyncrasies; here book collectors rub shoulders with waitresses, addicts, and men who tie flies: the narrators record their ambitions and reveal their vulnerabilities, and readers, cumulatively becoming aware that this book talks also about the process of writing, stand transfixed between two dislocations: the discomfort of laughter and the discomfort of tears.

As with other years, 2002 also saw the reappearance of several works from the past. Some of these have long held favour: Stephen Leacock's *Sunshine Sketches of a Little Town*, for example, in a new edition by Carl Spadoni for Broadview. Others include the Maritime works in the Formac Fiction Treasures series edited by Gwen Davies, which indulge a taste for Edwardian popular fiction, easy dialect, largely secure moral sympathies (there are no uncertainties about point of view here), and a landscape of emotion that is represented through tide, storm, lilac, and the scent of clover: Evelyn Eaton's *The Sea Is So Wide* from 1943 (a romance of Acadian exile that ends with the blending of races epitomizing a passion for freedom); Margaret Marshall Saunders's *Rose of Acadia* from 1898, one of many footnotes to *Evangeline*; Alice Jones's *A Privateer's Fortune* (called *Bubbles We Buy* in 1903), involving lovers, an unsavoury inheritance, and European titles; and C.G.D. Roberts' *The Heart that Knows* from 1906, which criticizes conventional morality regarding children born out of wedlock, in a tale whose heightened prose fastens on revenge, truth, and courage ("betrothed and then betrayed"). Guides to shifting literary taste—and perhaps narrative case studies for ethnographic inquiry—these works will likely appeal to readers with a taste for *how things were* more than to those who enjoy the challenges of narrative disjunction.

Among noteworthy translations are

English-language versions of Jacques Poulin's *Tournée d'automne* (*Autumn Rounds*, Cormorant), in which a St. Lawrence-North Shore man discovers love late in life; Sergio Kokis's *L'art du maquillage* (*The Art of Deception*, Dundurn), in which a painter gets seduced by his ability to forge the great masters, and works his way slowly towards *un*-painting the surfaces of what he has so readily accepted as real; and works by Louise Dupré (*The Milky Way*, Dundurn) and Lise Bissonnette, both fine stylists. Bissonnette's dramatization of Canadian politics in *An Appropriate Place* (Anansi) abruptly dismisses the "two solitudes" version of the country and various nostalgic and economic versions of cultural disparities between anglophone and francophone Canada; in particular, the characters criticize "English" Canada for failing to appreciate political passion in Quebec.

Politics (widely defined) lay behind many a critical book as well, perhaps nowhere more clearly expressed than in the contrast between two books that claimed the word "odyssey" for their title: George Elliott Clarke's *Odysseys Home* (UTP), an eloquent, impassioned, and carefully argued set of essays on black writing in Canada, the culture of margin, minority, and dispute, and both the overt and the covert languages of racism; and W.J. Keith's conventional *Canadian Odyssey* (McGill-Queen's UP), a reading of Hugh Hood's *The New Age* cycle, isolating literal, allegorical, moral, and analogical approaches to the fictions, elucidating their Catholicism and affirming (as 20th-century Canadian) the social accomplishment of this particular *roman-fleuve*.

In a class of its own, Douglas Coupland's engaging, imaginative *Souvenir of Canada* (Douglas & McIntyre) is a kind of running alphabet of things Canadian, a collection of illustrations with caption commentaries from Canuck and Dew Line to Hockey and Zed (missing CBC, Pablum, Lucy Maud, and Bell, but otherwise pretty inclusive); the

illustrations are particularly striking, and include some remarkable photographic “still lifes,” arrangements of Canadian *things* that function iconographically. This is perhaps Coupland’s most evocative and arresting book since *Generation X*, a literary rendezvous with the culture that surrounds him.

There were, of course, several critical writings that were less emotionally engaged than Clarke’s—matter-of-fact accounts of careers, as in the case of Linda Rogers’ monographs on Al Purdy and Bill Bissett (*Guernica*), for example, Lianne Moyes’ *Gail Scott* (*Guernica*), or Reingard Nischik’s critical anthology *Margaret Atwood: Works and Impact* (*Anansi*), but these, too, were often explicitly political. Moyes’ book (the longest in the new *Guernica* series) sets out a carefully worded feminist argument to explain Scott’s career (Scott herself translated Michael Delisle’s stories, *Helen with a Secret* [Mercury] in 2002), and the essays that Nischik collects range across topics, from genre and cartooning to ecology and personal interview. Margaret Atwood’s *Negotiating with the Dead* (Cambridge) gathers recent talks and essays on literary connections and the craft of writing.

Uncommon Ground (Knopf) is an avowedly personal “celebration of Matt Cohen,” put together by his friends, Graeme Gibson among them; it is a fine book, ranging from critical writings by Stan Dragland to memoirs by Daniel Poliquin, Don McKay, Alice Munro, and others. It is also intense both with presence and with loss. A book of a rather different order, Sherrill Grace’s *Canada and the Idea of North* (McGill-Queens UP, 2001) also burns with a persuasive passion: about Canadian independence and the importance of Northern writers and writing—and the image of the north in Canadian imaginations—as a bulwark against loss. Nancy Huston’s *Losing North* (McArthur) muses more fragmentarily on land, tongue, and self, childhood and what it means to live “abroad”; while full of won-

derful phrases (including the title: in French, the phrase “losing north” means “forgetting what one is about to say”), these pieces never quite cohere as essays: but that is perhaps their point, arguing that “Our memory is a construction, a tale filled with gaps.” Herménégilde Chiasson’s declaredly Acadian essays, published in Wayne Grady’s translation as *Available Light* (Douglas & McIntyre), also range in effectiveness; these, however, prove most vivid when they focus on the visual arts and the specifics of childhood, and are least so when they seek the intensity of emotional illumination. Among many art books, I welcome Joan Murray’s new view of the Group of Seven through their flower paintings, simply called *Flowers* (McArthur), and four fine books from Art Books Canada, all gallery catalogues, respectively of the art of “number structures,” female nudes, contemporary photographs, and pop posters: Kazuo Nakamura’s *The method of nature*, Randolph Stanley Hewton’s *Modern Colours*, and collections of the work of Roy Arden and Ken Lum. I would also single out Ian Thom’s *E.J. Hughes* (Douglas & McIntyre) for special praise; an informative text, based largely on the correspondence between the very private Vancouver Island painter and his Toronto agent, follows the artistic career from war to landscape; long ignored by the art world at large, Hughes nevertheless maintained an enthusiastic small following—and with this book comes the recognition that the small following has long since grown huge. The artistic rendering of space—not quite realist, not quite magic realist—evokes motion caught in the moment, site caught by surprise; Thom’s book is a tribute to the man, and also an indirect treatise on the history of taste.

Approaching the question of taste from another angle, Stephen Henighan’s prize-winning *When Words Deny the World* (Porcupine’s Quill) takes Canadian criticism to task with a set of wide-ranging, solid,

challenging *thinking* about why some contemporary books get published and prized; clearer on what he dislikes than about what he admires in recent Canadian books, Henighan calls for the “reshaping” of writing in Canada, for seriousness rather than trendiness, commercialism, and aimless border-crossing. Heather Murray’s scholarly *Come, Bright Improvement!* (UTP) approaches the question of public and private taste through a different lens; examining the literary, religious, and abolitionist societies of nineteenth-century Ontario, Murray shows how they shaped what people thought it appropriate to read and to approve. Contextualizing the societies’ judgments in local history, her book also provides a serious glimpse of some of the competing personalities in Ontario culture and politics.

A more evocative book of memory and reclamation is *Lake of the Prairies* (Doubleday) by the fiction writer Warren Cariou. Funny, sad, full of wonderfully narrated tales of fishing, 4-H Club incidents, rapscaillon daring and penance-without-regret, the book begins with an epigraph from Kim Stafford, that “a place is a story told many times.” This ‘biography of a place’ (“Lake of the Prairies” is the Cree name for Meadow Lake, Saskatchewan) relies on images drawn from both the domestic and the natural world—barbecue sauce, blueberries, and muskeg (the instability of the land suggesting the potential for loss)—and uses them, together with vivid delineations of characters *and character*, to reflect on how people-in-place learn their own humanity. Cariou’s tale is also a tribute to his father, a record of how he discovers his own Métis heritage, and a testament to the intensity of love.

Life writing took a number of other ingenious directions in 2002—from the useful interviews (with sixteen young writers, including Bush, Coady, Crosbie, Heighton, Martel, McCormack, Niedzviecki, Redhill, Smith, Turner, and Winter) collected by

Michelle Berry and Natalee Caple in *The Notebooks* (Anchor) to those in Tim Bowling’s anthology of conversations with poets, *Where the Words Come From* (Nightwood), with Don McKay interviewed by Ken Babstock, for example, and more than a dozen other contemporary poets in sensitive encounter with readers who know their writing. There is also David Zieroth’s beautiful account of his childhood, *The Education of Mr. Whippoorwill* (Macfarlane, Walter & Ross). Emily Pohl-Weary, Judith Merrill’s granddaughter, brought her grandmother’s life into focus in *Better to Have Loved* (Between the Lines); Cornelia Strube’s *The Barking Dog* (Thomas Allen) was one of several cancer memoirs, this one taking the form of fictional narrative, the satire expressing the wit with which a victim sometimes deals with oppressive reality (other cancer narratives include some of the stories in Jane Eaton Hamilton’s *Hunger*, Oberon); and in *Writing in the Feminine in French and English Canada* (UTP), Marie Carrière sought to elucidate the “relational ethics” between genders. More conventional biographies, however, traced the lives of such literary figures as *Constance Lindsay Skinner* by Jean Barman (UTP), Roy Daniells (in *Professing English* by Sandra Djwa, UTP), and Pauline Johnson (*Flint and Feather* by Charlotte Gray, Harper). (Relatedly, Carole Gerson and Veronica Strong-Boag edited Johnson’s *Collected Poems and Selected Prose* [UTP] back into print.) While short on literary criticism, which would have informed some of the historical evaluations, Barman’s book ably reclaims Skinner’s remarkable literary career in the United States, her life at the edge of influential American literary and art circles, and her intense rivalry with William Arthur Deacon. Gray’s book tells not so much the life and times as the life and stories, relying on the appeal of anecdote for its momentum. Djwa’s is a remarkable scholarly inquiry into the Daniells

papers, retrieving for history the many ways in which Daniells shaped the direction of Canadian literary studies, and retrieving for the public record the extraordinary circumstances in which the man grew up, and the psychological trauma to which his early upbringing led.

Among other books of general prose, John Griffith Armstrong's *The Halifax Explosion and the Royal Canadian Navy* (UBC P) places the blame for the disaster squarely on the government; though it is solidly written (and mentions MacLennan and McNeil), it bears only indirectly on literature. (Likely the most effective poem in Deirdre Diana Dwyer's *Going to the Eyestone* [Wolsak & Wynn] also deals with the Explosion; the poems here are anecdotal by design.) The brief essays gathered in Drew Hayden Taylor's *Furious Observations of a Blue-Eyed Ojibway* (Theytus) are occasionally funny, but like the previously unpublished talks and reviews that Robert Denham has collected in *Northrop Frye on Literature and Society 1936-1989* (UTP), they are more for aficionados than for general consumption. (Most historically interesting in the Frye collection are his early definitions of archetype and myth, but most striking are his harsh judgments of television comedy.) Christopher Gittings' *Canadian National Cinema* (Routledge) is an important investigation into forms of cultural nationalism; inquiring generally into the ideology of representation, Gittings probes how film has worked to express shifting political sensibilities: the function of immigration films, for example, the melodrama of invasion and settlement narratives, the generic changes that affect representations of ethnicity, aboriginality, and the state. William Beard and Jerry White's edition of essays on anglophone film in Canada since 1980, *North of Everything* (U Alberta P), reads somewhat like an appendix to Gittings' work; general essays on such subjects as cultural policy, documentary, and experi-

ment accompany more specific essays on Cronenberg, Egoyan, Mehta, Wheeler, AIDS films, and aboriginal narratives.

Anthologies included important ethnically motivated gatherings—recuperations, even: reassessments of accomplishments that had previously been marginalized—among which are John Miska's *Blessed Harbours* (Guernica), assembling Hungarian Canadian writers (Tihanyi, Zend, Payerle, Anna Porter, and more); Elizabeth Dahab's *Voices in the Desert* (Guernica), a collection of Arabic Canadian women writers; and Wayne Compton's eloquent venture in personal discovery, *Bluesprint* (Arsenal Pulp), a collection of Black B.C. "literature and orature," with an extensive bibliography. Different in kind, but related in context, is *All Amazed for Roy Kiyooka* (Arsenal Pulp), ed. John O'Brian *et al.*, a compilation of art, poetry, biography, and reference details. Anne Compton (*et al.*), editing *Coastlines: The Poetry of Atlantic Canada* (Goose Lane), and Keith Harrison, editing *Islands West* (Oolichan), a lively collection of B.C. stories, provide a healthy corrective to the excellent and useful (but still Centric) anthology edited by Russell Brown and Donna Bennett, the second edition of their Oxford survey, now titled *A New Anthology of Canadian Literature in English*. John Robert Colombo's wonderful *The Penguin Treasury of Popular Canadian Poems and Songs* (Penguin) opens up a treasury of remembrance. In a different genre, Oberon's reliable *Best Canadian Stories '02* and *Coming Attractions* together suggest the formal and tonal range of contemporary short fiction during the year, Don McNeill's "Blame Canada" standing out for its sense of present tension; adolescence (as is the case with a number of longer fictions) appeared to be a repeated motif, and for the most part was more credible in the short forms. But of special interest is the essay collection assembled by Tim Lilburn, *Thinking and Singing* (Cormorant), which is one of the

most absorbing and intellectually provocative books about poetry to have been published in recent years. Gathering comments by Robert Bringham, Don McKay, Jan Zwicky, Dennis Lee, Brian Bartlett, and Lilburn himself on “poetry and the practice of philosophy,” the book explores how poetry means, how it *must* “mean” in order to warrant respect. Being alive (it affirms) is a great gift; thinking about being alive is even tantamount to poetry; thinking in sound and word and image about the vitality that makes us human, permits us to see, speak, listen, change: this is nothing short of necessary—the music a way of perceiving that lets us grow.

The recurrent interest in space, place, and the natural world, which permeates so many of the books already mentioned, surfaces again in such collections as Grace Rajnovich’s *Reading Rock Art* (Natural Heritage), which examines more than 400 examples of Algonkian “stories in picture writing” from 2000 years ago, emphasizing their sacred function as Midewiwin writing, granted by the manitous of the cliffs. In addition, Seán Virgo’s anthology, *The Eye in the Thicket* (Thistledown), is far and away the best collection of Canadian nature writing ever assembled, with fine essays on snakebite and bees, stones and history, with a range that includes Patrick Lane on his childhood and Jan Zwicky on “agribiz”: this is a book that is not to be missed. Nor is Cole Harris’s brilliant work of historical geography, *Making Native Space* (UBC P), which traces the emergence of reserve policies in British Columbia, the alteration of the original local government policies of James Douglas in favour of more discriminatory practices, and the subsequent impact of whatever came to be accepted as “normal” on issues affecting land, land rights, and social relations.

Turn then to poetry. I read more than three dozen collections this year (out of likely twice or three times that number of

books that were actually published). And once again I found some more engaging than others. Some invoked familiar names: the selected poems of Milton Acorn appeared in Anne Compton’s edition as *The Edge of Home* (Island Studies Press, UPEI); Douglas Lochhead’s *Weathers: poems new and selected* (Goose Lane) reflects on the “green cleansing” we all need; P.K. Page’s *Planet Earth* (Porcupine’s Quill), a selection of old and new work, comes with an excellent introduction by Eric Ormsby; Fred Cogswell’s *Deeper than Wind* (Borealis) displays a felicitous sense of rhyme and an acute consciousness of age. Raymond Souster’s *Take Me Out to the Ball Game* (Oberon) is his best book in years, relying this time on a recurrent baseball metaphor, the voice enacting exactly how it feels to play, watch, and also write. But other writers seem to have developed less from their first startling book, so that the family lyrics in Joan Crate’s *Foreign Homes* (Brick) are less compelling than the Pauline Johnson poems she published some years ago; and Margo Button’s *The Elder’s Palace* (Oolichan), of interest for a parallel text in Inuinnaqtun and for the cultural therapy it finds supportive, continues to write out the author’s personal, terrible loss of a schizophrenic son. Other writers, too—Antonio d’Alfonso with *Getting On with Politics* (Exile), Glen Downie with *Desire Lines* (Wolsak & Wynn), Hiro Boga with *Love Songs for a Tender God* (Oolichan)—range across the familiar territory of living in the now, living with age and memory, and living in the contexts of love. But still other writers found a more individual voice and a way to evoke it compellingly on the page.

Linda Rogers’ *The Bursting Test* (Guernica), for example, includes some quite wonderful intense, lyric mini-narratives that cumulatively deal with the premise invoked by the title: how much can an individual, can the planet itself, withstand pressure? Some poems are witty and acerbic observa-

tions of behaviour and memory, such as “Week-ends at the Buddha Hotel”; others (e.g., “Missing”) express the intensity of loneliness and desire, and the distressing memory of “being used.” At the heart of the book is a plea for peace, the earth’s survival, for continuance. And the power of irony is that it addresses other kinds of power (military, economic, physical), that it functions as a way of displacing what cannot be controlled so as to deny large claims on absolutes their further claim on truth. Dennis Cooley’s *Bloody Jack* (U Alberta P) bursts with a different kind of energy; a big book, with an introduction by Doug Barbour, it is a largely comic vernacular narrative about being in the here-and-now (and in the comparatively recent here-and-now), which is at once a personal claim on presence and a spirited wander through the Canadian West. Tom Wayman’s *My Father’s Cup* (Harbour) evokes the intensity of the personal through a record of his father’s dying: the poems come cumulatively to terms with the fact that one person’s presence affects others, and that mortality alters one’s perception of a place in the world. This consciousness of what’s ephemeral and what lasts permeates a number of other effective books as well, among them Patrick Friesen’s *the breath you take from the lord* (Harbour), where long lines narrate internal dialogues about place, person, family, and faith; Marlene Cookshaw’s *Shameless* (Brick); Aaron Bushkowsky’s *Mars is for Poems* (Oolichan), less consistent perhaps, but imaginatively adapting space metaphors to represent family interactions; Fiona Tinwei Lam’s *Intimate Distances* (Nightwood), with its sharp oxymoron but not always controlled lyricism; and Kathleen McCracken’s *A Geography of Souls* (Thistledown), an uneven but linguistically lyrical combination of dream poems and attempts to find and articulate a sense of home, to reflect from the vantage point of Ireland the worlds

of Native and Other in North America.

Among other books, I was drawn to the liveliness of Karen Solie’s *Short Haul Engine* (Brick, ed. Barry Dempster), a book whose enthusiasm for Babstock and Jarman shapes its idiom; and to the precision of detail that startles every page of the first book by Adam Dickinson, *Cartography and Walking* (Brick), from whom much more will be heard; and to the exact observations of nature (birds, reptiles, mammals, mainly in Mexico) that motivate Derk Wynand’s meditations in *Dead Man’s Float* (Brick). But I was also drawn to the imagination that takes flight in works by Carla Funk, George McWhirter, Norm Sibum, and Ken Howe. Some of the poems in Howe’s *Household Hints for the End of Time* (Brick) feel too close to the personal to connect wholly with other readers, but in a wonderful work called “Assorted Views of Chocolate Cake,” Howe marvelously combines his ironic self-awareness with telling meditations on home and snow. Sibum, too, contrives a witty but placid sense of contemplation (“What does one do with holiness? / I’d close my eyes, try to sleep”). Funk’s *Head Full of Sun* (Nightwood) contains an effective series on particular women (Goliath’s wife, Eve, Ruth, Jezebel), and a work that is at once a brilliant comedy and a serious meditation called “Alphabet of Psalms,” which at one point poignantly reads: “when the words become lies and the lies/ wear the names of people I know / I want to believe they . . . / leave the room and page thinking / *that poem is about me / she means me / I want her to mean me.*” Desire: it takes a number of different forms, not least that which it assumes in George McWhirter’s brilliant contemporary eclogues, “Ovid in Saskatchewan,” one of the suites in *The Book of Contradictions* (Oolichan). In the midst of dislocation and impending disaster, McWhirter finds gentleness. It is a marvellous talent, a tribute still to the realism of hope in a world torn to pieces by pride.

Al Purdy and Paul Dutton: Poetry on CD

Kevin McNeilly

Al Purdy's recorded poems embrace their own demise, cultivating a pathos in dissolution and loss. The monumental and the inchoate intersect meaningfully in Purdy's voice, a style characterized by admixture and fluidity—and by the poised, off-kilter self-consciousness of work-in-process. "I have been stupid in a poem," runs the declaration in "Trees at the Arctic Circle": "I will not alter the poem/ but let the stupidity remain permanent" in a kind of verbal permafrost, the vagaries of speech ossified, historicized. The title poem of *Necropsy of Love*, a 1998 spoken word CD issued by Winnipeg's Cyclops Press, addresses the complexities of historical process and verbal monument at a typically personal level:

If it came about you died
it might be said I loved you:
love is an absolute as death is,
and neither bears false witness to
the other—
But you remain alive.

Utterance, tenuous though it may be (as in what *might be said*), becomes absolute, takes on weight and permanence, only posthumously, when it dies; word and life, for Purdy, remain antithetical. Bearing true witness is an extinction, and occurs only on formally contrived perfections, in the hollow completeness of the cliché:

No, I do not love you
hate the word,
that private tyranny inside a public sound,
your freedom's yours and not my own . . .

How strange for a writer so verbally exuberant to claim to hate words, for a publishing poet to deride his public function; sure, we may want to qualify such a reading by noting that what the poet finds abhorrent are *empty* words, or the expressive limitations

of context, but I think that the point still stands. ("I am a sensitive man/ and would you believe I write poems?" Purdy queries his fellow barflies nonplussed at the Quinte Hotel, offering with deadly dark humour "a heart-warming moment"—extemporizing, again—"for Literature"). Acutely cognizant of a deathly stasis inherent in writing, his texts document the inadequacy of bearing witness; they belie themselves, gradually fraying toward the world they can only catch in hints and gestures, and in awkward moments of stupidity, of stupefaction. Purdy's poetry wants to dispossess itself ("not my own"), to be freed into an unclosed present; it attempts—always an attempt, never an achievement—to write its way out of its necropsy, its defeat, toward the living: to "touch," as he asserts at this poem's close, "the moving moment once again."

Necropsy of Love was released barely a year before Purdy's death, and offers a valediction, taking the form of an extended reading of the sort Purdy often gave. Many Purdy chestnuts are here—the disc begins with "At the Quinte Hotel" and "Homemade Beer," as most of his readings did (certainly the four or five I saw). Some of his strongest poems, drawn from *The Cariboo Horses* (1965), *Poems for All the Annettes* (1962/68), *North of Summer* (1967), *The Stone Bird* (1981), and *Piling Blood* (1984), are mixed in with recent pieces and lesser-known meditations. This disc is essentially an anthology, and something of an autobiography, the poems interspersed with brief anecdotes, digressions and commentary as they would have been at a reading. Purdy's distinctive slur, the musky, off-hand swagger that inheres in his speaking voice, washes across the texts, marking them indelibly—once you have heard him—with the peculiar rhythmic surge and blur that have come to characterize his free verse. These rhythms probe, scuffle, search, and push on. I hear Purdy as a happy malcontent, embracing the perpetually unfinished business of making sense as the

heart of his task as a writer. The first track, his opening remarks on overcoming the fear of public reading, mesh resignation and querulousness: "You don't give a shit any more, that's the point. You know, you let things fall wherever they're gonna go." That's the point. The insistent coupling of poetry and death in Purdy stems not from morbid-ity so much as from the recognition that the good poem, the functional poem, refuses closure and affirms a vital resistance to being finished off (a refusal affirmed by the frequent absence of closing punctuation, especially periods, in his poems), even as it hammers and embalms the furious, exhilarating rush of declaiming. In "Funeral," a lyrical rant incorporating a eulogy for his mother, Purdy presents himself bearing witness, as a son, "naked / on the needle point of now / before the rushing winds of time." Poetry faces off against death-bound absolutes not to win, not to break free, but to affirm, in flight, the possibility of a contingent human energy. Purdy's poems are not, as Robert Frost once put it, temporary stays against confusion; instead, they embrace that confusion outright as their substance, revel in it, knead it for all its worth.

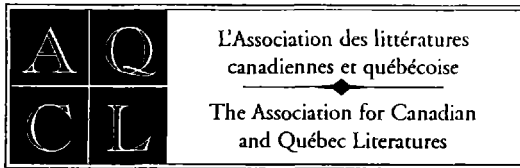
In "The Dead Poet," Purdy imagines a "dead brother" coming before him in his mother's womb, writing "words on the walls of flesh" that would "alter" him; the overused womb-tomb set-piece becomes in Purdy's hands a finely-wrought elegy on the permanence of verse. He describes "stone poems" in the North African desert, monumental works obliquely recalling Shelley's "Ozymandias." By contrast, Purdy seeks out the "music of blood," "a small whisper/ . . . / and a brief saying" that remind him "where the words came from," in the ephemeral tissues of human body—both maternal and fraternal. The fleshiness of Al Purdy's voice, its aural thickness, prods his listeners toward an awareness of how fully poetry depends on the pulse, of how a poem literally piles blood. Purdy's

preoccupations with history and aesthetics, in such poems as "Lament for the Dorsets," are essentially queries into the false hope of preservation, but also affirm the artist's essential role as bearing personal witness to body heat, a testament that someone was once here, that however fleetingly human life happened. Days and now years after Purdy's passing, with recordings such as *Necropsy of Love* offering liminal testimony to his absence, how is it, we need to ask ourselves, that these lines might still be warm.

The recorded poem documents the moment of its release, its encounter with the very framework of containment that it aspires to exceed: to live beyond itself, to cheat its own death. This engagement with the lived is pushed to its limits in Paul Dutton's *Mouth Pieces*, a CD that collects compositions and improvisations, "newer and older works" as Dutton's own notes assert, "one as old as the '70s, but most as new as the day I stepped into the studio." Again, questions of time and memory, of history and documentation, are foregrounded as we listen to these pieces, which Dutton describes as "explorations of the limits of human sonic expression," many of them beyond generic categories (even those as unfixed as "sound poetry" and "audiopoems"). Dutton seems happy to call what he does "soundsinging," a designation drawn from contemporary improvised music to label work by Phil Minton, Maggie Nicols, Sainkho Namchylak, and others, and that certainly situates his ongoing performances with the improvising collective CCMC, based at Toronto's Music Gallery. While there are elements of song in Dutton's mouth pieces—fractured melodies, chants and refrains—they are better understood not as finished works but as essays, or probes. A set of four brief explorations of nasals—"M's 'n' m's 1," "An M 'n' an M," "M's 'n' m's 2," and "M's 'n' O's"—are positioned at regular points in the 21 cuts on the disc to create the coherence of a musical set, acting as recurrent motifs within the

divergent sonic structures that Dutton explores. Their titles also suggest much about Dutton's method: he chooses a particular verbal form, morphemic set or word pattern and builds a performance by intensely sustained close reading, working aloud through the aural scaffolding that those parts of speech provide. For instance, the opening track, "Reverberations," uses overtone singing to extend the word-pair "going gong" into a 4 minute chant. "Snare, Kick, Rack, and Floor" is, as Dutton himself puts it, "a verbal drum solo executed with the elements of the phrases 'combustible compatibility' and 'compatible combustibility.'" Each track focuses on a specific aspect of human sound production, much of it vocal, all of it corporeal. The body—lung, muscle, vocal cord, bone cavity—is made to resonate, to speak a fleshy idiom: visceral grunts and spitty burbles, duck squawks and

lip farts, lovely hums and breathy murmurs. Textures are sustained, held, examined from as many sides and angles as Dutton can manage, unfolded and reworked into what are essentially poetic forms, fashioned things. We ought to remember that the root of "poem" is the Greek *poiein*, to make; Dutton's recordings trace a repeated process of making, of giving shape, of searching out the essential elements of rhythmic or tonal architecture. They are akin to the language musics of Anthony Braxton or the solo improvisations of Roscoe Mitchell, each of whom builds sets of successive improvisational forays by relying on minimal structural specifics, a collection of basic designations for timbre or speed or form. Dutton's mouth pieces, for me, are best described as poems, inasmuch as they attempt to ascertain in performance the means by which meaning and sound coalesce in reading,



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“Descent into Representation, Ascent towards Power”

Eva-Marie Kröller

In chapter 5 of *The Inglorious Arts of Peace: Exhibitions in Canadian Society during the Nineteenth Century* (U of Toronto P), E. A. Heaman insists that “[t]o reduce this rich popular culture to bloodless academic categories would bely the argument of this chapter—that on the fairgrounds, popular culture was able to defy the intellectual imperialism of the Enlightenment,” but this wariness toward theoretical frameworks that unduly simplify the eclectic and often contradictory material before the author characterizes the entire study, not merely this chapter. This does not mean that *The Inglorious Arts of Peace* proceeds without a sophisticated conceptual framework; indeed, the first chapter introduces, in overview, a “theory of the exhibition,” linking the latter to rationalist and encyclopedist ideals of education in which the training of the mind was powerfully reinforced by visual object lessons. Heaman is alert from the beginning to the gap between ideal and real, but what distinguishes her work from many others that belabour the constructedness of cultural symbolism is the zest with which she delves into the messy contradictions of “the descent into representation” which could also “be an ascent towards power.” Heaman’s reader is at no time in doubt about the substance and seriousness of this study, but it is the effective organization and polished story-telling that make this book difficult to put down.

Moving outward from “Exhibitions in Central Canada” to “Canada at the Inter-

national Exhibitions,” Heaman concludes with chapters on women and First Nations as groups that, because they “were not considered full historical agents,” were not easily accommodated by exhibitions, but nevertheless made shrewd use of them to forward their own cause. This outline makes for a national narrative that runs both parallel with and in counterpoint to its officially sanctioned versions. An excellent example is Heaman’s documentation—persuasive because of the thoroughness with which she consults sources in both English and French—of the squabbles between English and French-Canadian participants, including commissioners, who accused each other of attending to personal ambitions rather than the nation’s business, thus undermining the Canadian government’s determination to demonstrate the harmonious co-existence of the two language groups. Her description of the feud between J.-C. Taché and Alfred Perry at the 1855 Paris Exhibition, for example, provides an intriguing sequel to the riot, six years earlier, that led to the burning of the Parliament Buildings in Montreal. At the time Taché and Perry found themselves in opposite factions, with Perry leading the mob in hot pursuit of Lord Elgin for passing the Rebellion Losses Bill and Taché guarding Prime Minister Lafontaine’s house. There is also keen irony in the fact that Perry (who hurled the brick that shattered the chandelier that caused the buildings to burn) was in Paris to present his brother’s fire engine, a machine successful enough to have won an award earlier at the Great Exhibition in London and presented by none other than Lord Elgin, who may well have been fuming at the imposition.

Heaman's accomplished rendering of such scenes frequently invites comparison with contemporary situations. Anyone ever drafted to serve on a committee will enjoy the depiction of some of the people who looked after the 1862 exhibit in London where the "vice-principal of Bishop's college . . . apparently spent half his time gluing slips of paper with his name onto the commission letterhead and the other half writing a pamphlet extolling the Eastern Townships," and readers of *Maclean's* infamous annual surveys of Canadian universities will encounter a prototype in an exhibition catalogue which caused Principal Dawson of McGill to fulminate against the description of his university as "irreligious and weak in Classics and mathematics." No wonder one of the greatest challenges was to locate symbols of the nation's "collective aspiration and self-definition" that would neutralize regional and social differences like these, with the result that the story of Canada was henceforth "decipher[ed] and set down" by its government.

Although its brilliant writing puts it in a class of its own, Heaman's study resembles two other recent books also published by U of Toronto P, H. V. Nelles's *The Art of Nation-Building: Pageantry and Spectacle at Quebec's Tercentenary* and Colin M. Coates and Cecilia Morgan's *Heroines and History: Representations of Madeleine de Verchères and Laura Secord*. Lavishly illustrated, *The Art of Nation-Building* is a major work of historical recovery of an event—the tercentenary in 1908 of Samuel de Champlain's arrival in Quebec—that has all but disappeared from collective memory because, as Nelles argues, the pageantry failed to bring about the harmony between English and French Canadians that it was meant to generate after the serious disagreements during the Boer War. The tercentenary is worth studying, however, precisely "because it reflected so well the several Canadas living parallel lives," and because it anticipates concerns that occupy

Canadian historians and myth-makers to this day. The city of Quebec itself embodied such "parallel lives": following the initiative of Lord Dufferin and subsequent Governors-General for the restoration of its gated walls, Quebec—no longer the thriving port it had once been—had made itself over into a historical theme park for high-end tourism. If the 1893 Columbian Exposition had been cause to complete the Château Frontenac so that visitors on their way to Chicago could lodge at a picturesque hotel in an even more picturesque setting, then Chicago in turn became the inspiration for many of the ideas incorporated into the tercentenary. It would be easy for Nelles to seize on this cross-pollination as a typical feature of such pseudo-events and either leave it at that or, worse, endlessly go on about it, but—like Heaman—he is after the complications behind the façade. He points out, for example, that anglophone women were "overrepresented in the court scenes" at the tercentenary because they were able to afford the expensive costumes; at the same time, anglophone women assumed the role of *habitant* women with greater ease than did their francophone counterparts possibly because they were donning a quaint costume rather than slipping into the shoes of ancestors. It would have been interesting to know what part, if any, the popular historical fiction of the time played in the planning of the pageantry, obsessed as these novels were with the history of New France as seen through the lens of the English. An image of "Le Chien d'or" in the program commissioned by the National Battlefields Commission suggests that books like William Kirby's *The Golden Dog* did provide a familiar point of reference.

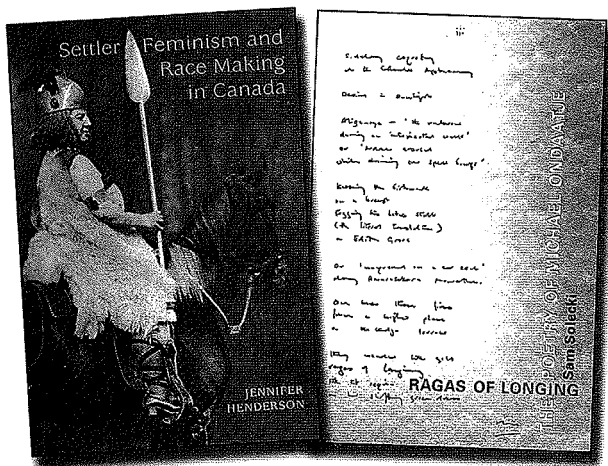
First Nations people participating in the festivities were required to dress up in the regalia of Plains Indians because these made them more "authentic" to an audience steeped in stereotype, but they were not so easily subsumed into the role of extras that

organizers had mapped out for them. Although the commodification involved remains scandalous, Nelles points out that the dominant view of Native people as a melancholic and vanishing race was belied by the spectacle of “a living, reproducing, thriving presence” in the Indian encampment on the Plains of Abraham.

This demonstration of an alternative history may have been inadvertent, but *Heroines and History* documents an instance where such protests were deliberate. Morgan, who in her analysis of Laura Secord as cultural heroine is preoccupied with versions of history in Canadian school textbooks, writes about Milton Martin, a Mohawk from the Six Nations reserve, and a World War I veteran. As a “public school teacher, principal, and secretary of the Ontario Public School Men Teacher’s Federation,” Martin campaigned against the stereotyping of Native people in textbooks as savage, dishonest, and barbarous. Morgan admits that more research is required to determine whether Martin’s work was as isolated a case as it currently seems, but her chapter on the “Iroquois presence” in the Laura Secord myth performs a valuable gesture in the same direction.

Coates and Morgan spend more time on the theoretical scaffolding of their case studies than either Heaman or Nelles, but in the end it is the rich textual and pictorial documentation of two iconic figures in Canadian history, one of them all but forgotten, that makes *Heroines and History* greatly rewarding reading. If the organizers of the Quebec tercentenary failed to erect a giant Angel of Peace to compete with New York’s Statue of Liberty, then a twenty-five-foot statue of Madeleine de Verchères greeting travellers on their approach to Montreal was the next best thing, especially if the monument could be made to project typically Canadian virtues. “In too many cases the statue of Liberty suggests only license and the freedom to pursue individ-

ual, at the expense of the public interest,” proclaimed Governor-General Lord Grey, using rhetoric that serves to distinguish Canadians from Americans to this day, “while the history of Madeleine de Verchères will suggest the highest ideals of citizenship.” Louis-Philippe Hébert’s sculpture was erected in 1911 with great fanfare, but its location on the shore of the St. Lawrence is not propitious enough to have had the desired effect. Coates’s discussion appeared almost simultaneously with a major retrospective at the National Gallery of Hébert’s work, which provided further evidence for the complicated dialogue between English and French versions of Canadian history that this book illustrates so convincingly.



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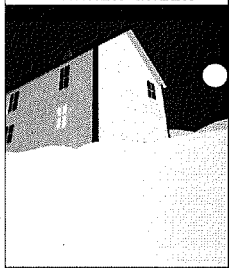
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