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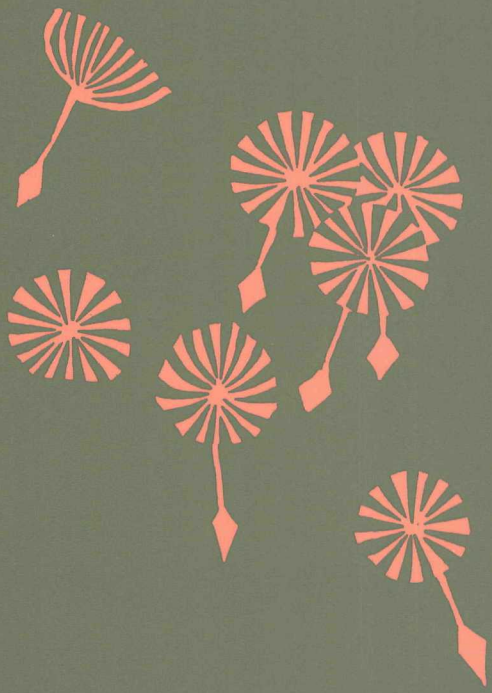

Editorial

Listening/over and over

Laurie Ricou

My childhood and public school education had little Canadian literature in it. The absence of Mrs. Bentley. The absence of *Wild Geese*. The absence of both Gabrielle Roy and Archibald Lampman. The absence of green gables, not to mention a good seed catalogue. But in Grade Six, every day, just after lunch, our teacher and school principal Bill Peden would read aloud from Ernest Thompson Seton.

I don't remember much else of what we studied in Grade Six, but I do treasure the memory of the unusual hush, the attentiveness, the tears (sometimes) as we listened, maybe twenty minutes each day, all year long, to what surely must have been our teacher's favourite writer. I remember the sense that we were on the lam each day from real school work. I think that's when we learned.

Seton's stories carried that group of twelve-year-olds into some rapt empathy with what I've since been taught to call the other. We entered into unlikely pre-pubescent reflections on ethics and morality; we held tight to Seton's narratives of chase and suspense. The stories were written in books, but we learned them that year only by ear (although sometimes we would huddle around the book to look at Seton's quickening illustrations). And Mr. Peden had a great sense of timing, often leaving us caught in mid-leap, wondering, waiting for the next day's telling. He tried gleefully to mimic Seton's transcriptions (sometimes with musical notation) of the sounds of the wild.

Through Seton we began to learn the birds and beasts of that stretch of prairie (with its surprising sandhills) that lay between our school grounds

and the village of Carberry. But we also followed Seton to the Don Valley, the Yorkshire Moors, and New Mexico. About maps and landscapes we learned what foxes teach us: "Never leave a straight trail if a crooked one will do."

If I may say so, however nostalgically—and I quite realize that Mr. Peden may have had a different view—we were good listeners. We were *made* into good listeners by Seton, and by our teacher's sense of intonation, emphasis, and timing. These thoughts about listening surfaced as I was reading admiringly through the essays, poems, and reviews that appeared in our last issue, *CL*#180. Behind them, I thought, were attentive, involved, responsive, questioning listeners. I trust that future issues of the journal will contain similar examples of *good listening.*

Our schoolroom introduction to Seton took place about the same time that Roy Daniells, Inglis Bell, Stanley Read, and Basil Stuart-Stubbs were beginning to talk about creating a journal dedicated to Canadian literature. Back there in Brandon, Manitoba, three years before the first issue of this journal appeared, we didn't even know that something called Canadian literature existed. We were, I think, amazed that a sandhill stag roamed so close to home. Nearly fifty years later, I imagine some crooked trail linking Seton, Peden, and George Woodcock, first editor, runs through the maps our contributors have been drawing.

I've noticed recently that the almost forgotten Seton is showing up in many places: in Lawrence Buell's *The Environmental Imagination,* in Rod Preece's *Animals and Nature,* in Betty Zyvatkauska's *Naturally Ontario;* and in some odd places, such as Molly Gloss's novel *Wild Life* and the *Autobiography of John Macoun.* And certainly Seton's stories echo, if not overtly, in J. M. Coetzee's *The Lives of Animals* and Yann Martell's *The Life of Pi.* Canadian literature (including its tradition of the animal story) has gone global: in prizes and honours, and in its multiple languages—both those in which we write and those which our writing remembers and incorporates in its stories and settings. At *Canadian Literature* we will listen for good listening, we will look to reflect and develop this happy evolution and broadcasting of Canadian writing. Our aim is to listen as intently as possible to as great a range of writers as possible, and to heed what scholars and writers from around the world tell us about what's worth listening to. The good listener leans toward you, as our good reader leans toward her writer, receptive to all the everything she can tell him. The writing that's good listening will also encourage us to listen a little more closely to the talking inside our own heads.

How do you (continue to) grow a journal?

Love is an amplification
By listening/over and over

For the past two years, Acting Editor Susan Fisher has provided day-to-day editorial guidance for Canadian Literature. *Susan's scrupulous attention to detail and sensitive judgement are equalled by her imaginative sense of possibility and new direction. Her dedication has allowed two editors to have very precious study leaves secure in the knowledge that we would return to our office to find a richer, stronger journal, fresh with the growing of work nurtured and accepted for the next several issues. Bookshelves full of thanks to Susan for an exceptional contribution. We are grateful to the University College of the Fraser Valley for having made Susan available to us.*

In September 2003, Eva-Marie Kröller ended her sixteen-year term as Associate and then Editor (since 1995) of the journal. It is fitting that her retirement as Editor coincides with the completion of her Cambridge Companion to Canadian Literature, *a giant task that reflects Eva-Marie's career-long commitment to seeing Canadian writing, in the official languages, and in its multiple languages, read within social, historical, and multi-genred contexts. The* Companion, *like its editor, always looks to understand Canadian writing beside and within the literatures of the world. Eva-Marie stayed true to the international perspective established for the journal by George Woodcock and promoted with vision by W. H. New. But her comparatist training expanded and enhanced that direction in so many ways. She established a distinguished international panel of readers to become our Editorial Board; she imagined and then tirelessly pushed to completion interdisciplinary focus issues on (among other topics) travel writing, Asian Canadian writing, autobiography, and archives. She brought Quebec writing and a francophone editorial voice more prominently back to the journal. Eva-Marie is an indispensable companion to Canadian literature. I will need to consult her regularly. She will continue, I trust, to contribute to this journal regularly.*

Readers will notice that this year's winner of the Governor General's Award in Canadian Studies returns to the masthead. Killam University Professor W. H. New retired from regular teaching in 2003. As Editor Emeritus, he will serve as reader, consultant, and senior advisor to all of us.

Anne Compton

The House After Dark, Winter

The lamps extinguished, moonlight carouses the kitchen,
takes a shine to the fridge, a lick of the butter knife.

On the table, the day folded back into envelopes.
Never as neat as the news when it came. Bulkier.

Slow walk of the hallway, a sconce fixing the west wall,
the coolness of it. The cellar conferring its air.

The body aware of itself, because it needs sleep and it's dark,
takes precautions up the stairs.

The book marked and put down for the night. The house
settling on its plot: midnight, a woman in conclusion.

Home and house are not the same. We miss one (who lives
there now?) wed the other. Wife to the *hus*, hussy.

Though room & board can be bought, it's not the same.

Upstairs, downstairs, rooms for this and that.
There should be better words for what we love.

If we were grander we'd have an aerie, solarium, cupola,
but I'd not leave a pantry for that prospect.

Emily was in the pantry, skimming milk, when a poem came down.
Anyone who's worked in a milk room knows about the scalding.

Asked if it was going to be a maid or an icebox,
Virginia Woolf chose the maid. Time spoils fastest.

I think of all those women who wrote in a house near water,
their words tilting lanterns over distance.

In the morning,
my breath'll be in the hall before me,

the light will not stall once on the river.

Edna Froese

Unbinding Isaac and God

Story as Promise in Adele Wiseman's *The Sacrifice*

In a poem titled "Their Lonely Betters," W.H. Auden observes that language entails culpability. Unlike birds and flowers, humans have words and are therefore capable of "lying," knowing about death, and "assum[ing] responsibility for time." "Words," Auden says, "are for those with promises to keep" (444). Not only human beings, but God also, as a character in sacred stories, uses words and assumes responsibility for time, especially the future. And we assume further responsibilities as we read, interpret, and appropriate the stories of God. As Adele Wiseman discovered in childhood, it is difficult "to separate the act of reading from the acts of living" (*Memoirs* 6), or, for that matter, to separate the acts of living from the acts of reading and writing. This difficulty becomes apparent when one examines the interwoven influences of text and life, of reading and of acting in her characters, many of whom are themselves storytellers (Greene xxiii).

That (con)fusion is the real issue at the heart of her first novel, *The Sacrifice* (published in 1956 and winner of the Governor General's Award). The protagonist, Abraham, is perpetually linked with stories, through the biblical myth that defines him, through the compelling stories about himself that he tells his friend, and through the biblical and legendary stories with which he educates his grandson. If Wiseman was right in her childhood conviction that in "stories life was in a sense holding still for [her] to look at and learn from and make judgments on" (*Memoirs* 7), then it is worthwhile to examine Abraham's use of story within the novel.

The obvious central problem of *The Sacrifice* is the murder of Laiah. In Abraham, an elderly Jew devoted to God and his beloved family, Wiseman

has created a very sympathetic character. To see him then as a murderer is a shock to the imagination and a forceful invitation to "go behind [the circumstances]," as Wiseman put it, in order to discover "the *implications* of this kind of act" ("Consciousness" 149, 152). Given the Jewish reverence for life that is very evident in the novel, Abraham's murder of Laiah is as inexplicable as God's command to the original biblical Abraham to sacrifice his son Isaac, but for Laiah, the loose-living divorcee, there is no last-second divine intervention, no convenient substitute. [1]

Critical efforts to make sense of this unfathomable act have revealed a further difficulty. If one follows the narrator's evident sympathy for Abraham and seeks to rationalize the murder, then Laiah and perhaps all women in the novel are denied real human value. Most early criticism, in fact, chose that alternative, reading the novel as an immigrant novel with mythical underpinnings, perfect as an example of a developing Canadian myth, so necessary in the years when "Canadian literature had suddenly become fashionable" (Keith 72). John Moss, for example, sees the violence in Wiseman's novel as similar to the violence in other novels concerning European immigrants and concludes, "all exchange the blood of their kin for their passage to a new world. . . . They pay their debts to the past in tokens of their blood that bind them more resolutely to it. Ultimately, by violence the violence of their leaving is redeemed, and the past is finally cast adrift in time" (82). Robert Thacker similarly explains the murder as a "clash between old- and new-world values" (29). For Donald Stephens, the murder becomes a "ritualistic sacrifice" necessary for the "renewed possibility of life" (508), a theme he attaches to Canadian writing in general:

> Inherent in the dilemma of the modern Canadian writer is the idea of the sacrifice. Consciously and unconsciously, this phenomenon has become a significant part of the early stages of the literature. It manifests itself in the death of the individual or of the spirit, where the signs of decadence must be obliterated to permit the growth of a nation, a literature, or a human being. (509)

Such readings, patriotic or not, leave Abraham valorized for the murder (Mack 135–36), or, and often at the same time, dismissed as a madman (Moss 101; Stephens 508; Rosenthal 84). Abraham can then join other characters who have courted insanity in their struggle with harsh Canadian conditions (although the madness usually results from too much wilderness, not from cultural conflicts).

If, however, one chooses to focus on the treatment of women in the novel, noting their secondary role in a very patriarchal community and

their expendability as sacrifices, both literal and figurative,[2] then the novel seems crack'd from side to side, since it no longer reflects a coherent moral vision from within itself, although it pretends to. One reads thus from a hermeneutic of suspicion, to use Paul Ricoeur's phrase,[3] and a position morally above the text, an uncomfortable position given Wiseman's intentions to "[change] the way we see, [draw] us closer to good and [settle] for nothing less than the truth" (Greene xviii).

Thus, although the predominantly male perspective and pervasive patriarchal values provide sufficient material for the hermeneutic of suspicion, *The Sacrifice* can nonetheless speak to us and "extend" our consciousness in a way that will make us "better" (to use Wiseman's description of the function of the artist [*Old Woman* 59–60]) if we pay attention to the importance of reading story within the novel.[4] Abraham is above all a story-maker, that is, both teller and interpreter, not an unusual role. But Abraham chooses also to be a character in a story that is not truly his, "[trying] to literalize what he has been given" (Wiseman, "Permissible" 122). He has chosen to read story as promise, out of a hermeneutic of devotion.

In one of the happiest moments in the novel, Abraham retells for his family the story of the sacrifice of Isaac. His version includes Midrashic interpretations of the Genesis account as well as legendary material and his own gloss. Just as early practitioners of Midrash used specific cues in the original to help them account for actions and find guidance for themselves in their own relation to God, so Abraham uses story to give structure and meaning to his life.[5] It is instructive to note his omissions and elaborations, for they prepare us for his later sacrifice of Laiah. With his grandson Moses as the primary listener, Abraham happily recounts the patriarch's adventures: his early belief that there is only one God although he lived among a "wild people" who "sacrificed human beings to their wild gods" (194); his miraculous exploit of walking through the fire in proof of his God; his work of preaching against idol worship and the sacrifice of children; the birth of his son Isaac in his old age; and finally the sacrifice of Isaac, which is first called for and then prevented by God. He includes much legendary material on Abraham (Ginzberg; Rappoport), but none concerning Isaac. His Isaac is almost as passive as the Genesis Isaac, although Abraham does include the legendary Isaac's knowledge of the sacrifice and willingness to participate (Kugel 176). Abraham's own additions are the wording of God's initial promise of a son "who will go in [his] steps," and the observation that "his father loved him very much, for he grew just as Abraham had wished him to

grow" (197). The listening Isaac could not miss the implication of these added comments.

Then, in the climactic moment of the story, when the biblical Abraham lifts his knife to slay Isaac, the narrating Abraham interprets thus:

> In that moment lay the future of our people, and even more than that. In that moment lay the secrets of life and death, in that closed circle with just the three of them, with Abraham offering the whole of the past and the future, and Isaac lying very still, so as not to spoil the sacrifice. . . . *And God himself is bound at that moment,* for it is the point of mutual surrender, the one thing He cannot resist, a faith so absolute. . . .
>
> That was the moment that even God could not resist, and *so He gave us the future.* (199, italics mine)

This is Abraham's defining myth, with its implied promise that God must respond to absolute faith.

Because the novel is written in limited third person, with Abraham as centre of consciousness for most of the novel, it is possible to trace his narrative practices and observe his deliberate appropriation of sacred story. In the opening pages of the novel, he and his family leave the train before their arranged destination because Abraham suddenly concludes "that they had fled far enough," a thought which takes "hold in his mind like a command (9), "as though it were written" (12). He is sustained in their initial poverty by his belief that "God had chosen to set him and his family down in this strange city to await what further He had in store for them. Very well" (30). That "Very well" is exactly the phrase with which the legendary Abraham responds to God's demand of Isaac as sacrifice.

His early experiences and flight from Europe, as he relates them to his new friend Chaim Knopp, are all told with a similar intent of establishing his unique relationship to God. He "was born with the feeling" that "something extraordinary was going to happen in [his] lifetime. . . . as though it had been promised to [him] in another place, another lifetime" (64). That telltale "as though" repeatedly signals his tendency to self-dramatization and his identification with the patriarch. His story to Chaim about his forced sacrilegious slaying of a cow for a butcher too greedy to wait for the *shoichet* who alone can slaughter kosher meat is shot through with that "as though": "I looked about me for [God] to deliver me. . . . I felt as though . . . this moment did not really exist and as though it had existed forever, as though it had never begun and would never end. Where had this happened to me before?" (47). The moment of slaughter becomes a metaphysical revelation about the balance of life and death, when he understands that his forefathers

probably "made [their] sacrifices *to renew their wonder and their fear and their belief*" (47, italics mine). Abraham is drawn to the older blood rituals that seem closer to mystery and closer to a God who could be held to his promises—who could be manipulated, although Abraham would never use the word.

The difficulty with conceiving such a God is how to fit evil or tragic events into a predetermined story of promise. In his struggle to retain meaning, Abraham reshapes his life into a terrifying chain of cause and effect and turns his God into a forensic God, a "Demander," in Abraham's words (199).[6] Abraham's two older, unusually gifted sons (named after Moses and Jacob—both adroit bargainers with God) are readily accepted as "an augury" to be fulfilled (64, 71), but then their grisly deaths in a pogrom plunge Abraham not only into grief but into unbelief and rage. When his remaining son Isaac nearly dies of typhus in their flight to Canada, Abraham construes that as punishment for his anger and turns to frantic prayer. Chaim, his listener, seems not to notice that Abraham almost merges his identity with that of the biblical prophet Elijah who prayed a dead child to life again, as well as the patriarch Jacob who wrestled with God and won a blessing for himself. Isaac's survival becomes "a reiterated promise" (31), for he could not have been "spared for nothing" (18). Eventually Abraham fits even the deaths of his two sons into his scheme of reward and punishment, for as he concludes his story of the profane slaughter of the cow, he tells Chaim that the greedy butcher was punished: he had "his skull split in an argument with another butcher," and adds, "Perhaps God has punished me too for not denouncing the butchers" (48). No wonder Abraham needs continual reassurance that God is in control of his future—for benevolent purposes.

The effect of Abraham's single-minded appropriation of story as promise of future glory for his family and his people is a wholesale binding, particularly of Isaac. God himself is bound, in Abraham's mind, to respond to individual faith by giving the future (199), and the future comes through sons. When Isaac and Ruth are married, Abraham assumes their firstborn will be a son; when Chaim grieves over his son's failing marriage, Abraham prophesies for him a son, a miracle son even since the daughter-in-law can give birth only at great risk. This pervasive emphasis on sons as the guarantee of divine promise means that women become negligible, expendable.[7] Even Ruth seems necessary to Abraham only for the nurture of the young Moische, on whom rests all of the weight of the future after Isaac is dead.

True to his biblical prototype, Isaac submits with little resistance. Although he does not share Abraham's absolute faith—Isaac is, in fact, the

relativist in the novel (Loverso; Greenstein)—he nevertheless depends on Abraham's "living presence," his "confidence" which conveys "safety" (236). Initially merely the youngest son who "worshiped his brothers" (65), Isaac is nearly forgotten in the madness of grief when his brothers are killed. Now in Canada, he bears the weight of his father's immense expectations, perpetually measuring himself against his dead, idealized brothers. When he succeeds in winning Abraham's approval for his first independent decision—to leave school in order to work—he congratulates himself: "he had done the right thing. Neither of his brothers could have done a more proper thing at this moment" (59). His very purpose in living seems determined for him by his father: "he had been saved. . . . If he was confused often, at least sometimes he could sense vaguely what his father seemed to know for a certainty; that he was not here for nothing. . . . There was something in life itself that his father had drawn him back to, that waited for him" (80).

The weight of Abraham's expectations, however, is as destructive as the mountain in one of Abraham's stories about Iloig, the giant, who is crushed by the mountain he carried in order to assure his own future against an invading people (241). Abraham is repeatedly linked with Mad Mountain even before he finally lives in its asylum. Early in the novel, Isaac thinks, "It was strange that, no matter where his mind went, the hill remained there, solid in his vision, every time he looked up. It was a comfort that it didn't change. . . . It was like the sight of his father's face when he had opened his eyes for the first time after the fever, towering over him, claiming him" (30). While Abraham's *Weltanschauung* does provide security for Isaac, it also destroys him.

Abraham's expectations for Isaac eventually become imprisoning, suffocating (Isaac suffers from a weak heart and constricted breathing). Even before Isaac's last illness following his heroic rescue of the Torah from a burning synagogue—a demonstration surely of his adoption, even if briefly, of Abraham's values—he has had a recurring dream about being caught in an imprisoning, suffocating "transparent bubble" (220) that is Isaac's struggle against Abraham's need to see the future through his son.[8] When Isaac discusses the dream with his wife Ruth, he concludes, "If I broke through [the bubble] I'd no longer have the sphere as my boundary, but I'd lose its protection too. The bubble bursts, and I burst with it, into the unknown" (223). The dream indicates both Isaac's inevitable binding through Abraham's appropriation of story and the fragility of Abraham's enterprise. When Isaac dies, Abraham is tossed out of his surrounding bubble of mean-

ing, for sons have been the guarantee of divine promise for him. All he has left now is his young grandson, Moses Jacob, whom he named. He is robbed even of joy and pride in Isaac's sacrifice since that story has no happy ending and is rapidly disintegrating in gossiping mouths.[9]

Lost in his grief and existential angst, Abraham tries "painstakingly to piece together everything" (260), alert for further signs from God, since he cannot abandon the stories that have become his blueprint for the future. But his single-minded focus distorts the grieving process and robs him of his ability to listen to others (Loverso 172). This is particularly devastating in his conversations with his daughter-in-law Ruth, which turn into ugly quarrels, and his conversations with Laiah, former mistress and current friend of his employer, who now attempts to befriend Abraham, but with her own agenda. Because he is "*waiting for a word*" (281, italics mine), Abraham becomes vulnerable to the words of the two women who speak most directly to him, Ruth and Laiah. Both plan for the future and thus confuse Abraham, who cannot separate thoughts of the future from his own duel with God for blessing and control.

In their final explosive quarrel, Ruth wrenches Abraham's master-narrative away from him, accusing Abraham of making Isaac into a "figment of [his] imagination" (319), and pointing out what has been obvious to everyone except Abraham—"you wanted one son should make up for three. What did you care that God only gave him heart enough for one" (320). When Abraham protests, "I could swear by God, by the Almighty," Ruth retorts, "You and God together are always thinking. Whatever is convenient for you God happens to think" (318). For Abraham, Ruth's words are like a mirror "flipped up in his face" so that he "[stands] revealed as he [is] to another—a stranger, an enemy, an egoist" (316). For the first time, it occurs to Abraham to ask, "How had his dream appeared to them, his sons? . . . Was it for his own pride that he had dreamed his sons into heroes, so that he could boast that he was the father of such marvels? Was this why they had been taken from him? . . . Was this his answer, that not only the dream was lost, but also the dreamer?" (322). (Note again the presence of the forensic God.) Abraham has seen himself through the lens of the Abraham story for so long that Ruth's words are an intolerable assault on his very identity.

When, in his distracted pacing through dark city streets, he realizes that he is close to Laiah's apartment, the long habit of seeking divine guidance returns: "There came to him the whole puzzling aspect of his life to which she, this woman, seemed strangely related. Hadn't she lurked always in the

shadow of their new life in the city? . . . Somewhere must be the thread to unravel the knotted skein. Others had been led. He would trust. He would follow. *He would even, if necessary, demand*" (323, italics mine). Then he crosses the street to walk up the stairs to Laiah's apartment.

Laiah, meanwhile, has been appropriating story in her own way. And, indeed, she and Mrs. Plopler, the neighbourhood gossip, both misappropriate story as consumable product for personal uses (both are frequently seen eating). Mrs. Plopler, a parody of Abraham the storyteller, takes possession of all stories that come her way and alters them in the retelling according to her audience and her own need to aggrandize herself, to justify herself, to climb socially, or to assuage her own loneliness. Laiah takes only one story, that of her first seduction by the bearded Russian master, and attempts to relive it through Abraham (Rosenthal 80). She, too, is running out of future in which to manoeuvre. Abraham, the unworldly man with the rabbi's beard, shall re-enact the story of her first lover, give her back her virginity, so to speak, and provide for her a respectable position in the community as Abraham's wife. Although she would never dare to imagine herself as a recipient of God's blessing or a vehicle through which an entire people will be blessed, she is like Abraham in her use of story to find purpose.

After his terrifying glimpse into the abyss, Abraham is prepared to see meaning everywhere. Laiah, meanwhile, reads every move as a possible sign that her story is about to be relived. Thus each player in this awful sacrifice scene is attempting to push the other into filling the appropriate role in his or her predetermined script. When Laiah says, daringly, "I've waited a long time," Abraham thinks, "Now it seemed to him that she was beginning to reveal herself. If he listened now, if he could seize the right moment to ask the right question—It had been done in stranger ways" (327–28). As Laiah moves into Abraham's arms, the language deliberately echoes an earlier scene—Abraham's sacrilegious slaughter of the cow when he was a young man, that moment that he still thinks of as a glimpse into life and death. And it is life and death that he now seeks to understand. Critics have focused on the imagery of death and emptiness in the scene, noting the way Laiah becomes Abraham's shadow-side; Abraham does ask himself, "did he come at last to accept the shadow, to embrace the emptiness, to acknowledge his oneness with the fruit without seed, with death, his other self?" (331). He does contemplate emptiness, because without the story that has been the pattern for his life, and, especially, for his understanding of God, death would be welcome. But that is not what Abraham seeks, not what he can accept.

Instead, he makes one more effort to bind God, to demand an answer. To Laiah's petulant dismissal of his family—"they're dead; we're alive"—Abraham responds inwardly, "Who sent you to mock me? Who? And the thought leaped, as though it had been waiting, electrifying, terrifying, to his mind. One he could seek who knew, who would speak if he asked, *who would give if he offered*—if he had the courage" (333, italics mine). Laiah becomes for Abraham "something holy as she lay back, a willing burden, to offer, to receive, as once another" (333).[10] The language is ambiguous enough that it could refer to the gentle cow he once killed (and most have read the scene this way), but it also alludes to that ancient sacrifice scene between the biblical Abraham and his willing son, Isaac. Abraham now forgets fear and feels "as though he were almost on the point of some wonderful revelation" (333). It is a longing to recover that intense emotional moment of the slaughter of the cow, which Abraham has imbued with metaphysical significance, and a longing to hear, finally, from God, to win from him a blessing.[11] He is about to commit an act of what Wiseman called a combination of "Greek hubris with Hebrew morality," adding, "The protagonist, Abraham, demands that God should consider him, Abraham, over again, within his own personal, historical context. It is his own need for some kind of personal revelation but it never comes" ("Charm" 145). In the moment before the knife leaps almost of its own will, Wiseman's Abraham stands "once again, terrified, fascinated, on the brink of creation where life and death waver toward each other, reiterating his surrender; now was the time for the circle to close, to enclose him in its safety, in its peace. There *must be a word, with them, in the room, hovering to descend*" (334, italics mine). Now surely God must speak and affirm Abraham's faith. God is bound to respond to such faith. But, no, God is not bound and this is not a willing sacrifice.

At this point in the novel, everyone is bound. Isaac was bound by his father's determination to make story serve his own ends. Abraham is shackled with a guilt he will never lose. Ruth and Moses are forever bound by the story of the murder of Laiah: they have lost a father and grandfather and gained a burden of shame by association. Laiah, the one person prepared to surrender herself, albeit only sexually, will now live on in shocking stories and misunderstanding. Chaim Knopp will have to choose between repudiating his friend Abraham and suffering ostracism among his synagogue friends. Abraham's former employer and his cronies debate the sequence of events like amateur detectives or newspaper reporters; they are the least

bound in their reaction because they are, oddly enough, the most willing to try to understand without judging anyone.

This abrupt descent from the intensity of the transcendental sacrifice scene to the almost comic realism of the scenes immediately following may well have contributed to the confusing readings of Wiseman's resolution. Yet Wiseman has throughout shifted smoothly between complex metaphorical explorations of the mysteries of life and death, and ironic, even comic, renderings of the gritty realities that usually accompany both life and death. Now, as if to underline the dangers of misappropriated story, Wiseman picks up again the motif of story as rumour and nasty gossip, particularly in the mouths of Mrs. Plopler and other Jewish immigrants, themselves already damaged by prejudice and untrue stories. All who are acquainted with Abraham, including those who attempt to administer justice, and even Abraham himself, are now forced to interpret this new and horrific story of a sacrifice. The realistic suggestions—a crime of passion, a defense against a hot-tempered woman, or simple madness—are clearly inadequate. Abraham's own effort to explain himself is so tangled up in his grief over his dead sons and his desire to suffer, "to pay, perhaps to atone" (360) that readers are left finally to turn back to the whole novel in order to make sense of the unthinkable.

Most critical readings of the novel have located the resolution in Moses, making him either the heir of his grandfather's vision (however that vision is defined, whether as specifically patriarchal or vaguely nationalistic) or a symbol of a new vision that repudiates the old world embodied by his grandfather. Zeidman, in a specifically Jewish reading of the novel, focuses on the novel's generally "critical vision of modern Jewish life" (164), but still adds a positive note through Moses, who bears the biblical name of a "character who acts and finally saves Israel from slavery in Egypt" (164). Zeidman concludes, "Wiseman's vision of hope for her generation is clearly one of the Moses variety: compassionate, non-religious and thoughtful, with a sense of Zionism as an entrée into a new world" (165). I agree with parts of this historically grounded reading of *The Sacrifice*'s conclusion, but find it difficult to accept that Wiseman would thus displace the protagonist she has given so much loving attention to, especially since Wiseman has said that she wrote the novel in order to explore "what is the best possible reason for the worst possible deed" (Wiseman qtd. in Greene xxii), in this case a murder by a Jew.[12] Thus, the final chapter, although rendered in Moses' perspective, still concerns Abraham and that "worst possible deed."

The reunion between the adolescent Moses, still haunted by memories of his grandfather's stories, and Abraham takes place on Mad Mountain in the insane asylum. Moses has often imagined meeting him again, hoping for some closure to the pain of his abrupt departure out of their lives. When he decides to see his grandfather, he feels "as though all along he had known it would have to be" (374). He does not believe in his grandfather's religion any more, but he does seem to hope "that a revelation [awaits] him" (375). And he does find some revelation: when he leaves, he knows "that he [is] a different person from the boy who had gone up the hill" (380). For he has sat beside his grandfather and felt his grandfather's hand on his, has seen those "hands fused together" so that "it was as though he stood suddenly within the threshold of a different kind of understanding, no longer crouching behind locked doors, but standing upright, with his grandfather leading him, as he always had" (379). Moses responds, laying his own hand over his grandfather's in a gesture of love completely contrary to the hurtful accusations that he had often imagined hurling at his grandfather. As he travels back to the city on the bus, Moses wonders if he will have the courage to say to his new friend Aaron, the young Zionist, "I love him" (380).

Yet, powerful as the change in Moses is, the resolution of the novel is not primarily his. Moses makes no effort to place himself within a biblical story as Abraham so pridefully and desperately did. That kind of reading of story as promise is not passed on, because Abraham has achieved a resolution that is more important and more specific than Moses' new grasp of the complexity of human beings. In words addressed partly to the absent Laiah and partly to Moses, Abraham returns to the moment of sacrifice, and clearly repudiates his previous thinking: "though something in me reached out, I did not understand. Nothing was necessary. I could have blessed you and left you. I could have loved you. . . . I took what was not mine to take . . . , what was given to me to hold gently in my hands, to look at with wonder" (378). Blessing—it is the opposite of taking. To bless is to give, to set free, not to bind. Abraham has now realized that neither blood rituals nor any other manipulations of divine promise—magic, really—are necessary to revive wonder and fear. Love is a more powerful way of grasping wonder. He has understood finally that God is not a Demander, nor does he, Abraham, have any right to demand. Had he chosen simply to listen to Laiah, rather than make her a character in his story, Abraham could have affirmed life, not death.

Although Abraham clearly refers to Laiah, his words apply equally to story. Story is also given to us to "hold gently . . . to look at with wonder,"

not to appropriate as validation for our deepest desires, or wield as weapon in the face of the unknown future (or a threatening ideology). This is not to argue that the hermeneutic of suspicion is never justified—it is. It is merely to argue that when a novel exerts such power as *The Sacrifice* does, it is worth reading carefully to find that core that can "make us better," in Wiseman's phrase. *The Sacrifice* asks us to inhabit Abraham's space as we read, not because his patriarchal assumptions deserve replication or because his crime is justifiable, but because his narrative practices, with their profound results, are so familiar to many of us. We also need to have a mirror flipped up in our face, lest we take what is not ours to take.

NOTES

1 Leon Kass notes that "Jews have always had an unusually keen appreciation of life. . . . The celebration of life—of *this* life, not the next one—has from the beginning been central to Jewish ethical and religious sensibilities" (17). Wiseman similarly commented, "the Judaism I was taught, is a Judaism which is life-oriented, which celebrates life, because it's all we've got, because beyond life is somebody else's responsibility" ("Consciousness" 153).

2 For insightful examinations both of the roles of the women in the novel and the male view of women, see Ruth Panofsky, Donna Palmateer Pennee, and Marcia Mack. Particularly damning is Pennee's observation that even the young men, Moses and Aaron, who presumably represent new hope, dismiss women as "dames"(9–10).

3 Ricoeur observes that texts conceal/reveal a "hidden relation which connects ideology to the phenomena of domination" (215), so that the first task of a reader is often determining where the latter really come from (213). Language is too often "filled" by a chosen group, which elevates a particular perspective at the cost of nullifying others.

4 Wiseman never clarifies directly what she means by "better," leaving the word in its qualifying quotation marks, but throughout this sensitive examination of her mother's artistic work and creative spirit, Wiseman repeatedly returns to the "enlargement of consciousness," the disturbance of familiar perceptions. Earlier in the passage quoted from, she says, "For what the artist creates is consciousness. Hers is an expression of consciousness which extends consciousness. We cherish it because it represents us not as good, but as aware, and lets us feel that we have contributed to the dignity of creation an expression of our awareness of our situation, which enlarges creation and ourselves"(59).

5 James Kugel explains the process of ancient biblical interpreters who, as they recopied and compiled the oral stories and written versions, assumed that they were working with cryptic documents that demanded interpretation. Every detail in the story had meaning that needed uncovering and that was immediately relevant to the readers.

6 I have adopted the term "forensic God" from Madeleine L'Engle, *The Genesis Trilogy*. She uses the term throughout to describe the Old Testament God whom many Christians continue to see as a God who operates according to inscrutable laws and who must be placated somehow.

7 Panofsky and Pennee have rightly pointed out the dangers of being female in *The Sacrifice*: Panofsky notes, "Wiseman's first novel 'sacrifices' a female sensibility to the

patriarchal discourse of orthodox Judaism" (41); Pennee suggests that "the murder in this novel is not a homicide but a femicide, and specifically for the purpose of renewing a patriarchal structure and community" (3). I would argue, however, that the misogyny is an indirect consequence of Abraham's sincere effort to hear the voice of his God, and that the murder is not intended, either by Abraham or by Wiseman, to renew patriarchal structures.

8 The bubble has been read as a "relativistic microcosm" (Greenstein 33) or a solipsistic refusal to participate in spiritual conversation (Loverso 170).

9 Even before his death, Isaac anticipates that the miraculously saved Torah will be connected with the name of the unscrupulous real-estate agent who donated it as "conscience money": "And someone else will say, 'Schwarzgeist—aha, he must have been a fine man if God saw fit that his Torah should be saved'"(215–16). Fortunately, the already horrified Abraham never hears the later speculations that Isaac first set the synagogue on fire and then rescued the Torah (318).

10 It seems to me that this quotation particularly argues against the view that Abraham sacrifices Laiah because she is evil (Loverso 179; Stephens 507) or the embodiment of "the God of death" (Moss 99). Abraham has indeed judged Laiah for her promiscuity and her sterility. Nevertheless, I would still argue that the murder scene makes sense only when we take into account Abraham's increasingly desperate need to retrieve the meaning of his defining myth, and that means forcing God's hand by threatening human sacrifice.

11 In the last storytelling conversation with Moses, when the young Moses forestalls Abraham's wish to retell the story of the biblical Moses who saw God face to face, Abraham reveals his prideful longing to force God's hand: "It's not just a story. Can you imagine what it would be to see God face to face? And to win His blessing? My blessing I give you with all of my heart. But to win for you His blessing. Ah!" (279).

12 In the interview with Butovsky, this phrase refers only to Hoda's act of incest in Wiseman's second novel, *Crackpot*. However, in an earlier interview with Belkin, Wiseman explains the beginnings of *The Sacrifice*: "My intention was to find the optimal conditions under which a Jew would commit murder. By optimal, I mean what were the best possible reasons that the man himself could see for his act and could be driven to perform an act like that?" ("Consciousness"152).

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John Donlan

Person of Snow

Tom Thomson couldn't draw people for beans
but that doesn't stop us loving those
holy glows, deep in the bottom galleries,
a conflagolion of Canadian

identities, as flimsy as it gets.
There's just so much to say and then you're dead.
"So what happened."
"Oh, a guy had a seizure."

"I'm goin' to stupid school. The teacher came in
and played for us on the guitar and the mandolin."
"I've moved up from Elmer's and Lepage's:
I'm on prescription glue."

I hope it helped. I know my parents
did the best they could. Here we are, aren't we.
Hear me out or not, it's your birthday.
I've got a secret. You.

Warren Stevenson

Sketching Tom Thomson
(Now you see it, now you don't)

Never mind that your and his birth and death days jibe—
You each had a lucky grandfather—your 'Tam' to his Bysshe—
and were both obsessed with water, darkness and light:
He was his promethean 'Sensitive Plant,' you, your own jackpine
braving the north wind in harp-like headless monodrama—
dark tree, choppy water & phony spring sky—
which McCallum avers you never got quite right:
To hell with *The West Wind*—the title was theirs, not yours!

The Jackpine—now there's the one—
autumnal tree dripping surreal life and colour laid on colour
with 'penis or palette knife' (Town)—what does it matter?—
marmoreal, rich and strange, your own stained glass—
and topping it off, that wonderful cartoon jackass
wearing a tam o'shanter, profile facing south,
with whisky mouth spewing seeds and braying at death—
Gotcha!

Sharmani Patricia Gabriel

Interrogating Multiculturalism

Double Diaspora, Nation, and Re-Narration in Rohinton Mistry's Canadian Tales

Rohinton Mistry was born in Bombay in 1952 and migrated to Canada in 1975. As a "writer from elsewhere" (Salman Rushdie's term for writers whose narratives fall outside the dominant culture [12]), Mistry has used his location in diaspora to interrogate common assumptions about home and belonging in his Canadian narratives.[1] "[T]hrobbing between two lives, the one in Bombay and the one . . . in Toronto" (*Tales* 186),[2] his migrant characters grapple with the complexities of negotiating new identities out of the "ambiguities and dichotomies" (192) of their situation. Living between two countries can be fraught with tension, but it does offer a potentially productive site from which to challenge homogeneous narratives of the nation and its people.

Mistry's awareness of the ambivalence and instability of his cultural, geographical, and ideological location is evident in the way his texts, particularly *Tales from Firozsha Baag*, explore the cultural politics of diaspora. Mistry's self-conscious positioning in diaspora and his affirmation of it as a space that emphasizes multiplicity and ambiguity bears important resonances with Homi Bhabha's enunciation of a "third space," that in-between space of hybridity where cultural change can be brought about through the "contamination" of established narratives and dominant points of view.

Mistry's commitment to the non-essentialist cultural politics of diaspora derives not only from his experience as an Indian immigrant in Canada but also from his Parsi ethnicity. When he was asked to compare his work to that of Bharati Mukherjee (another well-known writer of the Indian diaspora who had at that time settled in Canada), Mistry immediately drew attention

to the disparate cultural spaces occupied by their characters. He pointed out that in contrast to Mukherjee's mainly Hindu characters, "my characters are outside Hindu India. And because of the history of the Zoroastrian religion, it does not provide a solid anchor like Hinduism or Judaism or Islam" (Hancock 149). Mistry has said that he hopes his writing will "preserve a record of how they [the Parsis] lived, to some extent" (qtd. in Barucha 25).[3]

As a Parsi, Mistry is a member of India's tiny Zoroastrian community that traces its origins to pre-Islamic Persia (now Iran). The Arab conquest of Persia in the seventh century resulted in the forcible conversion to Islam of an overwhelming number of Persian Zoroastrians. Those Zoroastrians who refused conversion had to flee their homeland to escape religious persecution. The majority of them migrated to India, probably in the tenth century, settling in Gujarat in the north western region of the subcontinent.[4] The Parsis have had to come to terms not only with their minority status (they constitute only .007% of the Indian population) and inability to make claims to specific territory, but also with the fact that their origins and cultural values lie outside the (Hindu) nationalist narrative. This submerging of their narrative by the cultural dominant (especially since Independence) has created a profound sense of loss and alienation for the Parsi community. As a Parsi, then, Mistry was, to use Nilufer Barucha's words, "in Diaspora even in India" (23).

While most minority migrant writers speak of their experiences of alienation in Canada, Mistry, as a Canadian of Parsi ethnicity, has experienced national exclusion not only in Canada but also in his Indian homeland. One of the characters in Mistry's short story collection, for example, draws connections between his experiences of racial victimization as an Indian immigrant in Toronto and the bullying and other forms of discrimination he experienced in school in Bombay because he was a Parsi. My aim in this paper is to demonstrate that it is precisely Mistry's experience of "double displacement," as Barucha terms it (23), or "double diaspora" that foregrounds the instabilities in the national narrative of culture and identity.

The phenomenon of "double diaspora" points to the existence of more than one homeland. In a real sense, however, there is no "original" homeland for the Parsis to return to—the historical Persia no longer exists. For the Parsis, there is only the blurred narrative of another place and time of origin before their migration to India. It is this realization of the deep disjuncture between the historical home and the present reality of homelessness that the Parsi subject in Mistry's fiction takes with him to Canada, his

new homeland outside India. The ethnic Parsi's positioning in yet another diaspora in Canada further emphasizes the instability of national identity, a concept that is premised on the illusion of a single, primordial homeland. The "double diaspora" in Mistry's fiction disturbs the ontological certainty or stability of "home," and thus undermines the nationalist narrative of Canada.[5] This process can be seen very clearly in Mistry's first published work, the short story collection entitled *Tales from Firozsha Baag* (1987).

Set mostly in a Bombay Parsi tenement, *Tales from Firozsha Baag* is largely concerned with constructing a narrative of culture and identity for India's Parsi community. This concern is manifest in the opening story, "Auspicious Occasion," which, by focusing on the everyday life and cultural practices of "an orthodox Parsi [couple] which observed all important days on the Parsi calendar" (9), asserts the distinctiveness of the minority Parsi community in India. All the major signs of Parsi cultural identity are brought to the reader's attention: the ancient religion of Zoroastrianism, Parsi festivals such as *Behram roje,* and institutions such as the Fire-temple and the Towers of Silence.

Crucially, although the Firozsha Baag residential complex functions as the space that delineates Parsi identity, Mistry subtly blurs its boundaries through two types of movement: journeys that take the Parsi characters away from the enclosed, private space of the Baag and into the overcrowded, public spaces of the city where they interact with other Indians; and the incessant shuttling between India and North America (usually Canada) for reasons of education or migration. Additionally, the Irani restaurant just outside the compound of the Baag, the neighbouring "low class" apartment complex of Tar Gully with its mainly Marathi Hindu residents, the nearby bicycle-repair shop called "Cecil Cycles" (the name of which hints at India's colonized history), and even the solitary Muslim tenant in Firozsha Baag are all incorporated as signs of the complex heterogeneity of Indian life.

Nariman Hansotia is the resident storyteller of Firozsha Baag through whom Mistry relates several of the stories in *Tales.* Like most storytellers, Nariman is a highly regarded elder of his community who "functions as the tribal spokesman and the repository of the community's heritage" (Malak 190). Yet, at the same time that Mistry constructs Nariman as the exemplar of Parsi identity, he also makes several tacit allusions to Nariman's Anglicization or Westernization. For instance, in addition to his English education and obvious love of the English language, seen in the relish with which he introduces new English words into his narration, Nariman, we are told, sports the moustache of a Western movie star (Clark Gable) and often likes

to whistle a tune from *The Bridge on the River Kwai* (Heble 53). Nariman's "hybridity" points to the "selective assimilation" (Kulke 78–79) of the Parsi community, as reflected in its amenability to Anglicization during the period of British colonial rule as well as its receptivity to "Indianization" in the face of contemporary national realities in India. Mistry thus suggests that in spite of the Parsi community's attempts to preserve its distinctness, Parsi identity is by no means fixed or closed in character.[6]

To further destabilize any notion of a fixed Parsi identity, Mistry assiduously inserts the cultural "Other" into his Parsi narratives. Consider, for instance, the inclusion of non-Parsi "Others" such as Gajra, the Marathi maid, in "Auspicious Occasion"; Francis, the Christian odd-job man, in "One Sunday"; and Jaakaylee, the elderly Goan ayah, in "The Ghost of Firozsha Baag." In fact, this background presence of the cultural "Other" is made explicit in "The Ghost of Firozsha Baag," which is narrated entirely from the perspective of Jaakaylee, a "proper Catholic" (whose name is actually a Parsi vulgarization of her "English" name, Jacqueline) (50). The ayah's first-person narration, sprinkled liberally with expressions in Parsi Gujarati as well as in her native Konkani, is framed as a recollection of her personal history. By ranging back through Jaakaylee's memory to her birth in the former Portuguese colony of Goa and to her fifty years of service with the Parsi Karani family of Bombay, Mistry represents Parsi life and culture from the perspective of a non-Parsi. As we listen to Jaakaylee's narration of her life story, we see that, despite the ayah's prejudices about the Parsis, she has been influenced—"[her] name, [her] language, [her] songs" (49)—by them, just as she herself has modified and transformed the cultural life of her Parsi employers. Jaakaylee's hot Goan curries have replaced the Parsi *dhansak* as the Karanis' favourite dish. The Karani household and, by extension, Firozsha Baag become metaphors for the changing configurations of Parsi cultural experience and identity.

Thus, from the first story, "Auspicious Occasion," to the stories in the middle section, such as "Squatter" and "Lend Me Your Light," which bridge India and Canada through the characters' incessant journeying back and forth, and then to the final story in the collection, "Swimming Lessons" (the only one ostensibly set entirely outside the Parsi enclave of the Baag and in fact outside India), we move from a distinct and isolated cultural system with clearly demarcated boundaries, through a mixed cultural landscape, finally to arrive at a temporal and spatial terrain where the borders are so blurred that there can no longer be any stable or homogeneous conception of national space.

Despite the apparently coherent domain of the Parsi housing complex, then, *Tales from Firozsha Baag* does not represent home as a clearly identifiable, homogeneous place. Like the Parsi microcosm of the Baag (which already contains within it other traces, other voices, other memories and histories), home consists of (to use Iain Chambers's description of cultural identity) "shifting configurations of transitive coherence" (39). Rather than seeking to return us to fixed and settled—"rooted"—notions of national or cultural identity, *Tales* constructs home as an unstable site existing in tension and mediation between "roots" and "routes." Mistry's second work of fiction, *Such a Long Journey*, reinforces this fluid idea of home by announcing in its title the difficulty, perhaps even impossibility, of "homecoming." Instead, it is the chronotope of the "journey" itself, the passage between arrivals and departures, which the text suggests carries the meaning of culture.

Mistry's textual reconfiguration of home and identity as dynamic and inherently unstable is also connected to his purpose of challenging the dominant (white) culture's definition of itself in the narrative of the Canadian nation. Mistry has resisted the terms in which the narrative of the non-white migrant writer has been constructed for him in dominant Canadian discourses:

> I think they feel that when a person arrives here [Canada] from a different culture, if that person is a writer, he must have some profound observations about the meeting of the two cultures. And he must write about multiculturalism. He has an area of expertise foisted on him which he may not necessarily want, or which may not necessarily interest him. He may not want to be an expert in race relations. ("Author's Headnotes")

What Mistry specifically objects to is the tendency to read multicultural literature through the racial or ethnic labels affixed to its authors. Mistry implies that the multicultural label routinely imposed on the work of non-white authors may be well-intentioned in that it includes writers conventionally excluded from mainstream representation, but it actually serves to reinforce stereotypical images of these authors and their cultural communities. In seeking to emphasize the idea of ethnic or cultural difference, multiculturalism imposes a fixed notion of "difference" itself, obscuring the fact that difference is "weighed differently in given historical moments" (Kamboureli 3).[7] Current constructions of "multicultural" and "ethnic" in Canada therefore foreclose an understanding, Mistry suggests, of the shifting complexities as well as multiplicity of identities within cultural communities.

For instance, with reference to works by writers of the South Asian diaspora in Canada, the ethnic labels "South Asian Canadian" or "Indo-Canadian" mask the many nuances of difference in the works of writers as diverse in

their thematic concerns, aesthetics, and ideological affiliations as M.G. Vassanji, Neil Bissoondath, Cyril Dabydeen, Sam Selvon, Nazneen Sadiq, Himani Bannerji, Arnold Itwaru, Yasmin Ladha, Shani Mootoo, and Shyam Selvadurai. The personal histories of these authors in Canada, their positioning of themselves and their works within their own cultural groups and within Canadian society at large, and their treatment of cultural identity and difference in their writings are factors that often transcend the "Indian" or "South Asian" classification imposed on them and their work. Furthermore, "Indian" or "South Asian" does not account for multiple geographical and cultural displacements experienced by several of these writers.[8]

Thus, in suggesting that "ethnic" is a label foisted on minority communities to perpetuate their exclusion, Mistry provokes a re-examination of the term as it is used in current constructions of the national. For instance, the narrator of "Lend Me Your Light" comes to fully realize what it is to be called an ethnic in Canada only after he juxtaposes his experience of discrimination as a non-white immigrant in Toronto with memories of his own community's attitude towards non-Parsi Indians, whom it referred to as "ghati":

> With much shame I remember this word *ghati*. A suppurating sore of a word, oozing the stench of bigotry. It consigned a whole race to the mute roles of coolies and menials, forever unredeemable. (182)

More significantly, Mistry's objection to Canadian multiculturalism is that, as a liberal framework that accords recognition to non-mainstream writers, it functions to further consolidate their minority position. As Smaro Kamboureli notes, "making such writers visible only by viewing them as representative of their cultural groups does virtually nothing to dispel the 'marginality' attributed to those authors" (3). In Kamboureli's view, the Canadian policy of multiculturalism accords the mainstream culture the power to determine difference and normalcy. Sarosh, the protagonist of "Squatter," is a Canadian citizen, but he is tormented by "the presence of xenophobia and hostility" (163) solely because he persists in "a grotesquely aberrant" (171), non-mainstream practice. The wise and respected storyteller of the Baag, Nariman Hansotia, drawing from Sarosh's "sad but instructive chronicle" (160), tells his audience that Canadian multiculturalism is merely a political ruse for discrimination and exclusion:

> The Multicultural Department is a Canadian invention. It is supposed to ensure that ethnic cultures are able to flourish, so that Canadian society will consist of a mosaic of cultures—that's their favourite word, mosaic—instead of one uniform mix, like the American melting pot. If you ask me, mosaic and melting pot are both nonsense, and ethnic is a polite way of saying bloody foreigner. (168)

Defining itself as the "norm," the dominant white culture measures "ethnic" cultures as deviant, assigning them to the margins. The "ethnic" subject is made to feel that he or she does not fully belong in Canada. Discriminatory social practices and racist assumptions thus are perpetuated by the discourse of multiculturalism, which elides the serious underlying issues of political, economic, and cultural empowerment as well as the management and negotiation of the day-to-day realities of difference. As Enoch Padolsky observes, "In Canada . . . multiculturalism . . . is associated with an 'ethnic' cultural 'song and dance' approach that distracts from issues of racial inequality and power" (24). It is to resist the hegemonic underpinnings of Canadian multiculturalism that Mistry insists that non-white authors should be regarded as Canadian writers, not as representatives of racial or ethnic groups.

The rejection of the ethnic label and the "difference" it represents, however, is an undertaking fraught with problems. Ranu Samantrai, drawing from her own position as a member of an ethnic minority community, elaborates on the particular nature of the double bind faced by Mistry and other Canadian writers from minority communities:

> [T]he dilemma of difference on the one hand means that Mistry can and should be read as Canadian, assimilated into the Canadian canon, judged by perhaps inappropriate criteria, his difference dismissed. On the other, it means that he should be read as Asian Canadian, not really Canadian, perhaps an exotic new offshoot of the Canadian canon, but unable to affect fundamentally the definition of that canon. (37)

One way in which writers like Mistry claim their "difference" (from the mainstream or dominant national culture) and yet reject essentialist assumptions of ethnicity is by calling into question multiculturalism itself. While supportive of multiculturalism as an ideological practice that attempts to accommodate the heterogeneity of the nation's histories and cultural experiences, Mistry is aware of the assimilationist pressures encoded in state constructions of multiculturalism.

"Squatter" powerfully articulates the problems that arise when an assimilationist multicultural state fails to include the ethnic subject in the national imaginary. On the eve of his departure for Toronto, Sarosh, a resident of the Baag, makes a promise to his relatives that he will return to Bombay if he does not "become completely Canadian in exactly ten years" (162). In Canada, he diligently pursues his assimilation into the national culture: his change of name from "his proper Parsi name of Sarosh" (160) to Sid functions as an index of his willing absorption into the mainstream culture. But Sarosh discovers that the "completely Canadian" identity that he longs for remains elusive. After

ten years of trying to divest himself of "the old way" (161), Sarosh finds that there is still one cultural practice preventing him from becoming "completely Canadian." Every time he uses the (Western-style) toilet, Sarosh finds that he still has to "simulat[e] the squat of . . . Indian latrines" (161):

> At first, this inability was no more than mildly incommodious. As time went by, however, the frustrated attempts caused him grave anxiety. And when the failure stretched unbroken over ten years, it began to torment and haunt all his waking hours. (161)

Sarosh interprets his inability to use the Western toilet as a sign of his failure to integrate: "If he could not be westernized in all respects, he was nothing but a failure in this land—a failure not just in the washrooms of the nation but everywhere" (171). So intent is Sarosh on overcoming his inability to achieve total assimilation that he engages professional help; the counsellor he sees recommends the use of a device, developed with "financial assistance from the Multicultural Department" (168), which will help him change. However, because of the possible risks posed by the appliance, Sarosh decides not to use it.[9]

Having failed "to achieve complete adaptation to the new country" (161), a dejected Sarosh returns to India, "desperately searching for his old place in the pattern of life he had vacated ten years ago" (176). Sarosh's attempts to secure his former identity are futile—"[t]he old pattern was never found" (177). This disjuncture between his memory of home as a fixed and stable space that can anchor his identity and the present reality leaves Sarosh in a state of extreme disorientation. India can no longer be the same place he left behind years ago. His ancestral homeland has changed, just as Sarosh himself has. The narrative thus suggests that the return to the "pure time" of the past is no longer possible, as there is no past "which is not re-experienced through the categories of the present" (Hall, "New Ethnicities" 258). Mistry deploys the "unalterable fact" (161) of the Indian immigrant's "squat" in this story not so much to ridicule immigrant desperation but to question the "national" in Canadian multiculturalism. In order to become "completely Canadian" (162), Sarosh is willing to be totally absorbed by the dominant white culture until he is rendered invisible, culturally, in the national scene. But Sarosh's inability to use the Western toilet without "perch[ing] on top of the toilet, crouching on his haunches" (161) points to his "unalterable" cultural difference (154). This, however, is precisely the point made by the text—that assimilation can never be completely successful. The cultural and historical "presence" of Sarosh's "Indianness" (symbolized in his squat)

is akin to what Frantz Fanon has called the "corporeal malediction" of his black skin.[10] The text suggests that "Indianness" cannot be erased completely from the Indian Canadian, however Westernized he becomes; he will carry a trace of his Indianness in his new cultural location. The ethnic Canadian will be, to use Bhabha's terms, "almost the same but not quite" because he is "not white" (*Location* 89). This "not quiteness" is of crucial significance in formulations of the national and constitutes "the important difference" (259) that the Parsi father in the story "Swimming Lessons" cautions his son against losing in Canada. Through Sarosh's predicament, Mistry foregrounds not so much the idea of being Indian as the idea of being Canadian *differently* (to use James Clifford's assertions about the complex processes of adaptation and resistance in various national contexts [312]).

Mistry suggests that "visible" immigrants like Sarosh are so desirous of acceptance that they do not see that their inassimilable difference is in fact a valuable commodity: it is a signifier of the heterogeneity of Canadian national identity. Their inability to consider themselves "completely Canadian" reflects the underlying premise of Canadian multiculturalism that considers ethnic subjects mere "squatters" (and here the story's title inheres with meaning), not rightful or legitimate inhabitants of the national space of Canada.

In rejecting current constructions of Canadian multiculturalism, Mistry proposes an alternative idea of the national that is not based on an opposition between assimilation and exclusion. In so doing, he participates in what Diane McGifford identifies as an urgent task: "to redefine multiculturalism, to de-ghettoize and de-hyphenate it" (x). In questioning the very terms of reference of multiculturalism, Mistry moves away from essentialist notions of identity. If ethnic categories like "Indianness" do not exist outside particular social and cultural contexts, then the national and cultural narrative of "Canadianness" itself is not a category with a fixed content; rather, it is, as Stuart Hall has described the Caribbean context, "subject to the continuous 'play' of culture, history and power" (225). "Canadianness" is indeterminate, and its meanings are constantly being renegotiated and rearticulated.

Mistry's commitment to challenging conventional narratives of nation and culture is also evident in the final story of the collection, "Swimming Lessons." The unnamed narrator, a young Parsi migrant in Toronto and a former resident of the Baag, tells us about his everyday life in an apartment in Don Mills. His first-person account is interrupted by another voice

telling a story about a middle-aged couple who live in the Firozsha Baag complex in Bombay. This third-person narrative (presented in italics) focuses on the couple as they wait eagerly for letters from their son in Toronto which they hope will tell them something about his new life.

One day, instead of the usual note from their son saying very little about his life in Canada, the parents receive a volume of short stories; they are delighted to find out that their son is a writer. Hoping to discover something about the life that he has built for himself in Canada, the couple eagerly start reading. They are, however, soon disappointed; the book which their son has sent them is not "based on his Canadian experience" but "all about Parsis and Bombay" (256):

> *Mother and Father read the first five stories, and she was very sad after reading some of them, she said he must be so unhappy there, all his stories are about Bombay, he remembers every little thing about his childhood, he is thinking about it all the time even though he is ten thousand miles away, my poor son, I think he misses his home and us and everything he left behind, because if he likes it over there why would he not write stories about that, there must be so many new ideas that his new life could give him.* (258)

Finally, the parents come to the last story in the volume:

> *The last story they liked best of all because it had the most in it about Canada, and now they felt they knew at least a little bit . . . about his day-to-day life in his apartment; and Father said if he continues to write about such things he will become popular because I am sure they are interested in reading there about life through the eyes of an immigrant, it provides a different viewpoint; the only danger is if he changes and becomes so much like them that he will write like one of them and lose the important difference.* (258)

At this point we realize that the collection of stories being read by the couple in the story is actually the same one that we are reading. The couple are reading and at the same time being read about by us. We also discover that the son who has his existence in the narrative of the Indian couple is probably the narrator of the story himself, presumably Kersi, who is probably also the author of the Firozsha tales. Kersi, in this sense, comes close to being the fictional equivalent of Mistry himself. This strategy of narrative self-reflexivity destabilizes reader expectations; it undermines the distinctions between writer/text/reader. By foregrounding the constructedness of these narrative boundaries, Mistry's narrative calls into question the ontological status of cultural and national boundaries as well. Crucially, the moment that we discover that the first-person narrator of the story is the son in the third-person narrative is also when the Canadian narrative of home con-

verges with the narrative of home in India. Canada and India come together to destabilize any notion of the stability, impermeability, or cultural homogeneity of national identity.

The point made by the text, in the form of Kersi's response to his parents' plea that he write "stor[ies] based on his Canadian experience" (256), is that the Canadian narrative already exists in conjunction with the Indian one. Unlike the parents, who have divided Kersi's life and experiences into an Indian past and a Canadian future, Mistry's text represents Kersi's identity as being in complex mediation between "here" and "there," "present" and "past." The spatial and cultural domains of India and Canada are interconnected, existing in a dialogical relationship with each other. Mistry's text, by providing the ground for such a dialogue through its shifting contexts and multiple intersections, suggests that every national narrative "betrays the constitutive presence of other possible locations or cultures" (Samantrai 34), in the process destabilizing the homogeneous or "closed" character of nationalist discourses.

Water, alluded to in the title of the story, functions as the governing metaphor of "Swimming Lessons," and it points to Mistry's ideas about the fluid contours of national identity. The recurring imagery of water—Bombay's Chaupatty sea, the swimming pool of the local recreation centre, and the bathtub—suggests other ways to think about national and cultural identity.

In India, Kersi's inability to feel "at home" is represented by his inability to swim, mainly because the waters of the Chaupatty are too filthy to enter. In Canada, Kersi's feeling of "failure" at achieving a sense of belonging is reflected in his "terror" of the swimming pool (246). Near the end of the story, Kersi, in the bathtub, attempts to conquer his fear of swimming: he closes his eyes, holds his breath, and dunks his head in his bathtub. He keeps it underwater for a few seconds. Slowly, he learns to open his eyes underwater:

> I am slowly able to discern the underwater objects. The drain plug looks different, slightly distorted; . . . I come up . . . examine quickly the overwater world . . . and go in again. I do it several times, over and over. The world outside the water I have seen a lot of, it is now time to see what is inside (259–60).

Kersi's ability to see "overwater" and "underwater" almost simultaneously (because he keeps going into the water and coming up so quickly) reflects his diasporic condition. Thus, the "lesson" the narrative teaches is that one must move away from a national aesthetic conceived in binary terms to a more flexible and dynamic construction of national identity.

Mistry's views about the fluidity of cultural and national configurations

are also evident in his subsequent works. The symbolic resonance of water in "Swimming Lessons" stands in contrast to the image foregrounded in *Such a Long Journey* (1991). The novel's dominant visual image is the concrete wall erected outside the compound of the Khodadad Building residential complex. Although it is meant for the security and protection of the inhabitants, the "solidity of the long, black wall" (184) (like the blackout sheets that the protagonist Gustad Noble has used to cover the windows of his house since the Sino-Indian War of 1962) acts as a defensive shell, preventing the Parsi residents from interacting with what Gustad considers to be the squalor of Hindu-dominated India—"the flies, the mosquitoes, the horrible stink, with bloody shameless people pissing, squatting alongside the wall" (63).[11]

Mistry's representation of the closed Parsi community, walled in by its ethnic separateness, brings to mind Edward Said's comment about the danger of boundaries. "Borders and barriers which enclose us within the safety of familiar territory," he cautions, "can also become prisons, and are often defended beyond reason or necessity" (54). Similarly aware that the attachment to one's cultural or ethnic identity can regress into militant forms of nationalism, Mistry points to the need to destabilize boundaries and to abandon the dangerous notion that cultures are closed and static systems.

Gustad's view of the separateness of Parsi life is altered when a pavement artist is hired to decorate the Baag's enclosing wall so as to prevent passersby from urinating against it. The artist decides to paint the wall with images of the gods and prophets of all the world's religions—"Hindu, Sikh, Judaic, Christian, Muslim, Zoroastrian, Buddhist, Jainist" (182). Although Gustad goes along with the artist's idea, he would have preferred that a portrait of Zarathustra, the founder of Zoroastrianism, grace the wall—an indication here that Gustad has not yet learned to look beyond his Parsi identity. Soon, the enclosing wall is transformed into a repository of India's heterogeneous religious identities: in the midst of Zarathustra, Buddha, Guru Nanak, "Nataraja did his cosmic dance, Abraham lifted his axe high above Isaac, Mary cradled the infant Jesus, Laxmi dispensed wealth, Saraswati spread wisdom and learning" (184).

Equally significant is that the wall with the sacred images includes an image of the wall itself: it becomes a "wall featuring a painting of the wall featuring a painting of the wall featuring a . . ." (288). This *mise en abîme* challenges metaphorically the notion of a single point of origin, and it calls attention to the constructedness of cultural systems—a lesson that Gustad has yet to learn.

Towards the end of the novel, with fundamentalist Hindu organizations like the Shiv Sena about to take control of the streets of Bombay, the Municipality decides to demolish the ecumenical wall. In protest, the Khodadad residents organize a *morcha,* which is joined by people of other faiths from neighbouring buildings. The wall, however, is brought down. With the wall down, we are left with the final image of Gustad removing the blackout papers from his window. With light pouring into his war-darkened house for the first time in more than a decade, Gustad begins to see that borders are provisional, merely constructs. This final scene underlines the novel's critique of any cultural system that valorizes retreat from external influences.

Through such devices as the metaphor of the wall in *Such a Long Journey* and the storyteller-within-a-storyteller-within-a-story (Nariman Hansotia/Kersi/Mistry) in "Swimming Lessons," Mistry's narratives attempt to show how cultural meaning is created or assigned. By collapsing boundaries, literal and narrative, Mistry also rejects essentialist notions of home as an absolute point of origin and meaning.

In *Tales from Firozsha Baag,* Mistry raises significant and compelling questions about current constructions of the national in Canada; his subsequent works—*Such a Long Journey, A Fine Balance,* and *Family Matters*—similarly challenge the reductive processes at work in the construction of a unitary national narrative for India. Collectively, Mistry's writings, which embrace the political and epistemological complexities of double diaspora, call into question the presumed homogeneities of nationalist narratives. Given the increasing attention paid to issues such as multiculturalism, identity, and difference in Canadian literary and social discourse in recent years, the experiential base and analytic power of Canadian minority writing may well offer, as Padolsky notes, "insights into the ways and means by which 'plural' conceptions can function in the area of race and ethnicity" (22). It is in this sense that Mistry's Canadian narratives exemplify the hope expressed by critic Michael Thorpe that "in Canada South Asian writing will have an increasingly large and responsible role to play" (18).

NOTES

1 *Tales from Firozsha Baag* is the only work in Mistry's oeuvre (thus far) that directly thematizes "Canada."

2 *Tales from Firozsha Baag,* first published in 1987 by Penguin Canada, was brought out in Britain and the US under the title, *Swimming Lessons and Other Stories from Firozsha Baag.* All page references will be made to the New Canadian Library edition published by McClelland and Stewart, 2000.

3 Mistry in interview with Ali Lakhani at the Vancouver International Writers' Festival.

4 Today the most thriving Zoroastrian community in the world resides in the cities of Bombay, Surat, and Puna, where its members have sought to live in an environment of religious tolerance where they can practise the monotheistic religion founded by the Persian prophet, Zoroaster (Zarathustra). These Zoroastrians came to be known as Parsis, or Parsees, in India, after Pars (or "Fars"), the heartland of the ancient Persian empire. The Parsis have been prominent members of the commercial and political life of India, acquiring a standing far beyond the relatively small size of their community (roughly 100,000 worldwide, 70,000 of whom live in India). However, as India's population expands steadily, the country's Parsi community faces extinction due to emigration, falling birthrates, the growing tendency to marry outside the community, and a religious ban against accepting converts. For background reading, see Randeria; Hartman.

5 Other ethnic groups in Canada could also be considered as members of a "double diaspora": e.g., West Indian Canadians, African Canadians, and Fijian Canadians.

6 The language spoken by most Parsis today is Parsi Gujarati, a mixture of the old Farsi and the regional Gujarati. This, together with the adoption of the sari by Parsi women, the celebration of Hindu festivals such as Dashera and Diwali, and the adoption of important Hindu social structures such as the Panchayat all point to the successful "Indianization" of the Parsis. This does not mean that the Parsis have completely or uncritically assimilated into the dominant culture, for they still retain several distinctive cultural practices. The most conspicuous and controversial of these is their way of disposing of the dead.

7 The policy of multiculturalism was officially introduced in Canada in 1971 under the leadership of Pierre Trudeau as an acknowledgement of the cultural and ethnic diversity of Canadians: its aboriginal peoples, the Anglophone and Francophone heritage groups, the influx of other European immigrants since the middle of the nineteenth century, and the more recent arrivals of the "visible minority" immigrants from non-European, mostly Asian, countries.

8 Writers such as Bissoondath, Selvon, and Dabydeen, for instance, have come to Canada via the Caribbean; Selvon lived for a few years in England before relocating to Canada. Vassanji, also of the Indian diaspora, migrated to Canada from East Africa. Shani Mootoo, another writer of South Asian origins, was born in Ireland and raised in Trinidad before making her home in Canada.

9 Sarosh discovers that many other immigrants have also sought professional help to integrate completely into Canadian society. One man, he learns, looked for help because he could not eat Canadian Wonder Bread without vomiting; he was able to digest only Indian bread made with flour milled in the village back in India. After a series of treatments by the Multicultural Department, however, the man was able to "successfully [eat] his first slice of whole-wheat Wonder Bread with no ill effects. The ultimate goal is pure white Wonder Bread" (166).

10 I am using the term "presence" here in the sense meant by Stuart Hall. In rejecting the view that cultural identity can be fixed and secured by looking back to an originary homeland and the notion of pure ethnicity, Hall argues for the existence of at least three main cultural and historical "presences" in the Caribbean—the African, the European, and the "New World"—which constitute the complexity of (Caribbean) identity. See "Cultural Identity and Diaspora" (398).

11 The Parsi emphasis on physical cleanliness and avoiding pollution is again evident in the novel *Family Matters*.

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Stephanie Bolster

The Canadian Garden

What you passed on your way in:
look at it right and it's seen by Tom Thomson
but you didn't, and it was a few rocks,
some shrubs in need of water. Over at the zoo,
moose, muskoxen, and raccoons bask unbothered
in their forested enclosures, down a hill from the rest
of the spectacle. Beyond the ridge of conifers,
it could go on and on. How lifelike.
Giraffes on cleared slopes, reaching
for acacias planted thinly just a little
too far past their fence, draw crowds.

Ann Martin

Visions of Canadian Modernism

The Urban Fiction of F. R. Livesay and J. G. Sime

Canada in the 1920s has been traditionally regarded as the desert outpost of modernism. At best, its writers were able to filter modernist experimentation from elsewhere through Canadian landscapes, and to create "a partly isolated culture of patterns and tendencies which exist[ed] in a more complicated form outside" (Dudek 11). At worst, they were content "To paint the native maple" (F. R. Scott) and enumerate old themes, seemingly miles away from metropolitan and cosmopolitan literary trends. If "Canadian literature evolved directly from Victorian into Postmodern" (Kroetsch 1), it appears that this feat was achieved through the nation's own desire to remain a noncombatant in the struggle between artistic movements. In this sense, Canada remained a neutral zone in the war over modernism: a space of hesitation and vacillation, a land of transience and escape from social and cultural upheaval.

Luckily, this version of the Canadian canon has had its critics, who have asserted the diversity of poetry and fiction written in Canada in the first half of the twentieth century. But it seems that we are only just beginning to address the interpenetration of modernism and the experience of urban modernity, even in texts that are widely acknowledged as dealing with modern city life. For other national literatures, the connection between modernity and urbanity has been at the centre of modernist studies for years. Works by writers such as James Joyce, Virginia Woolf, F. Scott Fitzgerald, and Nella Larsen have led to readings of the modern metropolis as a microcosm of the modern world, reflecting its "futility and anarchy" (Eliot 177), or alternatively, its empowering challenges to "totalizing or hegemonic" discourses (Boone 7). In these texts, "the city is not only . . . a form of modern life; it is

the physical embodiment of a decisive modern consciousness" that is expressed through modernist literature (Williams 239). Urbanization and industrialization are narratives that manifest themselves differently depending on cultural contexts, but the experience of the modern city has been a profound and inextricable element in modernist literature—and this is true not only in Britain and the United States, but in Canada as well.

The effect of the metropolis on Canadian writing has, of course, been recognized. Though Mary Jean Green points to the reluctance of the early twentieth-century Québécois literary establishment "to recognize the realities of Quebec's urbanization and industrialization" (51), Louis Dudek indicates the effects of "the physical tumult and discords" of Montreal on anglophone poets such as A. M. Klein and Irving Layton (61). W. J. Keith has explored the centrality of Toronto in a range of works of fiction (191–251), and George Woodcock has noted in Morley Callaghan's novels a portrayal "of what we now call urban alienation" (186). More recently, Brian Trehearne has identified a range of High Modernist texts produced in the 1940s that engage in "a poetry of ironic realism, urban life, and class-conscious historicity" (313). Justin Edwards and Glenn Willmott have also made bridges between modernism and urbanism through their studies, respectively, of Callaghan's *Strange Fugitive* (1928)—which Edwards calls "Canada's first urban novel" (212)—and Ernest Buckler's *The Mountain and the Valley* (1952). These critics are leading us towards a new understanding of Canadian modernism, but in the dominant view, 1920s Canada remains a "rural and loyal British *hinterland*" (Pache 1151; italics in original), where the presence of the urban retains its nineteenth-century associations with British Decadence, or reflects imported modernisms, such as those of T. S. Eliot and Ernest Hemingway.

We might extend our understanding of Canadian modernism, then, by exploring in more detail works from the 1920s that respond to urban modernity, and that involve the metropolis as it was experienced specifically in Canada. First, we might acknowledge that we do "find ourselves in cities" in early twentieth-century Canadian texts, and that we are not just "led into the countryside" (Willmott 301). The issue is not the absence of the metropolis in 1920s Canadian writing, nor its lack of connection to the cities depicted in Anglo-American modernist texts, but rather a perspective on Canadian literature that has led us to overlook the role of the city. Desmond Pacey has observed, for example, that "we are apt to see Canadian fiction of the twenty years between the two World Wars as a barren area peopled only by Frederick Philip Grove, Morley Callaghan, and Mazo de la Roche" (168). Grove is

identified, of course, as one of the "prairie realists" (189), and Callaghan as the urban realist, while Mazo de la Roche is designated as a "novelist of rural Ontario" (179), despite her depiction in *Jalna* (1927) of the powerful impact of New York City on the imaginations and lives of the Whiteoaks. Similarly, a writer such as Arthur Stringer is generally better known for his Prairie fiction than for his novel *The City of Peril* (1923), which delves into the social, financial, and sexual politics of a modern metropolis.

Works of prose fiction by Florence Randal Livesay and Jessie Georgina Sime from the 1920s also depict the lived experiences of the modern city, and the social and economic challenges that accompanied changing gender and class roles. In her reading of J. G. Sime's short story collection *Sister Woman*, for example, Sandra Campbell points to the influence of "the psychic and social pressures brought to bear against women as a result of the rapid industrialisation and urbanisation which Georgina Sime witnessed between 1907 and 1919 in Montreal" (Introduction *Sister*, vii-viii). Sime's and Livesay's portraits of women working and living in Canadian cities may complicate, however, the notion that "the war, and the industrialization of the modern state" led only to "alienation" (Malus *et al.* 64). By exploring the new possibilities that the twentieth-century metropolis and its technologies offered to women, Sime and Livesay provide another perspective on the sense of social and personal estrangement that we have come to regard as a prominent feature of the literature of the day.[1] Modernism has been generally associated with "an aesthetic centered on neutrality and apolitical objectivity," and a "valorization of style over content" (Ardis 5), but Sime and Livesay depend less on literary experimentation and more on realistic depictions of women's lives. In other words, while responding to similar material conditions, Sime and Livesay are not necessarily part of or participants in an artistic revolution influenced by "the men of 1914"—Pound, Lewis, Eliot, and Joyce (B.K. Scott 79). By depicting the complicated experience of urban modernity rather than engaging with an imported modernist aesthetic, their works present us with an opportunity to revisit our definitions of modernism and to acknowledge other perspectives on the time and the literary responses that it entailed.[2]

The limits of traditional definitions of modernism become particularly significant in readings of J. G. Sime's works, including those that tend to downplay her twentieth-century context. For example, Sandra Campbell and Lorraine McMullen situate Sime's writing in relation to turn-of-the-century New Woman fiction, despite its publication during and after World

War I (Introduction, *New Women* 14). Misao Dean also places Sime's *Sister Woman* (1919) in a *fin-de-siècle* aesthetic category, even as she acknowledges that Sime's stories "differ from much New Woman writing in including the experience of working-class women and prostitutes as well as the middle-class 'business woman'" (73). While Gerald Lynch connects the effects of the city to the form and content of Sime's fiction (63–64, 68), his readings link her work to late nineteenth-century Fabianism. Lindsey McMaster's exploration of Sime's working women also emphasizes the effects of industrialization (20–21), but she too places Sime's stories in a turn-of-the-century context. It seems that when we view modernist writing only as aesthetic rebellion, wartime trauma, and wasteland cities, other explorations of urban modernity and modern subjectivity, especially those by women, are read in relation to earlier literary trends, not modernism.

Because views and "formulations" of the city and its inhabitants are affected by gender (Parsons 7) as well as by other factors, we need a different lens through which we can perceive a range of literary responses to the growth of the metropolis, to the opportunities as well as the problems created by industrialization, to the transformation of gender and class roles, especially in the wake of World War I, and to the effects of these social changes on perception and subjectivity. The works of both Sime and Livesay present us with an opportunity to engage critically with traditional visions of Canadian modernism. Sime's *Our Little Life* (1921), set in Toronto, and Livesay's *Savour of Salt* (1927), set in Montreal ("Regalia"), indicate the influence of metropolitan spaces on women's identities. Caught in the larger demographic shift from the country to the city, Livesay's Aine Finnigan and Sime's Katie McGee confront, resist, subvert, and adhere to the expectations of the urban and rural environments in which they circulate. Both women utilize social structures creatively, employing what Michel de Certeau has called a "tactics" of cultural engagement, whereby they are able to "use, manipulate, and divert" the spaces and norms of urban life (30). The modern city in particular is figured as both an enabling and a threatening place for women; it is neither a wholly positive nor a fully negative alternative to the rural societies from which the women have come. Their marginalized positions in the metropolis at first alienate them from others, but eventually the women are able to forge personal connections and local networks of support, indicating the potential for community as well as autonomy in the city. By presenting the experiences of women in the Canadian city, Sime and Livesay participate in a widespread, multinational response to the modern metropolis. Instead

of privileging formal experimentation over material conditions, or depicting only the alienation of individuals in the modern urban world, they focus on the internal contradictions of the city, exploring in Canada the fragmented and shifting nature of modernity and its effects on women's identities.

Both *Our Little Life* and *Savour of Salt* feature Irish-Catholic protagonists who migrate to the city and experience a Canada transformed by industrialization and urbanization. A predominantly rural society had become by 1921 a nation balanced between rural and urban communities, and based upon an economy that "had been reorganized on industrial, corporate, and metropolitan lines" (Kerr 67). Migration from the country—and from other countries—to the major Canadian cities of Montreal and Toronto in the early twentieth century had a profound influence on individuals' personal and public identities (74). While as "*conceptual*" categories, the binary of rural and urban "breaks down," since the terms are "constantly in negotiation with each other" (New 158; italics in original), the material experience of the modern metropolis signaled a significant break with the socio-economic organization of the country and its inhabitants. The difference between rural and urban societies is reflected most powerfully by the difference in the kinds of community that the spaces engender. According to Georg Simmel, for example, the "money economy" of the early twentieth-century industrial centre alienated the worker according to his or her function in society and disrupted traditional interpersonal relationships (411). The division and specialization of labour led to a social "structure" based upon "the highest impersonality" as well as "a highly personal subjectivity" (413). The new sense of autonomy, produced by the anonymity of the individual within the city and his or her role within the larger economic structure, was thus accompanied by the subject's sense of anxiety regarding his or her singular and alienated position in the midst of the masses (418). The "discontinuity" of the metropolis, "the rapid crowding of changing images," and "the unexpectedness of onrushing impressions" added to the individual's sense of being alone in a disordered world (410). As Simmel observes, "one nowhere feels as lonely and lost as in the metropolitan crowd" (418). The city may involve interactions among different people, classes, cultures, and ethnicities, but these dealings are characterized by what Raymond Williams identifies as a "lack of connection" that arises from the absence of the traditional organization of an agrarian community (245).

Though Toronto and Montreal were minor cities compared to 1920s New York, Paris, and London, they nonetheless offered in Canada a modern

metropolitan experience that had profound effects on the form and content of early twentieth-century Canadian literature.[3] Though *Savour of Salt* is the main prose text in which Livesay presents the sense of urban disjunction and disorientation, her other works indicate that this shift in perspective continued to hold her attention. In her poem "Time" (1923), for example, a former rival hails the speaker of the verse, making overt the arbitrary nature of human contact in the unnamed city environment: "Caught in an eddy of a crowd / I heard one call my name aloud." Memories of a previous time and space erupt in the midst of this new setting, which has refigured the relationship: it is not enmity but temporary community that the speaker encounters in the scene. Momentary conversations and connections are thus possible, but seem fleeting and random, symbols of discontinuity rather than representations of lasting or stable bonds. Sime too explores throughout her career the effects of urban settings on the individual, on the society, and on literary style. As she suggests in this passage from her prose study, *Orpheus in Québec*, time and space and flux are the essence of the city:

> The constant brushing against one another, in familiar daytime association, of the most discrepant elements (such as could never have encountered one another in daily life before this age of rapid transit and the ubiquitous influences of the radio and the movie), the chance meetings and partings of men and women of widely dissimilar personalities and outlooks, the half-understandings and total misunderstandings of the ideas and ideals by which the various lives are swayed—all this may be admirably dealt with in rapid pencil-sketches or storiettes or possibly in radio-serials. . . . (44)

Sime's list of external stimuli recreates the overwhelming sensory impact of the city, whose pace is best reflected in media forms capable of reproducing the speed and fragmentation of modernity. Like film, which she invokes here as a metaphor of the quick-moving and diverse crowd, the metropolis is a coherent spatial entity but composed of disparate parts placed in rapid juxtaposition. Sime suggests that a sense of community will eventually result from the "gradual amalgamation" of these fragmented parts in the context of Montreal (44). But for the moment, her vision of the modern city is characterized by motion and social transition, where the individual's sense of identity and place is continually disrupted and must be constantly recreated in a changed and changing landscape.

The role of women in Canadian cities is particularly important in the 1920s, not only in terms of the political power many gained from the suffrage movement and from their work during the War, but also in relation to the increasing numbers and visibility of women in the metropolis. Changes

in technology and in the economic structure of the nation led to "a massive influx of women into the workforce, mainly in the manufacturing industries" ("Making History"). By 1921, women represented almost 17% of the labour force. A further 36% increase in Canadian women's employment through the 1920s (Vipond 6) saw women continuing to move from domestic service into "industrial, retail and clerical sectors" (Campbell and McMullen 15). The fact that about 90% of these women were single (Vipond 6) and living alone in the metropolis had a profound effect on the power dynamics of the city. Carolyn Strange, for instance, argues that widespread cultural anxiety regarding industrialization and urbanization took the form of a reaction against the increasing presence of women in Toronto between 1880–1930. Single "girls" working, living, and playing in the city became connected in the public imagination with "immorality" and "danger" (10). Their professional independence was linked to unsupervised and thus illicit sexuality in public spaces such as the Canadian National Exhibition and Hanlan's Point on the Toronto Islands (123). In reality, their occupational choices were accompanied by varying degrees of economic, personal, and social marginalization, since the women's precarious financial position, resulting from often low-paying and non-unionized jobs, made them vulnerable not just to exploitation but to increased surveillance. New kinds of "regulation," both formal and informal, appeared at this time, whether in the shape of policewomen or of organizations such as the YWCA and Big Sisters (15). The modern city, with its new economic structures, new infrastructures, and new attitudes towards women's work may have led to increased autonomy and visibility for women, but it also prompted new kinds of policing in Toronto and elsewhere.

The power of the law and its effect on single women in the city are what Livesay addresses in *Savour of Salt.* Though better known as Dorothy Livesay's mother, Florence Randal Livesay was a significant figure in the early twentieth-century Canadian literary scene, publishing poetry, prose, and journalism, especially in the 1910s and 1920s. Livesay's work reflects her awareness of the different societies that were coming into conflict in the modern world, as well as the different communities that were being affected by modernization. The first half of the novel is set in an Irish farming settlement in rural Ontario presided over by a Catholic priest; the second half takes place in what appears to be the less constrictive space of Toronto. The Catholic community in which Aine Finnigan is raised is thus contrasted to the Protestant city, and the family-centred countryside seems to be at odds

with the fast-moving metropolis. Aine's love interests symbolize the tension between these two worlds and their distinctive norms. Larry is expected to become a Catholic priest, retaining the traditions of the country; Van Bradburn, on the other hand, is a Protestant who is engaged to Aine's city cousin, and who uses modern technology in his dentistry practice.

Both men are portrayed as being unavailable to Aine, as are the two communities they represent to which Aine herself does not fully belong. Indeed, Livesay depicts Aine as a "Child of Twilight" (3). However, it is Aine's liminal social and cultural status that enables her to adjust to a changing world. An orphan, Aine represents the autonomous modern subject who is able to realize the promise of the city without rejecting the nation's rural roots. It is not, however, an easy road. From the beginning of the novel, her family history puts Aine at odds with the imperatives of the rural community in which she has been raised. As her adoptive parent, Mrs. Finnigan, explains at the end of *Savour of Salt*, Aine's biological mother transgressed the laws of the Settlement:

> Who was her mother? A half-crazed creature, wandering up and down the fields of a town fifty miles away—an English girl. And Desmond Finnigan would have married her right enough—when it was too late—and would have brought her to my house. I said: "I'll take the baby, but you keep that woman away from the place or it will be the worse for her." (219)

As well as establishing Aine's illegitimacy, the passage summarizes the key divisions in her identity: the mother is "half-crazed"; the daughter is only half-Irish; Aine has known only half her story for most of the novel. Even her given name, Lorraine, is split, as Aine's identity reflects her birth parents' unofficial, unrecognized, and unsuccessful union.

Despite her ties to the community and to her adoptive family, Aine seems destined to become a reflection of her mother. As the Settlement's priest tells her, Aine is one of his "failures": "For all you seem so docile you're a little rebel at heart and I've always known it. Here you've been brought up very strict . . . but you'd leave us tomorrow, Aine, though you'd always love and understand us" (152–53). Though he has enough influence to rupture her friendship with Larry, he cannot force her to remain within the community or to follow its traditions. Indeed, the priest's evaluation of Aine proves prophetic: after his death, she leaves the Settlement altogether for the liberating opportunities of the city. But in this environment too, her split identity and her inability to conform to the communities in which she circulates lead to another crisis. Aine and Van Bradburn break a social

taboo: when Van's fiancée Beatrice, who is Aine's cousin, is not at home, Van takes Aine for a drive in the country. Once they traverse the city limits, the car runs of out of gas and they are stranded in the countryside. After receiving help from a farmer, they arrive back at the city house, but at an outrageous hour. Aine is ostracized by her cousin, by her aunt, and by all whom she knows. Her reputation in shreds, she is taken away from the house by the urban counterpart of Father O'Shea: "a woman in the uniform of the Salvation Army" (182) who will place Aine "under some supervision for a time" (183). In the scene, Aine's identity is erased. Neither part of the city nor part of the country, and yet the focus of their laws, she ceases to be a subject and instead becomes an object upon which power is exercised. She is moved "mechanically" by larger forces through a nightmare world characterized by division and liminality:

> The door closed with a bang and Aine as in a dream was led to a taxi that seemed to have sprung up by magic just outside the door. She was so tired that nothing mattered, not even the key grating on the outside of the lock of her door. She flung herself on the hard little white bed and was asleep in a second.

Aine's freedom of movement has been marked as sexual misconduct, and she is punished accordingly, as she becomes an anonymous inmate of the city under the supervision of the Salvation Army.

In this scene, Livesay emphasizes the key differences between the power structures of the city and the country. Though sympathetic, and indeed "an old friend of the family," the "matron" who supervises Aine's division from her family and friends indicates the increasing institutionalization of behavioural norms in urban areas (183). The Sally Ann represents the official enforcement of mainstream expectations regarding class and gender roles. In contrast, the priest in the Settlement represents a local form of authority, embodying the community's history, culture, and religious traditions. Where the priest supplements the superstitions of the matriarchs of the community, the matron suggests the alienation of power from personal contexts, as her uniform conflates religion, civil law, and military might. The forms of punishment associated with the two environments also differ: whereas Aine's mother is exiled from the Settlement, Aine will be reformed into a more acceptable member of the urban society. Her work becomes her "gospel" (183), as she is incorporated into the Salvation Army's urban rescue mission. Assigned a job as a waitress in a tea-room, she is separated from both the Finnigans and from Van's company, and removed from the communities that have given her a sense of personal and not just professional

identity. The result is an insecurity and an uncertainty that emphasize her sense of internal division: "Aine, finding herself in a new world, ached with the sense of the old one left all unfinished, with ragged edges" (185). Her position in the transitory space of the restaurant is thus symbolic of her position in the metropolis, where interpersonal relationships are replaced by monetary exchanges in impersonal spaces: "Aine began to hate the surging crowds, in which she was daily lost, as she had never detested the farm" (185–86). In the Settlement Aine is limited by her family history; in the city she is reduced to an anonymous economic role.

Livesay suggests, however, that the alienating flux of the city can lead to possibilities as well as limitations. Since the space of the metropolis is based upon the concept of autonomy, the individual can exercise power within its social structures and infrastructures in order to make opportunities realities. Thus, though Aine is placed in a regimented job, she finds that she "like[s] the work amazingly" (184). Her attitude towards Mrs. Plaice's boarding house is similarly positive. At first, the boarding house with its separate apartments seems to represent the restrictions and boundaries involved in the larger city. But Livesay shows moments of connection among the residents that break down barriers and suggest new kinds of bonds. On Christmas Eve, for instance, the Protestant landlady gives her Catholic tenant a candle which, though unblessed, signals the crossing of religious boundaries (187); her aunt makes the journey from the Settlement to the city for a visit (188); her "fellow-roomer," Miss Sillifant, offers to do her hair (189). These different relationships and identities arise from the very organization of space in the urban setting, where the estrangement of the individual from a traditional social order is countered by the multiple connections that become possible in this new environment.

The climax of Livesay's novel is predicated upon this dynamic, where, ironically, Aine's punishment leads to her reward, as her very anonymity in the city enables her to reconnect with Van. Her position as a waitress may signal her alienation from her rural community, but the resulting autonomy and distance from the community's restrictive norms leads to social mobility in form of a renewed relationship with her lover and with her family. It is in the public space of the tea-room that Van Bradburn's sister, Letty, happens to see Aine, and though Van arrives at the restaurant too late, he sees Aine catch the streetcar, and manages to board it behind her. In a specifically urban fantasy, written as if viewed from the street, the lover sees the object of his desire in the crowd and follows her through the maze of bodies:

"He had fought his way to her, touched her on the shoulder; they were hanging on the same strap. Aine looked as if she were going to topple backward, and a curve in the rails nobly swept her in the proper direction. She fell into his arms" (208). Here, Livesay suggests not only that personal connections undercut the alienation of the city, but that personal contact is made possible by the physical and social organization of the modern metropolis, and the increasingly important place of women within it. The city itself—its streets, its shops, its public transit systems—enables the reunion of Aine and Van, and the creation of a new social order. At the end, the newlyweds travel between the Settlement and the city on a train, symbolizing a new Canadian union that links and balances rural and urban traditions.

In Livesay's novel, the problems and possibilities of the metropolis relate to the structure of the modern city itself: not just the gendered social structures through which Aine is punished and rewarded, but the physical spaces that both separate and bring together Van and Aine. In Jessie Georgina Sime's *Our Little Life*, however, the anonymity of the individual in the metropolis leads to a powerful sense of anxiety that often overshadows the protagonist's sense of autonomy. If Livesay reaffirms the ability of the individual to ride the crest of 1920s urban change and renewal, making personal connections and overcoming obstacles at an individual level, Sime emphasizes the citizen's struggles to remain afloat in a shifting and alienating urban society. In *Our Little Life*, the train tracks and "the electric car-line" in Katie McGee's neighbourhood signal the possibility of boundary-crossings, as they do in Livesay's novel, but their promise of mobility is overshadowed by Sime's focus on the apartment building and the rooms in which individuals seem to be trapped (xi). The tenants' fortunes are tied to the fictional neighbourhood at O'Neil Street and Drayton Place, which declines from being an area of "good" houses in the 1860s (vii), to being one of respectable apartments at the turn of the century, finally becoming a kind of slum by 1917. Katie McGee's own slide in social position after the death of her mother echoes the buildings' fate, and it appears that she is caught in social and economic systems beyond her control.

Through Katie McGee, Sime explores how hegemonic discourses are experienced by citizens on an immediate and personal level, as individual resistance and local bonds seem to pale in comparison to the metanarratives of industrialization and capitalism. Her depiction of a thinly disguised Montreal suggests the complexities involved in negotiating ethnicity and religion, as well as class and gender, in a modern urban setting. Like Aine

Finnigan, Katie McGee has a bifurcated identity. She is an anglophone within a city that saw its boundaries change and its francophone population expand in the first decades of the twentieth century (Gordon 40). She is divided between her distant history as an Irish citizen and her present status as a Canadian, and her conflicted views of immigration suggest the continuing power of the Empire as well as its fragmentation (Watt xxviii-xxix).[4] Katie also indicates the increasingly common division between a rural past and an urban present: "She came straight off the land . . . and the few modern ideas of the city she had plastered on to herself were anachronisms" (104). An unmarried Catholic seamstress of forty-six, Katie is consistently caught between her reliance upon inherited beliefs and mores, and her experience of contemporary modern realities. Family traditions regarding her daughterly duties have divided Katie from previous suitors: "It had been a choice between her mother and Tully" (57). But her current loneliness causes her to question her dutiful obedience to the family's expectations: "Had she been right?" (57). Money divides Katie from her middle-class sister, who offers her charity: "I ain't a *beggar*!" (75; italics in original). But Katie's pride—"she had ever since steadily and strenuously refused to see her sister"—may lead to her isolation from a caring community (75). Her Catholic faith involves Katie in an argument with an employer: "She felt that Mrs. Barclay in desecrating her Lord had desecrated her" (67). Katie's religious outrage is complicated, however, by her financial and emotional dependence upon the Barclay household: "She felt as if she could never go back to Wellington Road . . . as if she must forgo for evermore all that solid comfort and kindliness, never even carry home baskets with cakes and home-baked bread and things for tea any more" (68).

In these episodes, social and economic marginalization is tied to the hierarchies and assumptions of the anglophone city neighbourhoods in which Katie moves. Her working-class status, her Irish background, and her Catholicism are at odds with the ideals that her modern society, as well as its conservative English-speaking elements, seem to promulgate.[5] Social mobility, for instance, may be figured as being both possible and desirable in this commodity-oriented world: indeed, the second Mrs. Glassridge who hires Katie to make her clothes was a manicure girl "until Mr. Glassridge one fine day caught sight of her and wrought a transformation-scene" (83). But such ascensions are rare, and working-class immigrants like Miss McGee and even her English-born neighbour, Robert Fulton, are unlikely to be upwardly mobile. When he sees commercial goods through shop and car

windows, for instance, and knows that they are inaccessible, "something of the anarchist would rise up in Robert Fulton; a desire would seize him to go out and break through the window of the ly-mousine" (128). In Sime's novel, newcomers to the city and the nation realize that the system will not change for them, despite their attempts to realize its promises and demands.

Although Sime points to the disjunction between upper- and working-class neighbourhoods, and between cultural fantasies and lived realities, she also stresses the enabling differences between her characters' public or professional roles and their personal lives. While as Miss McGee, she is subordinated in the moneyed English and Protestant sections of Montreal in which she works, as Katie McGee, she is part of another community. Just as her neighbourhood is located within the larger metropolis, and her building within the neighbourhood, and her apartment within the building, Katie's identity is grounded in her relationships with the people who immediately surround her. Her "little life" is centred primarily in her friendship with Robert Fulton. Miss McGee is a "great believer in keeping oneself to oneself" (13), but she opens her room to the younger man, who comes for dinner every night and regards it as "an oasis" (14) in an otherwise alienating landscape. The two are divided by their inherited identities; further, Katie's unrequited and almost acknowledged love for Robert is at odds with his view of Miss McGee as "just a kind elderly thing of no particular sex" (52). And yet, in depicting Robert's reliance upon Katie's kindness and support, Sime suggests the persistence of community and the new forms that social connections take in the modern city. Social barriers are not deconstructed in the novel; indeed, it is Robert's gentlemanly, British background that seems to attract Miss McGee's admiration in the first place. But such culturally constructed hierarchies are countered by moments of sympathy that arise from the friends' meetings. These two individuals, who in former days and in other places would have had little in common with each other, come to depend upon each other. The apartment building thus represents the complexities of the metropolis, whether exemplified by Montreal, New York, or London, and the "polysemy of place" that enables different experiences of urban modernity, where individuals can both comply with and resist official mappings of space and identity (Radice 19). Though the physical structures of the city symbolize the powerful social systems that alienate individuals, the apartments are also places of refuge and interpersonal connections, and offer a sense of local community that undermines the divisive, official hierarchies of ethnicity, religion, gender, and class.

The hegemonic discourses that characterize Sime's vision of the modern city are undercut in a rather different way when the worldwide influenza epidemic of 1918 strikes. Affecting all classes and sections of the city, it causes Miss McGee's wealthy clients to fall ill, along with the artists, labourers, and drug dealers who live in the apartments. The epidemic crystallizes Katie's resistance to larger social imperatives, as she rejects, albeit somewhat reluctantly, her previous assumptions regarding morality and social status. She nurses not only the gentlemanly Robert but also the prostitutes and "chorus-girls" who live in the basement of the apartments (354). This experience changes her view of these women and of the value of respectability:

> "Would ye want me come set be ye here," Miss McGee added after a moment—as her eyes met the frightened eye of the third of the bunch of prostitutes that she had so bitterly decried. "Will I come spend the noight with ye, eh?" Miss McGee said: and, in response to what she read in the frightened eyes that looked into hers, she added, "Wait jes' a minnut. . . . I'll see you through. I'll be back. I shan't be a minnut." (370)

This is social rebellion on a local level, enabled by the space of the building itself, and prompted by Katie's recognition of another woman's pain, fear, and illness.

The larger change in Katie's life, however, results from Robert's death. When he succumbs to influenza, Katie must re-form her sense of identity, which for so long has been based upon his company and companionship. Instead of choosing to leave the apartment building and move to her sister's suburban home, Katie decides to remain in the city: "she had to go back to Penelope's Buildings—and *live* there" (388; italics in original). In her decision, she reaffirms the value of her position in the community, whether in her professional role as a seamstress, or in terms of her personal connections both to the tenants and to the women whose clothes she makes. It is to maintain her sense of autonomy that she returns, but she comes back also to a community, though one that differs from the hierarchical upper-class neighbourhoods of her clients, or the organized suburbia of her sister. The nature of this new metropolitan community is realized most strongly when, at the end of the novel, Katie is coming home on the streetcar. It is packed with workers from the munitions factory, and after a man gives up his seat to her, they exchange pleasantries:

> The same old things. The same old human things that we say to one another, generation in and generation out. As Miss McGee replied to this neighbour of hers who had wished to help her, who had shown her good-will, she felt—it was

> inexplicable—as if her feeling to life changed. It *wasn't* a mess. The world was a mess, but not life. (393; italics in original)

Paradoxically, her sense of belonging to the neighbourhood and apartment building stems from these seemingly random moments of personal contact that are enabled by the ostensibly alienating infrastructures of the inner city. The modern city remains an ambivalent environment for this woman despite the "good-will" of her fellow workers, since its systems, citizens, and businessmen often undercut her ability to earn her own living. But the scene on the streetcar encapsulates Katie's ability to survive in the city through a combination of independence and communal connections, through which she is able both to assert her own local identity and to compromise with the larger structures by which her life is bounded.

Instead of indicating only the alienating aspects of the metropolis for women at this time, Sime and Livesay emphasize the process of negotiation that accompanies the assertion of identity in the modern city. Urban modernity involves an altered sense of subjectivity and new kinds of contact, including those based on moments of random personal connection within alienating public structures. By engaging creatively with existing class structures, gender roles, and social norms, the female protagonists of the novels retain a certain amount of autonomy but also forge bonds with individuals, whether in the boarding houses or the streetcars of the city. Sime's and Livesay's modernism stems from a similar tactics of cultural engagement. The authors' explorations of women's positions in the 1920s metropolis involve a perspective on the modern world that is not necessarily adapted from imported modernisms, or derived from nineteenth-century urban identities and literatures. Instead, they depict the complicated power dynamics of the metropolis and of subjectivity itself, presenting a vision of modernity that depends upon compromise rather than control, and fluidity rather than stability. Their fiction may supplement our scripting of the Canadian canon, then, not only by challenging our location of modernism in the literary and geographical margins of the country, but also by emphasizing the diversity of classed and gendered experiences that led to a range of modernisms in Canada.

NOTES

1 See, for example, Edmund Wilson's seminal reading of Eliot's *The Waste Land*: "In our post-War world of shattered institutions, strained nerves and bankrupt ideals, life no longer seems serious or coherent—we have no belief in the things we do and consequently we have no heart for them" (106). In the context of Canadian literature, Willmott

refers to "a modern relativity of the self estranged from any identity essentialized or naturalized by a rural way of life and its traditions" (302).

2 Exploring other forms of modernism becomes an important task, particularly if the canon of Canadian modernist authors has been predicated upon "the marginalization and exclusion of feminine, emotional, domestic art forms, and the idealization and centralization of masculine, abstract, public art forms" (Kelly 78).

3 According to the *Sixth Census of Canada, 1921*, the populations of Montreal and Toronto were 618 506 and 521 893 respectively, followed by Winnipeg at 179 087. In the same year, the population of Paris was recorded as 2 906 472, and the population of the London area was 7 386 755. New York City and its boroughs had a population of approximately 5 621 000 in 1920 (*Demographia*).

4 While most immigration to Canada at this time stemmed from the British Isles, "whose people are regarded as the very best types" (*Montreal* 148), Montreal experienced a dramatic increase in ethnic diversity in the first decades of the twentieth century (see Gordon 37–38).

5 Antoine Sirois indicates in his study of the literature of Montreal the sense of division among English-speaking inhabitants of the city, as well as between anglophone and francophone societies. He describes a character from Mavis Gallant's *An Unmarried Man's Summer*, for instance, as being stunned "quand il rencontre une personne convenable qui n'est ni Anglaise, ni Écossaise, ni protestante" (52). Elaine Kalman Naves has also discussed Gwethalyn Graham's depictions of anti-Semitism in Montreal (62-63).

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Hendrike Slegtenhorst

Self-portraits in Youth

1 *Approach to Middle Night*

An arbitrary ritual of ricerars[1]
Constructed on neural channels
Soaked in coffee and chance wines,
The patterns beat dully, steeped
In the smoky asphyxiation of cigarettes.

My senses glisten above a meniscus of breath,
Sounds poured into a calcifying ear,
Atoms to the eye imperfections
Of a parabola of repetition, the careless
Arithmetic held in place by adhesion.
(Must I, then, enter your nakedness
Before recovering ecstasy?)

2 *At Midday*

Strange retreat
Into a mythology of avowal,
When gentleness runs ragged and sharply
In estuaries of the mind.

Moreover, the clandestine efforts
Sear with peregrine vengeance
Coming round sombre corners in the organism,
Unavoidably, I am face to face.

Threadbare resolutions that close ranks
Like disciplined soldiery
To erode mercilessly in summer storms
Pumping blood in a febrile heart.

Centuries of disavowal
That coalesce in vertical dreams
Waking remains a point of departure
To cauterize flesh to flesh.

3 *In the North of the Afternoon*

Irruptions rend the torn mind
And immobile broken ear, smoke
The arterial vortex.

Rainfall in the afternoons of northern cities
Convulses the oscillating intervals that fall into
The allure of error in disjunctions of time,
Spasms of actuality permeated by
The remembrance of waste.

1 Polythematic, solemn music in imitative counterpoint, with extended treatment of each subject.

Suzanne Bailey

Woman/Body/Landscape
Imaginary Geographies in the Writing of Karen Connelly

Karen Connelly's poetry and non-fiction belong not only to the genre of travel writing but also to a continuing project of female self-representation, a kind of "autobiographics," to use Leigh Gilmore's term. Like other contemporary theorists of women's self-writing, Gilmore extends notions of what constitutes autobiography, proposing "autobiographics" as an intermediary term between traditional autobiography and acts of self-representation in other genres.[1] While it would be reductive to read Connelly's books, particularly her poetry, exclusively in terms of self-representation, the narrative premise of each work involves a traveller or speaker who narrates stories of self and other set in landscapes around the world.[2] Specifically, travel for Connelly permits a de-centring of self. "Land owns and defines us," she writes in *Touch the Dragon: A Thai Journal* (1992): "Without it, we become something else" (1). In two of Connelly's most compelling works, *Touch the Dragon* and *This Brighter Prison: A Book of Journeys* (1993), travel serves as a form of self-fashioning. Both texts negotiate the relationship of self to place—and home—through narratives of travel. *Touch the Dragon* is a prose work that explores what the self becomes when refracted through the gaze of others in a different culture. *This Brighter Prison*, a collection of poems, narrates a darker psychological journey, in which the speaker struggles to define her vocation as poet and to deal with traumatic memories associated with home.

As a genre, travel writing falls between fiction and non-fiction, for it involves the movement of the traveller through actual spaces which are then

imaginatively reconstructed.[3] As in autobiography, the retrospective shaping of experience is as crucial an object of study as the actual events the author recounts. Stephen Greenblatt argues, for instance, that in early modern travel narratives, the anecdote has a key role: "seized in passing from the swirl of experiences," such stories "[mediate] between the undifferentiated succession of local moments and a larger strategy toward which they can only gesture" (3). The travel narrative may be seen as a series of embedded stories or even as a kind of photo album. In even the most unimaginative historical travel narrative, there is something to be learned from the way narrator frames the scene: that is, in the people, places, and objects singled out for attention. In other words, the narrative framing of the picture and the choice of subject matter tell us about the traveller and his/her construction of self and world.

Judith Adler suggests that the journey itself may be read as an artifact or performance, the basic elements of which are the body and its stylized movement through spaces in time (1369). In "Travel as Performed Art," she argues that

> travel may owe some of its cultural prestige, as well as its importance in persons' lives, to the fact that, in carrying a performer beyond the world of routine home life, it yields observations, encounters, and episodes that are free to function as . . . abstract signifiers. (1369)

Adler focuses on actual tourists, but her observations can be extended to travel writing as well. Travel is, as Nicolas Howe claims, "a way of living and writing out one's inner condition" (63). Michel de Certeau's essays on spatial practice also provide a context for considering travel as performance. In *The Practice of Everyday Life*, he argues that spaces have a lived reality for people, which may be "underexpressed" in language: felt on the level of the body rather than articulated through speech. As he puts it: "[p]laces are fragmentary and inward-turning histories . . . symbolizations encysted in the pain or pleasure of the body. 'I feel good here'—the well-being [suggested in these words] is a spatial practice" (108). De Certeau connects bodies to spaces and to narrative as well: stories, he argues, "permit exits, ways of going out and coming back in, and thus habitable spaces" (106). In *Touch the Dragon*, we see this process of "storying" the self,[4] as Connelly learns to inhabit the unknown spaces of a new country and culture with a body she represents as suddenly alien. In *This Brighter Prison*, the interweaving of old and new stories of self and place allows the traveller a way of "coming back in" when she returns to Canada.

Touch the Dragon: "I am not what I was before I came here"

Touch the Dragon charts what happens to the self when the relationship between identity and place is disrupted. At the age of sixteen, "painfully bored with high school" and Calgary, Connelly was hungry "for living knowledge of the world." She sought a way "out" by somewhat prosaic means: an exchange programme to Thailand (*Touch* i). In Thailand, she undergoes near-complete cultural immersion. She has some opportunities to speak English but lives with a Thai family in a remote northern location. Although the narrative involves only one year of Connelly's life, it can be seen as a *Bildungsroman*. Connelly states in the preface that her "true education began [in Thailand] and, in many ways, I consider it the country of my birth" (ii).[5] Birth is represented metaphorically in the opening passage of *Touch the Dragon* in a sequence entitled "Leaving Canada," the first words of the narrative. Connelly represents herself taking flight, enclosed in the body of the plane, hurtling through space: "[a]s the country pulls out from under me, I overturn like a glass on a yanked table-cloth, I spill" (1).

The self that emerges in Thailand is one Connelly doesn't recognize, and which is marked for her by the unruliness of her body: "Everything is the wrong size here. My bones are too big, my mind is too small. I never thought words could fail me, but here they're not even words. They're useless noises, wholly unreliable" (23). Blood pours from her body as her menstrual period goes out of control, until a doctor with a few words of English tells her she has an infection and anaemia from her new diet. Even her name is altered, suggesting a new identity: Karen Connelly, mispronounced in Thai, becomes Kalen Canary. As the only white *falang* or foreigner in her area of Thailand in 1986, Connelly experiences what it is like to be a member of a visible minority, albeit a privileged one who has chosen her displacement. In the eyes of the Thai, she becomes the exotic other: "I feel like a new acquisition in a famous zoo" (7). Like a child who must learn to walk and speak, she cannot control her body as she lumbers beside her Thai classmates in traditional dance class or attempts to form the sounds of a new language (43). Her vulnerability is wryly and repeatedly acknowledged with the hyperbole that characterizes Connelly's imaginative flights: "I would die in a week here, if lost; I would shrivel into a wrinkled skin and catch in thorns. Snakes would nest in my ribcage" (194). Connelly learns the relationship between place, language, and identity through the cutting away of her Canadian moorings. "Land," as she writes, "steadies people, holds them, even if they imagine they control it. . . . Without it, we become

something else" (*Touch the Dragon* 1). In *Travelers, Immigrants, Inmates,* Frances Bartkowski uses the classic woman/vase or figure/ground visual puzzle to describe the ambiguities of identity and place and the importance of articulating their complex relationship: there is a moment when, "for fractions of a second, [we can] name both elements of the representation, realizing that our eyes will soon insist on simplifying and choosing one element in this ambiguous visual field" (xvi). Connelly in effect learns what Bartkowski calls the "prismatic effects" of identities: that culture marks the self but that place is potentially transformative (Bartkowski xvi). In *Touch the Dragon,* Connelly begins to fashion a hybrid identity. By the end of her sojourn, longing to become Thai, she realizes how impossible this desire is: she is now, instead, "an interesting deformity. I am not Asian and never will be. Even if I forget it sometimes, no one else does. I am the wrong colour. But I am not what I was before I came here, either" (125). Throughout her narrative, Connelly refers back to the dream-like place home becomes, unable to hold "figure" and "ground" together at the same time. She senses that she has changed as a result of her cross-cultural experiences, but precisely how she has changed she cannot state in any language: "If a word exists that describes this quality I don't know it. . . . If there were a word to explain what has happened to me here, it would be a 'heart' word, and it would be in Thai" (125).

Are the effects of displacement lasting or transitory? Ajahn Champa, the English teacher at Connelly's Thai school, associates identity with place when she first meets Connelly: "Things you think are so real become dreams when you go away from them. Thailand will be a dream for you one day, when you go away again. Everything changes so easily. I might have lived in London in another life" (10). The relationship between setting and self is something Connelly tries to fix as she reflects on her new world. Her impulse is to turn to visual means of recording and understanding place, but at times even images can fail:

> [There] are . . . photographs I don't take, can't take, scenes without explanations because I have none. Images materialize once or every day and seem impossible to catch except with my own eyes. Even writing them is nothing, not nearly enough, not real. With words I never quite touch the bones. (41)

Knowledge is local; it involves being there, bearing witness. The longer Connelly remains in the skin of this new country and identity, the more difficult it becomes for her to imagine Canada. Significantly, the narrative defers the moment of return, closing on the eve of her departure as

Connelly lies dreaming of the Thai home she is about to leave. In the context of Connelly's development as an artist, this episode represents the mastery of vision or imagination. Just before she goes to bed, her friend Goong gives her an elaborate set of instructions on how to dream what she wants. "Dream this, dream this," she repeats before falling asleep, and in her vision, the children of Nareerat sing (206). She is able to control what she sees, and the narrative concludes with a vision of the Thai village framed in the traveller's mind.

This Brighter Prison: The Poetics of Location

The poems in *This Brighter Prison* are drawn from journeys through Spain (the series "Spanish Lessons") and France ("Paris is Not a Dream"); the collection ends with poems about the return home to Canada ("I Kneel to Kiss the Ice," "A Grand Place: A Greeting").[6] As "snapshots" of encounters in other countries, the poems record the speaker's travels in a manner that corresponds to her inner life. The writer-traveller seems drawn to scenes of suffering or to figures who can overcome suffering through creativity. In a number of published interviews and essays, Connelly has commented on the difficult circumstances that led to her first leaving home:

> Coming to the poems again recently [the autobiographical *The Small Words in My Body*] . . . they suddenly felt real again, taut with the pain of my growing up, with the confusion and sorrow I felt when my older sister killed herself, with images of violence and amputation that haunted my first serious relationship, with the sometimes hesitant, sometimes unabashed wonder I first experienced in rural Thailand when I went to live there, at seventeen, as an exchange student. (*Grace and Poison* 4)[7]

In "Evidence of God" (*The Disorder of Love*), Connelly attributes her own inner survival to the gift of writing, "singing demons / out of me, out of my body, away / into the wind / or onto paper // where they are / no longer demons // but gifts" (56–62). Travel is what activated this gift.

In *This Brighter Prison*, Connelly creates (to use geographer J. Douglas Porteous's terms) both "sense-scapes" and "bodyscapes": metaphorical maps in which space is represented through the language of touch, taste, and smell. In these poems, the speaker's responses to place are figured through the body and through the language of physical sensation. In "Spanish Lessons," for instance, Spain becomes a place of oceans and rain: "the violet sky [. . .] / reaches down to kiss your face, / and stars drop ivory petals of light in your eyes" (17–20). There are two poles to the landscapes of *This Brighter Prison*. For

example, in the imaginary geography of this work, the ocean consistently stands for a place in which self merges, even vanishes, in the natural world. In poems such as "Would You Trade Your Life to Live There?" the shedding of self in the water suggests the desire to expand consciousness or escape pain.[8] However, the natural world just as frequently turns on the speaker, its seduction exposed as illusion. In "The Ugly Mermaid," the siren "seduces only herself":

> sea-witch, ugliest mermaid [. . .]
> you are cast out, clenched of heart,
> you make a ragged voyage in the dark
>
> and even the sea spits you out
> like a rotten tooth. (22–27)

In "The Old Man Presents Himself," Connelly contrasts domestic and natural spaces, inside and outside. The speaker cowers in a room while the rain beats down; she is overwhelmed by the outside world. Geography bites back even when Connelly returns to Canada: ice cuts the lips of the traveller as she kneels to kiss the Canadian soil in winter ("I Kneel to Kiss the Ice," 61–62).

The speaker's sense of alienation and loss is expressed not only in her ambivalent relationship to landscape but also in her human relationships. For Connelly, "countries live in people" (*Touch the Dragon* 166); culture is embodied in individuals and their stories. As a travel narrative, *This Brighter Prison* is structured as a series of encounters with others, ranging from Amaya, a heroin addict whom the speaker shelters, to an unnamed woman in "Teeth of Garlic" who reveals a story of childhood trauma. The identity of the writer-traveller in these poems is curiously empty; her body is a vessel for the stories she hears. In "Teeth of Garlic," the speaker positions herself on the outside of the dark story told, as listener and scribe to a young woman who confesses she has been raped:

> I do not tell her that I am hunting
> for details [. . .]
> That I believe bits of bone and gristle are magic.
> That I believe the silt of hearts is flecked with gold.
>
> The girl spills memory into me
> and I open like an eager hand
> to catch her words [. . .] (53–60)

The open hand and hollow self are recurring images for the traveller's identity in *This Brighter Prison*. They serve as metaphors for a transfigured or altered subjectivity, a Keatsian "negative capability" wrought, for Connelly, by the displacement of self in alternate landscapes.

As "Teeth of Garlic" suggests, this emptying of self is a pre-condition for creativity, for finding and retelling stories. But the empty self can also be invaded. In "Paris is not a Dream," the city and its past overwhelm the artist:

> In the museums and churches,
> hands like blades pass through your body,
> lives waltz into your skeleton,
> fingers press your eyelids
>
> and the whisper of history is such
> that you cannot hear your own blood. (IV:1–6)

The vulnerability of the empty self here is also evident in her relationships with lovers, who either see her as consumable (though arguably she also consumes lovers), or do not see her at all: "You rise [from the bed]; he does not open his eyes" (III:13).[9] Her alienation is further reflected in the speaker's vision of the city: "the filthy sea of streets" (II:4); the "neon" bodies of prostitutes (III:30); the unforgiving surfaces of city structures which peel away the skin (I:5–6). The woman cannot connect to the men whose bodies she seeks or remembers (III:31–34); she longs to split open the anonymous "masks" of the travellers in the Metro, the hardness of which also defeats her (II:15–20). As she leaves her lover's bed to roam the streets at night, the poet addresses herself in the second person:

> You remember your other country,
> but it is so far from this place.
> The broken compass is wedged in your chest. (III:38–40)

Disoriented, the speaker wanders through the city. In its galleries and museums, what she encounters reinforces her sense of emptiness and alienation. The paintings seem to promise a multi-dimensional world more real than her own. In contrast to *Touch the Dragon*, in which the narrator longs to become part of the everyday Thai world that surrounds her, here she wants to enter imaginary spaces:

> You want to strip your body of clothes, your mouth
> of tinsel words, you want to
> [. . .] plunge into the paintings,
> greet the cracked and open faces, [. . .]
>
> lives, stories, deaths, lives,
> more vibrant in paint than
> your own sweating fingers,
> faces, eyes, touching yours. (IV:39–49)

The paintings themselves become imaginary "meeting grounds" of self and other, spaces in which to encounter the dead. In "Paris is not a dream," the speaker shifts her attention from the city to works of art. She ceases to be a traveller and becomes a different kind of observer—a consumer of art. This shift to the aesthetic, which occurs repeatedly in *This Brighter Prison*, suggests that art, like travel, can transfigure and remake the self.

In the prose-poem "Journal without dates: from Paris to Honfleur to Caen," a similar sequence occurs. The speaker is first a traveller, and then a museum visitor. She hitchhikes from Paris to Caen, sleeping in fields and travelling some of the way by foot. The "loneliness of freedom," as Connelly calls it (22), opens a space for stories. "My lies," she writes, "become historical":

> I walk through strawberry fields inventing
> elaborate tales of orphanages, seductions, deaths.
> The land's memory rises up through me [. . . .] (28–31)

She refuses to let the fellow-tourist who picks her up probe "her pearl of hurt" through his questions, yet sees that "[t]he price of a ride with a stranger / is skin, or words" (75–76). They check in to a hotel; he forces himself on her in a painful sexual encounter, yet she decides to stay long enough in the morning for him to buy her breakfast (280–81). The sexual encounter, the "price" of which the speaker seems to anticipate, suggests a disregard for self. Both the long journey and the poem end with the speaker's visit to a museum in Caen, where there is an exhibition of photographs of Holocaust survivors. The strange dislocation of the speaker finds its objective correlative in these representations of tortured bodies. She is transfixed by them, in contrast to the other visitors to the museum, who appear unmoved. The exception is a child described in the final lines of the poem, who seems to embody a primal, life-seeking impulse to flee darkness for light: "She wants that green field above us. / She wants to drink and fly / through the sun-hurled air" (321–23). The movement of the child contrasts with the speaker's immobility; the child's turning from darkness to light echoes the metaphor of the world as a "brighter prison."

A striking number of poems in *This Brighter Prison* relate encounters with artist-figures who, like the child in "Journal without dates" are mirror-doubles of the speaker: they can negotiate the distance between art and life and create a space for healing. Like the gallery visits, these encounters with artists mark a shift to the aesthetic: instead of travel as a mode of self-discovery, the contemplation or creation of art serves this function. In the

case of the artists she meets, suffering, externalized through art, acquires monumentality. Jean-Louis, a painter, depicts the woman who has left him; the speaker in "A Painting for Rachel" commemorates a woman who has died. These people have travelled in time, from the moment of loss to a place where its representation becomes possible. As de Certeau comments in *The Practice of Everyday Life*: "it is the silence of these things *put at a distance*, behind the windowpane, which . . . makes our memories speak or draws out of the shadows the dreams of our secrets" (112; my italics). He continues: "This cutting off is necessary for the truth, outside of these things but not without them, of unknown landscapes and the strange fables of our private stories" (112). Distance, then, whether through travel or in time, permits the articulation of sorrow. Connelly suggests in several poems, however, that what the artist or traveller imagines is a fiction, an image to sustain memories of past connectedness. In "A Painting for Rachel," she writes:

> What I remember is imagined, this poem
> is imagined, this is a history
> I give myself, a rug of scraps
> well-woven, yanked over the holes. (31–34)

Jean-Louis, the artist she meets, obsessively sketches his lost love: "You paint her again and again that way, / in a nightdress made of shadow, / her limbs and breasts blue in moonlight, / her entire face open as a mouth" ("Jean-Louis" 27–30). To Connelly and her unnamed companions in this poem, the paintings of Jean-Louis suggest "melodrama" and exaggeration (14):

> Even as we laugh at you, Jean-Louis,
> and shake our heads,
> we inhale your paintings
> as if they were perfume
> drifting vivid from the skin of Venus.
> We have no sacred loves.
> ("Jean-Louis, eight years after the Italian girl went away," 45–50)

But in her closing words, the speaker acknowledges the personal wellsprings of art and memory, and their consequent validity in spite of inevitable distortions: "When we say she cannot be as / beautiful as you remember / we know we are lying" (51–53).

"Isadora and the Basque Photographer" also focuses on the relationship between art and loss. In this poem, Iñaki, the photographer, has not yet lost what he loves; it is the speaker who sees beyond and can read the end of the story. The narrative premise of the poem is complex: it is the speaker who

urges the artist to "take the picture," and who frames the female subject, the photographer's lover, as an object of art (1–17). The photographer, in contrast, has been "too breathless" with awe or desire, to photograph his lover (26). Is the speaker "Isadora," the woman who will leave Iñaki for other men, or is she simply a prescient witness, who sees "the rotting face of a black angel" behind the tableau she composes (58)?

> The church is two hundred years old.
> Her face will not last that long.
> You will die.
> Take the photograph.
> You are dying now. (49–53)

These photographs, like the traveller's snapshots, record what is meaningful, but they may also serve in darker times as reminders that moments of well-being are possible. Dean MacCannell suggests that the impulse to travel and to photograph resembles the religious impulse to enshrine experiences that have achieved heightened significance (*Tourist* 147). Although this kind of recording and remembering may be subject to mystification, I would argue that it serves a transformative function for the individual. The photograph or painting, the poem, the journey—they are all forms of visual, verbal, or performative self-discovery.

This re-orientation of self through art, as well as through travel, is the subject of "A Bowl of Yellow Flowers Stains the Canvas." Arguably the best work in *This Brighter Prison*, it explores the shift to the aesthetic as a means of dealing with trauma. The speaker in this prose-poem is positioned as an observer, balancing precariously on a stone wall which splits the scene in two. What unfolds in the panorama before her is a painterly spectacle: people sunbathe by the ocean on a beach in Spain; lovers embrace; children play. It is "picturesque," the speaker writes, because she cannot see the details (18). And it is a scene the observer deconstructs simply by turning her head, for the view she sees beyond the crowd includes a road on which, to her horror, a child is struck by a car. For a brief moment, the two worlds co-exist; the people on the beach are oblivious to what has happened. The speaker turns back and forth, "like someone at a stunning tennis match" (70–71): from a vision of beauty to one of overwhelming loss. The shocking intersection of these worlds spurs her reflection on the poetics of location:

> This is where you are now. Then you turn your head away and you are somewhere else. The only truth is that there is none: it moves when we blink. The trick of seeing is not seeing everything. If you see everything and feel all you see, you unravel the wrinkles of your brain like a ball of kite string. . . . It is easier to be

> blind if the choice is between blindness and madness. Learn to see with one eye or both eyes half-closed. (75–82)

Connelly here defends creative fictions as a means of dealing with suffering. Ironically, the distance that allows the speaker to see both worlds also protects her: from her vantage point, the girl's bleeding head looks like a bowl of spilled flowers on the road. The image underscores Connelly's deliberate choice to aestheticize a painful reality. The poem ends with the poet's turning toward art and the consolation of wider perspectives. "Here is your life," the speaker says: "This is the only canvas they'll sell you. Do not paint what there is (You'll be dust before you've done that work). Paint what you want to see" (95–98). The speaker's emotional state is "performed" through the movement of the body: she looks away towards the sea, the movement outwards paralleling an inner need to move beyond grief. At the same time, the gesture represents the artist's control of the story or vision, in a manner that echoes the concluding dream-vision of *Touch the Dragon.*

The final journey depicted in *This Brighter Prison* is the return home, the difficulty of which is suggested in the epigraphs to one of the poems in this section: "To leave is to die a little," but "[t]o return is a nightmare. I hate returning" ("She Returns to the Farm," 76). The speaker rejects an identity circumscribed by place, yet is driven by her need to confront the past:

> I come home
> hating this language,
> these words, my stories,
> my eyes, hands, wishing
> only to forget the clamour
> inside that has brought me here
> again ("I Kneel to Kiss the Ice," 55–61)

Rather than the shift from aestheticized travel anecdotes to art itself—a shift so pronounced in the earlier sequences—here Connelly employs complex metaphors that link the speaker's body and memories with the landscape of home. The first poems on the traveller's return are set in a winter landscape: "Like the skin of a dead lover, / the snow feels nothing, / offers no signs" ("She Returns to the Farm," 25–27). The poems in this sequence—they have titles such as "Animals I Cannot Touch," "This Domain of Dark Wing," "Living Nowhere," and "Words Woven From the Sadness of Evening Trains"—suggest disconnection and continued separation, as if the speaker remains a traveller in her own country. To return is to take up the threads of past lives—"the habits of blood" ("I Kneel" 5), the "entrails of memory"

("This Domain of Dark Wing," 79)—in a landscape that is not restfully empty but cluttered with memories:

> The up-ended roots of dead trees
> are the time-slaughtered hands
> of my grandmother [. . .]
> There, higher up the slope
> is my father's face [. . .]
> the petrified bones
> of those I failed to love. ("This Domain," 60–69)

Home is indeed the "haunted place" de Certeau describes (108).

Such projections of memory on landscape function as a grotesque magnification of the inner world of the speaker. The lens is inverted, however, in the final section of *This Brighter Prison*, in which body is presented as landscape. Here, microcosm becomes macrocosm, and self, a new world. In the first poem of the sequence, "A Grand Place: A Greeting," the speaker offers her body as a map to be read:

> This, my skin.
> A bruise here, a red scrape, there
> a long blue vein, a river
> on a breathing map. (6–9)

While mapping has connotations of conquering, Connelly plays on the idea of delighted discovery. Through the transformative touch of the lover, water runs in the desert, promising regeneration:

> Your mouth wondered at my neck,
> my thighs, the wet surprised songs
> in this desert body,
> And I smiled [. . .] (38–41)

To accept the body as territory with secrets, even dangers, is to accept the unpredictability of emotion itself. "Do not be afraid to cry here," the lover whispers: "We are extraordinary when we feel" (36–37).

Movement and stasis, death and life are juxtaposed in the final poem, "Sleeping Near the Graveyard," in which the speaker again contemplates the ephemeral nature of the body and memory. Even sleep is deceptive, for "[s]leep, where we imagine we are safe" may take the mind into a world of nightmare (II:1). In contrast to earlier poems in the collection, however, sex functions as a metaphor for merging through difference, and loss of self does not entail its erasure.[10] The woman remains an observer as she contemplates her sleeping lover. The lover's body, however, becomes translucent to her; she sees a hidden world beneath the skin (I:29–34). The poem

concludes in an apotheosis of the senses, as if the speaker has indeed learned that "the body is its own absolute" ("Spanish Lessons" 9). Rather than attempting to hide her "pearl of hurt" ("Journal" 75), the woman seeks to enter her lover; their coupled bodies form the image of a mouth that speaks:

> our bodies falling and opening
> like the jaws of an angel
> learning to sing. ("Sleeping Near the Graveyard," 34–36)

This striking, even grotesque, image of the singing angel suggests the poet-speaker, who may indeed have found a voice by the end of her journey. The lovers, who together make the body speak, suggest a dialogical space in which solitudes can meet.

Conclusion: Perpetual Motion

As a traveller, Connelly seems motivated by the desire "to shed the weight / of human skin" or self, to escape the ways in which land, and arguably, memory, "own[] and define[] us" ("Would You Trade Your Life to Live There?" 21; *Touch the Dragon* 1). Yet whether one is at home or abroad, the lure of distance puts the traveller at risk of perpetual motion. In *Touch the Dragon,* Connelly writes:

> I am often aware, as I was in Canada, that there is another life beyond the one I live now . . . and other ones beyond that. There is an endless variety of lives from which I'm cut off by the one I lead myself. I want to know those depths and swim out of the tunnel of my own days. At times I distrust my . . . vision: am I seeing through the layers, do I have a wide scope of things, do I know what illusions the mist and mountains contrive? (63)

Moments like these in Connelly's work recall Bartkowski's insights into the construction of identities in travel. Despite the darkness of many poems in *This Brighter Prison,* Connelly embraces an ideal of openness and movement. For this traveller, the world is "a *brighter* prison" ("This Brighter Prison" III:24). The golden horses of Versailles rise out of dirty water ("Paris is Not a Dream" (IV:63–65). "*La vida es una tormenta*"—these are the wry words of the Spanish woman who tells Connelly her story of trauma ("Teeth of Garlic," 106). "Storm in Spanish," Connelly notes, "is *tormenta*" (105). Life is torment; life is a storm. For Connelly, art is born from pain and from the grittiness of living; the physical alienation and displacement of the self through travel allow a space for healing and for art itself.

NOTES

I would particularly like to thank my colleague Zailig Pollock for his advice and encouragement, and Karen Connelly, who generously allowed me to interview her in 1999 about *This Brighter Prison*.

1 Sidonie Smith studies travel writing as a form of autobiography in *Moving Lives: Twentieth-Century Women's Travel Writing*.

2 Connelly talks about the perils of poetry as autobiography in the Introduction to *Grace and Poison* (3).

3 Paul Fussell refers to the difficulty inherent in classifying travel writing as a genre, suggesting instead that travel narratives are generically hybrid (*Abroad* 202). Some of the most interesting work on relationships between space and performances of identity is being done in the field of geography, in studies such as Teather's *Embodied Geographies: Spaces, Bodies and Rites of Passage, Spaces Through the Body,* or Douglas Porteous's *Landscapes of the Mind: Worlds of Sense and Metaphor,* in which Porteous coins the term "bodyscapes" to describe the psychological mapping of space through movement.

4 A term used by psychologist Harriet Lerner (Chapter 7, *The Dance of Deception*).

5 Also alluded to in the Introduction to *Grace and Poison* (7).

6 *One Room in a Castle: Letters from Spain, France, and Greece* (1995) is, as the title suggests, epistolary in form, chronicling time spent primarily in Greece. Connelly's poetry collections themselves are almost diary-like, in that they are structured as a sequence of thematically related poems. The poems snap into focus half way through *The Small Words in My Body,* when in the second part of the collection Connelly moves from an abstract series of confessional poems to works about Thailand. *This Brighter Prison* takes up the story of Connelly's travels where the last poem in *Small Words* ends, with her arrival in Spain.

7 See, for example, the interview published as "Death of the Tragic Female Writer," as well as the Introduction to *Grace and Poison* (2001), a re-publication of *The Small Words in My Body* and *The Disorder of Love* (4). In this introductory essay, Connelly writes about the relationship between poetry and personal experience.

8 See "Journal without dates," ll. 231–241.

9 See note 10.

10 This difference may be one based on the separateness of bodies, or it may refer to actual gender difference (the lover is not named as male or female). Connelly writes about lesbian as well as heterosexual encounters in *The Disorder of Love*; whether these encounters represent Connelly's own experiences or are imaginatively linked to the place in which she actually lived in Greece—the island of Lesvos—the issue of sexual ambiguity in her work remains to be explored.

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Rick Taylor

the deer in her tracks

Cal brought his truck down to the ditch hollowed out with its light
there he said where she landed

you can see signs of struggle on the snow, furious angels
biting and calling each other names

she kicks him and throws him off, blood relative
or not he rips open her coat in the front

she rakes his face, hits him with a stone running not so fast
girl, where you think you're goin'

and there she fell, that last time
the road passing over us like judgment.

Cynthia Sugars

Strategic Abjection
Windigo Psychosis and the "Postindian" Subject in Eden Robinson's "Dogs in Winter"

In *The Postcolonial Aura*, Arif Dirlik takes issue with postcolonialism's "denial of authenticity" at a time when claims to cultural authenticity are proliferating around the world (220). Dirlik is particularly interested in contemporary indigenist movements which are committed to notions of Native identity as a step towards empowerment. In short, he argues that there are constructive ways of being essentialist (227).

In many instances, the invocation of an essential Native identity involves a form of "'self-Orientalization,' that replays the features ascribed to the Others of Eurocentric modernizationism [*sic*]" (224). In some cases, such as Thomas King's famous evocations of Native stereotypes in *Green Grass, Running Water* and elsewhere, and Drew Hayden Taylor's comic send-up of similar stereotypes in his "Blues Quartet," "self-essentialization" (224) is mobilized for strategic purposes as a form of counter-discursive parody. King especially is well known for his images of Native "savagery" that mock dominant images of the Native as alien and abject other.[1]

Eden Robinson's story collection, *Traplines*, and Robinson's subsequent novel, *Monkey Beach*, are both conspicuously violent. On one level, this preoccupation with violence represents Robinson's engagement with the effects of colonization (or colonial attitudes) on Native peoples. Yet Robinson accomplishes this critique in an unusual way. First, she invokes the often negative imagery conventionally associated with Native peoples (hunting, cannibalism, savagery, primitivism, the windigo/sasquatch) and uses it to strategic effect. Second, she frustrates the reader's desire to interpret her characters on the basis of their ethno-cultural identity. The ambiguity emerging from these mutually contradictory strategies is intentional, and it is central to Robinson's dislocation of conventional constructs of identity

and abjection. In contrast to Dee Horne's contention that "*Traplines* does not overtly challenge settler images or stereotypes of First Nations" (160), I would argue that it does so in an unprecedented way, enacting this challenge expressly *because* of the derogatory association of criminal and violent behaviour with aboriginal people. Robinson's approach represents one way of meeting Gerald Vizenor's demand to "'re-invent the invention' of 'Indianness'" (Horne 161), or of undertaking what Ward Churchill speaks of as the "negation of the negation" (107). Robinson is at once appropriating and reformulating the discourse of savagery. At the same time, she negates racialized binaries through her own problematization of racial identity in her stories.

In short, her characters "perform" themselves as savage. However, this "savagery" takes a particular form in her work, for the violence is not specifically "native." Rather it is a symptom of the ills of contemporary urban society, a form of Western psychosis that has infected Native peoples in Canada. This is what both Jack Forbes and Deborah Root have identified as the cannibalizing and psychotic "wétiko sickness" that plagues Western society, a condition marked by greed, excessive consumption, violence, and egotism, and which was visited upon Native peoples at the time of colonization, infecting and steadily debilitating their descendants. Forbes and Root both make use of a Native legend concerning the taboo *against* cannibalism (the Ojibway/Cree story of the man-turned-monster, the windigo/wétiko) to assess the malaise of contemporary Western culture.[2] What is perhaps most significant about the windigo story is the notion of infection, for the human who resorts to cannibalism in a sense becomes infected by bloodlust, and this acquired compulsion to cannibalize makes him/her a windigo. If the story of the windigo was originally intended as an ethical warning against giving in to libidinous impulses, it has also been widely used as a metaphor for the violence of imperialism and the sickness at the heart of the modern capitalist world.[3]

Robinson's characters thus protest or "talk back" in ways that reflect not only traditional Native culture but also the "wétiko sickness" of contemporary society. In this way her critique of contemporary Native-white relations in Canada extends beyond a clear-cut opposition, an approach that is further complicated by the ambiguity of race in her writings. Numerous critics have pointed out how difficult it is to pinpoint the racial identity of Robinson's characters.[4] It is therefore no accident that Helen Hoy's chapter on *Traplines* focusses on the question: "How does the Indianness of *Traplines* signify?" (154). Philip Marchand, for example, contends that "Dogs in Winter"

has "nothing to do with Indians." In an interview with Derrick Penner, Robinson has claimed that she makes the characters' identity unclear because she does not want to be pigeon-holed as a Native writer, someone who *must* write about Native issues only. The result is that Robinson's fictions themselves function as a series of traplines, performing "as tricksters which lure [readers] into believing one thing at their own expense" (Davidson et al. 55). Readers, then, are challenged to sort out the racial/cultural identity of her characters and are in a sense led to enact their own colonialist violence on the texts. The experience of reading (and teaching) Robinson's works thus forces one to engage in processes of abjection and othering.

This racial confusion (and boundary dissolution) is utilized for specific purposes. On the one hand, it suggests that a socio-cultural windigo sickness affects both white and Native communities (something explored in many Native writings, particularly in Lee Maracle's *Ravensong* and Tomson Highway's *Kiss of the Fur Queen*). On the other, it dissolves the traditional boundaries between the two groups.[5] This strategic ambiguity enables Robinson to launch a radical "post-Indian" response to racist stereotypes by complicating the very origins of "savagery" and "primitivism" and by defying the reader to make a definitive identification of the characters (and their author) as either "white" or "Native." The savagery associated with aboriginal identity becomes transfigured as a result of the contagion of the non-Native world and metamorphoses into a kind of psychosis—specifically, an all-consuming hunger for physical and psychological violence.[6]

Robinson's work is of particular relevance for critics interested in Native cultural expression and postcolonial conceptions of hybridity, for it complicates Dirlik's rejection of the anti-essentialist and dehistoricizing implications of hybridity. She wrestles with notions of both hybridity and Native essentialism in a manner that is comparable to Judith Butler's deconstruction of the binary between constructivism and determinism in accounts of sexual identity (94). Although Robinson's characters may be performing themselves as Native, it is finally up to the reader to evaluate the authenticity of the performance. Compelled by Robinson's texts to seek the ab-original in the hybrid, the reader is caught in the imperializing act, so to speak. This strategy dislocates the teleology of essence and origins, without erasing them altogether.

In *Cannibal Culture*, Deborah Root explores the ways contemporary Western society "has aestheticized *wétiko* sickness and we ourselves have become cannibal" (13). According to Diana Brydon, Root's

notion of "white cannibal culture" shows "non-Indigenous Canadians their own rapacious desire imaged as the consumable other" (53). In her fiction, Robinson makes this re-projection more blatant by showing both Native and non-Native Canadians their "rapacious desire" imaged as a kind of corrupted Native (a version, perhaps, of the Native "going native"). Her characters engage in ritualized performances of savagery, thereby evoking the very qualities that have been inflicted on Native peoples, who for generations have been designated the savage and soulless "Other" (which is also a possible, though not conventional, definition of the psychotic).[7]

In *Totem and Taboo*, Freud gives a disturbingly Eurocentric account of the links between aboriginal ("primitive") and European ("civilized") instances of taboo and savagery. Throughout his study, Freud is fascinated with what he deems the "lower" order of Native/savage cultures (75).[8] For him, the Native itself is taboo. This, of course, was true historically in that the sacred practices of aboriginals were considered unclean and dangerous by Europeans. As Root puts it, "Within Western culture there has been a tendency to project the categories of violence and of bloodthirsty, barbaric religious practices onto colonized people" (9). For Freud, the Native is what stands as the abject for white ("civilized") society, functioning as that which should remain unconscious, and yet also that with which one is clearly obsessed.[9]

Julia Kristeva develops Freud's thesis in *Powers of Horror*, where she explores the specific dynamics of abjection. The abject is that which haunts the self by continuously bringing it into crisis–generally in the form of some cast-off part or product of the body (e.g., corpse, animal, flesh, excrement). In a colonial context, the abject becomes metaphorized as the subordinate colonial object that constantly brings the imperial self into question. When the abject assumes a specifically aboriginal form, conjured in the writing of a Native author, one might say that a strategic summoning of abject aboriginality is in operation. Like the abject body that hovers at the borders of civilization and/or subjectivity, aboriginal peoples were seen as both part of and not part of white society (and indeed are often still seen in these terms). In "Dogs in Winter," one might say that Robinson brings abject aboriginality into the foreground. The racially ambiguous serial killer in this story produces the ultimate abject entity in the form of a corpse or cadaver which propels the "I" (and by extension the civilized social world) into the vortex of abjection (see Kristeva 3–4).

By engaging in this strategic summoning of the abject, Robinson depicts how Native people in Canada were colonized by a system that has historically

designated them as the abject side of the mind/body or self/other binary. We might think of this approch as a variation on strategic essentialism for women: it is a form of strategic savagery for the aboriginal woman. If, as Spivak writes, "the question of the abject is very closely tied to the question of being *ab-original*" (10),[10] Robinson invokes a specifically *aboriginal* version of the abject: she destabilizes conventional racially inflected constructs of abjection, and she utilizes images of savagery often associated with aboriginal "primitivism" to depict the ills of contemporary society.

Robinson's approach might thus be one way of answering Gerald Vizenor's call for postindian "simulations of survivance" in contemporary Native cultural expression (5). Vizenor seeks an alternative to both the negative stereotypes and their idealized replacements. As many commentators have noted, the latest shift in configurations of aboriginality is marked by an idealizing of the Native (see Goldie, Tiffin, Torogovnick, Dumont). Robinson launches an effective counter-discursive response through her version of "postindian" parody. By exaggerating Western commodification of Native savagery, she highlights the violent history of Native-white relations, while resisting idealized versions of the Native. Robinson thus directs her message to Natives and non-Natives alike, an approach that is reflected in the racial ambiguity of her characters. The matriarchal serial killer in "Dogs in Winter" prefaces her forays by singing the children's rhyme "A-Hunting We Will Go." Yet Robinson's narratives leave one in doubt, finally, as to who is the hunter and who is the hunted.

Central to Robinson's method is the way the text lures the reader into premising his/her interpretations on the aboriginal identity of the characters. The story "tricks" the reader into making stereotyped judgements. For instance, the "savage" rituals and criminality engaged in by Lisa's mother may be read as evidence of her "aboriginal" identity, especially given their association with hunting practices; so, too, can Lisa's placement in a series of foster homes. Thus, one may be led to interpret the story according to a certain anti-colonial trajectory. The narrator of the story, Lisa, is horrified by her mother and wants to deny all likeness with her. This might be considered a typical response from a colonized subject, for in effect the narrator wants to divorce herself from her ancestry. (She does so, in part, by embracing her foster parents and non-Native friends.) However, this psychological colonization is parodied in that the daughter has legitimate reason to fear her mother, who has embarked on a career as a gleeful (and savage) serial killer. The daughter not only fears for her own life but, more significantly,

also suspects that the same impulses may be germinating within her, thus echoing the early colonizers' notion that savagery was "in the blood."

Nevertheless, Mama's role in the story is not so clear-cut. On the one hand, Lisa implicitly identifies with her mother (and hence is attracted to her), even though she wants to disavow her. On the other hand, Mama and Lisa may not be Native, in which case the apparent colonialist subtext is untenable. The story thus leads the reader through the very misreadings that have historically governed views of Native people, while also demonstrating that such constructions are erected on flimsy and easily manipulated "evidence." Prompting even the well-meaning reader to be racist, the text forces a confrontation with the ambiguity inherent in any colonialist interpretative enterprise.

Lisa's ambivalence about her ancestry further clouds the issue, for she evinces simultaneously an interest in what may or not be her aboriginal heritage and a consuming desire to be accepted in mainstream society. Given the text's strategic vagueness about her Native/non-Native identity, it is not surprising that Robinson erects as Lisa's personal totem the moose, a resonant symbol both for aboriginal and for non-aboriginal Canadians. One of Lisa's formative memories is of a moose-hunting expedition with her mother to celebrate her first menstruation. On an immediate level, the expedition represents a "savage" ritual, with the mother initiating her daughter into the mysteries of adulthood: "'Now you're a woman,' [her mother] said. She handed me the heart after she wiped the blood onto my cheeks with her knife. I held it, not knowing what to do. . . . She pried a tooth from the moose and gave it to me. I used to wear it around my neck" (60–61). As a scene of ritualized abjection, the blooding ritual is inherently ambiguous, yet it forms a central moment in Lisa's self-constitution. It seems "aboriginal," but it also parodies the recreational primitivism usually associated with non-native, homosocial bonding rituals. To read the scene as an "aboriginal" ritual is to fall into Robinson's trap, for it represents an act of ritual savagery whose "aboriginality" is unclear at best. Although the fact that Lisa wears the tooth as an amulet around her neck suggests that initially the hunting experience forged a welcome bond between herself and her mother, Lisa eventually becomes repelled by the savagery of the event. This reaction derives in part from her subsequent experiences of prim civility; Lisa's changed attitude echoes the way that aboriginal traditions and cultural practices were "framed" and demonized by colonizing Europeans.

The reader is finally left uncertain how to interpret this scene. Does the hunt initiate a moment of mother-daughter bonding, or is it is an early sign

of windigo blood-lust? Does it indicate Mama's insanity, or do her actions merely appear insane because they are later juxtaposed with the ultra-civility of contemporary middle-class society? "Dogs in Winter" lures the reader into making assumptions about its aboriginal content that are then rejected in the course of the story.

In Lisa's mind the moose-hunting expedition functions as a grotesque foreshadowing of the savagery that is to come. Her repeated revisitation of this event is an index of its importance. If the killing and subsequent mutilation of the moose represent a primal scene of abjection that threatens Lisa's sense of self, it is also symbolic of her own suppression/murder of her ancestry (Native or non-Native). We see this in her recurring dream about the moose-killing. In the dream, it is Lisa who shoots the moose with the encouragement of her mother, thereby making her link with the killer-mother overt. Moreover, she wears a blue dress in the dream as she walks into the lake to retrieve her kill (41), the same dress worn by her mother during her killing sprees. Yet if Lisa becomes her mother in the dream, she also identifies with the moose, whose carcass rises from the water to give her an ambiguous message: "It towers over me, whispering, mud dribbling from its mouth like saliva. I lean toward it, but no matter how hard I try, I can never understand what the moose is saying" (41).

If the moose represents an externalization of Lisa's own feeling of vulnerability at the hands of her mother, it also functions for Lisa as a stand-in for the Freudian lost object, the discarded supplement upon which self-identity is founded, always haunting, always beyond reach. It may also be interpreted in terms of aboriginal identity itself, which is evaded yet summoned in Robinson's manipulation of readers' preconceptions. By abjecting or discarding what society has previously abjected (the aboriginal), Robinson enacts a paradoxical conjuring of the absent aboriginal. In this way, her texts simultaneously conjure and repress, just as her characters are, in a sense, simultaneously Native and non-Native.

The moose thus functions as a crucial symbol in the story. It underscores Lisa's precarious sense of selfhood, acting as the abject body that haunts her. The moose appears again in the painting she buys from an antique dealer when on holiday with her foster parents. Although her foster mother is horrified by the painting, Lisa finds a curious solace in it: "Except for the moose lying on its side, giving birth to a human baby, it's a lovely picture. There are bright red cardinals in the fir trees, and the sun is beaming down on the lake in the left-hand corner. If you squint your eyes and look in the

trees, you can see a woman in a blue dress holding a drawn bow" (58–59). It is not clear whether Lisa is identifying with the woman in the painting or with the moose, the hunter or the hunted, since the two become conflated in the image of the moose giving birth to a human child. The uncertainty of Mama's influence is indicated by the ghostly Artemis-like figure amongst the trees, an ambivalence that is inherent in the huntress goddess herself—at once a virginal, protective figure embodying the spirit of the wilderness and associated with women, and a heartless (possibly murderous) huntress who seeks here to sunder the child-mother bond. The symbolism of the painting is further complicated by the bow and arrow, which can be read both as a classical motif and as a Native one. The symbolic Native (Mama) functions as the conqueror of the moose/child. According to this picture, the victim (moose) gives birth to the conqueror (human), who is in turn another victim (child).

This complex intertwining of identities has an obvious analogue in the fact that Lisa, apart from her mother, lacks any clear sense of genealogical or cultural roots. She wonders whether she is "savage" or "civilized," and her Aunt Genna's account of Lisa's parentage only clouds the issue. Aunt Genna (before she is murdered by Mama) lies to Lisa about her parents, transforming them into colonizing Westerners: "'They are in Africa. . . . They are both doctors and great explorers'" (43–44). Genna's invocation of the civilizing mission of colonialism explicitly endorses a White/Native opposition. Later, Lisa invokes this missionary lineage in response to questions from the mother of her friend Amanda.

Lisa's uncertain background makes her relation to the moose-hunting scene all the more crucial, for it is the one legacy (and the one "clue" to her identity) left her by her mother. But this legacy is tainted by its associations with a windigo-like cannibalism. Fearing that she may become a cannibalizing murderer as a result of having consumed the moose, Lisa sets out on a desperate bid for self-control by abjecting her mother (and hence the Native "savagery" associated with her) as that which threatens her sense of self. However, since the mother cannot be killed off so easily, Lisa inadvertently turns herself into her mother (and into a symbolic windigo) by attempting to kill herself before her mother can do it, playing the role of both moose and Mama at once (as we saw in both the dream and the painting). Time and again she loses her nerve, only to have her final suicide attempt subverted by the boy who threatens to rape her in the woods. Lisa finally realizes the truth about her ambivalent feelings towards Mama and herself: "I

can't kill, I decided then. . . . I can betray, but I can't kill. Mama would say that betrayal is worse" (67).

Lisa's realization represents a turning point in her growing comprehension of the origins of Mama's violence. If the mother-turned-killer behaves as a voracious and affectless windigo, perhaps this windigo psychosis has emerged from what society has imposed on her. The progression of Mama's killing sprees suggests this interpretation: Mama goes from hunting expeditions that forge an ambiguous bond between her and her daughter, to victimization at the hands of a "sick" society, to actual savagery and bloodlust. The result is a disturbing, self-mutilating, and abject hybrid–a subject who has symbolic ties with traditional Native culture but who has also been tainted by a psychotic society that lacks any healing connection with its past.

Although Lisa fears that she might have become contaminated by her mother's windigo sickness, Mama's "savagery" can be said to have at least two sources. First, she appears to want to forge a bond between Lisa and herself—the menstruation/hunting scene could as easily be read in this light as with the more gruesome slant Lisa puts on it. Second, her acts of violence begin as maternal protectiveness. The first time (outside a hunting context) that Lisa sees her mother kill is therefore significant. Ginger, the vicious pit bull next door, has been trained by its owner to intimidate the neighbourhood children. When the dog lunges to attack Lisa on her return home from school, Mama comes to the rescue:

> It was as unreal then as it is now. Mama and Ginger running toward each other. They ran in slow motion, like lovers bounding across a sunlit field. Mama's arm pulled back before they met and years later I would be in art class and see a picture of a peasant woman in a field with a curved knife, a scythe, cutting wheat. . . . Mama slid the knife across Ginger's scalp, lopping off the skin above her eyebrows. Ginger yelped. Mama brought her knife up and down. . . . Up and down. The blood making patterns on her dress like the ink blots on a Rorschach test. (48)

Although Lisa associates the scene with a European prototype, her description suggests something radically other: the stereotyped image of the Native savage, knife held aloft, racing to scalp the enemy white man. Mama becomes the Native savage in order to combat savagery. Her words about the dog's owner are prescient: "Stay away from that man. . . . He's crazy" (47).

Mama's first human kill, the murder of her husband, also appears to have been undertaken in order to protect her daughter. Once again, she makes use of her skills as a hunter, foiling any attempts to identify her victims by preparing them like slaughtered animals and removing their heads and feet:

> For a moment, the skinned carcasses inside the freezer looked to [the policeman] like deer or calves. Then he saw arms and legs, sealed in extra-large plastic bags piled high. . . . The bodies were identified only with difficulty, as they had no heads or fingers. . . . The easiest to identify was David Jonah Rutford, Moreen's husband, who was missing only his heart (69).

The link between the missing heart and the moose-killing scene is immediately apparent. It is further established through the man's name, Rutford, which echoes Lisa's earlier description of the male moose during "rutting season": "During rutting season, her mate, the bull moose, is one of the most dangerous animals, frenzied enough to inflict death or dismemberment on those who stand between him and her and incapable of distinguishing between friend and enemy" (49). If Rutford was Mama's first human victim, he may have been killed in self-defence. However, Mama seems to have been infected with Rutford's windigo blood-lust, especially the urge "to inflict death or dismemberment," for the list of her victims reveals the haphazard nature of her subsequent attacks: two are women; one is elderly; two are homeless (67). The text plays with the reader just as Mama plays with Lisa, for we are never sure whether or not she actually intends to kill her daughter. Mama, it appears, has metamorphosed from traditional hunter and protector into psychotic windigo.

Ultimately, "Dogs in Winter" leaves the reader uncertain of how to assess Lisa's mother. Has she become what she is through her own experience of victimization, and does that victimization carry ethnic or cultural implications? Does she initially embark on the killings in order to protect her daughter? Or is she simply a murderer? What is one to make of the fact that Lisa betrays her mother twice: once when she is a little girl and she directs the policeman to the freezer in the basement; and again, years later, when she hands a photo of her mother, now escaped from prison, to the police? In the end, is it possible that Lisa is the heartless savage, the one who has turned her back on her relations ("I can betray, but I can't kill")? Robinson doesn't allow any easy answers to these questions, suggesting that the spirit of the cannibalizing windigo has infected all segments of society: daughter and mother, white and Native.

"Dogs in Winter" (like the other stories in *Traplines*) does not offer a conventional postcolonial vision of Native-white relations; instead, this story presents a problematic postindian consciousness.[11] In this context, the prefix "post" signifies not a superseding of "indian" but an incorporation and modification. Perhaps Mama is a "postindian" subject, for she is aligned

with certain "signs" of aboriginality that in this story are subjected to a process of resignification. By engaging in strategic ambiguity, Robinson forces us to confront our own urge to colonize aboriginal texts.

Helen Hoy is right to suggest that Robinson "rewrites the texts that formulate her" (181). In her fiction, the abject Native confronts the culture that gave it being, offering a reminder of white society's historical complicity in the abjecting of the Native. In this way the abjected aboriginal returns as a haunting reminder of white society's inherent savagery and its historical complicity in the dispossession of Native peoples. Perhaps it takes the stereotyped savage—the hunter, the psychotic—to uncover the more pervasive savagery that lurks beneath the veneer of civilized society. Paradoxically, in "Dogs in Winter" it is a serial killer, colonialism's returned repressed, who comes to assume an ethical/superego function, acting as an unsettling reminder of the crimes of the past.[12]

NOTES

1 See, for instance, King's parodic *Dead Dog Café* (both the CBC Radio program and the restaurant in *Green Grass, Running Water*) where Native characters consciously use stereotypes of aboriginal naiveté and savagery to dupe gullible customers (restaurant patrons, radio listeners, etc.). Davidson et al. also explore King's parodic method in his photographs of Native artists.

2 The Windigo is a cannibalistic monster of the Algonquian group. The term derives from the Algonquian root word "witiku," although the Ojibway spelling is usually "windigo" and the Cree, "wétiko." Although Forbes and Root use the phrase "wétiko sickness," I am writing it as *windigo* throughout simply because this is the more familiar spelling of the word. The term is not a proper noun per se. In a general sense the windigo is a human who has been corrupted, usually as a result of an act of cannibalism (early accounts by Samuel Hearne and David Thompson describe the windigo in this context), and who in turn becomes a cannibalizing monster that stalks humans. The emotionlessness of the windigo—it is usually associated with winter and is said to have a heart of ice—makes it an ideal metaphor for what we today might describe as psychosis, and it is certainly best thought of as a monstrous spirit that can take possession of and live inside humankind. In the context of this essay, the windigo can be construed as an embodiment of the greed of contemporary consumer culture and as a type of serial killer.

3 There have been a number of contemporary "rewrites" of the windigo story. See, for instance, Wayland Drew's *The Wabeno Feast* and Ann Tracy's *Winter Hunger*. Margaret Atwood's essay in *Strange Things*, "Eyes of Blood, Heart of Ice," undertakes an extended discussion of modern Canadian reworkings of the windigo story. See also Tomson Highway's *Kiss of the Fur Queen* in which both the Natives and whites behave as windigos. A central motif in Robinson's *Monkey Beach* is the related figure of the B'gwus or Sasquatch, though its role in this text is far different from the windigo metaphor of "Dogs in Winter." In *Monkey Beach*, the B'gwus may be seen as an ambiguous psychic projection of the main character, Lisamarie Hill: on the one hand it functions as a sort of

Lacanian *objet petit a* (an unattainable metaphysical absence); on the other, it embodies a Real presence (an objective correlative for a cultural-historical reality). The text treads a fine line, never quite clarifying the role (or ontological status) of the B'gwus.

4 See Hoy for a survey of some of the early reviews of *Traplines* and the question of racial identity in the stories (153–54, 226). There are enough details in the text to support an interpretation of Lisa and Mama as aboriginal, and of course Robinson's aboriginal ancestry, combined with the subject matter of her other writings, cannot help but influence one's interpretation. When an aboriginal author uses motifs of savagery, they carry extra cultural weight. In a sense, Robinson is able to have it both ways: her characters may be read as aboriginals who are striking back at a society that has persistently marginalized them, while her text is also tongue-in-cheek in its evocation of stereotypes of aboriginality. Whether or not the characters in "Dogs in Winter" are identified as Native, I am arguing that Robinson is appropriating the terms of "savagery" conventionally assigned to Native peoples and reworking them here.

5 This conflation is, of course, emblematized in the title of the collection. On the one hand the title refers to the traditional traplines that historically belong to particular aboriginal families; on the other, it conveys a sense of generalized societal and/or psychological entrapment (for both whites and Natives). Additionally, it might be read self-reflexively, to allude to the reader's entrapment by the "lines" of the text, particularly vis-à-vis the racial/cultural ambiguity of Robinson's characters.

6 The psychotic nature of Robinson's characters has been identified by critics as a defining quality of her fictional worlds. James Marcus, writing in the *New York Times*, celebrates Robinson for demonstrating that Canadians have "psychos" too. Robinson herself has called her characters "flamboyant psychopaths" (qtd. in Hoy 175). All of this is true, and yet Robinson's methods are more profound than a mere revelling in the contemporary fascination with psychotics and serial killers.

7 According to Freudian psychoanalysis, psychosis is a disturbance of the ego's relation to reality and external objects. This is what lends to the psychotic a soulless or affectless quality. The height of "savagery" is perhaps characterized by this lack of emotion, or by the demonstration of inappropriate emotions, such as is evident when Mama, in "Dogs in Winter," cheerfully undertakes her murders. See also Seltzer for an extended account of the psychopathology of serial killers.

8 A dependence on the stereotype of the Native savage is central to the civilizing rationale of Western imperialism. As Dickason notes, "By classifying Amerindians as savages, Europeans were able to create the ideology that helped to make it possible to launch one of the great movements in the history of western civilization: the colonization of overseas empires" (xiii). It is telling that Freud's genealogy traces certain unconscious impulses to a racial inheritance, and does so via an analogy with the supposed atavistic remnants of primitive societies in his day. While Freud is interested in pursuing the "savage" origins of human civilization, especially vis-à-vis the murder and consumption of the father by the sons in the "primal horde," the cultures that he chooses for his case study of primitivism are aboriginal peoples of Australia and North America. Freud's obsession with savagery, as evidenced throughout *Totem and Taboo,* tells us something about the West's ambivalence about its own inherent violence.

9 See Marianna Torgovnick's related study of the modern obsession with the primitive/native in *Gone Primitive.* Her analysis of Western "primitivist discourse" (8) engages with the "impossible necessity" (Goldie 6) of establishing boundaries: "What's 'primitive,' what's 'modern'? What's 'savage,' what's 'civilized'? Increasingly it becomes difficult to tell" (Torgovnick 37–38).

10 That is, *from* the *original*, with the double meaning of *emerging from* and a *distortion of*. It is for this reason that Spivak sees the notion of ab-originality as involving a "reinscription of the subject" and not the object, a statement which certainly holds true in the history of Euro-American constructions of the Native. The notion of ab-originality, therefore, echoes the integral ambivalence that Freud notes in the etymology of the uncanny and taboo.

11 This is slightly different from, though not unrelated to, Vizenor's definition of the postindian. For Vizenor, the postindian is marked by "the absence of the invention" (11) that has long plagued the representation of aboriginals in North America. However, like Robinson, the Native writers Vizenor celebrates "create a new tribal presence in stories" (12).

12 This echoes what Jennifer Andrews observes of the ways *Monkey Beach* invites readers to wrestle with their presumptions about the origins of evil; she notes how the novel utilizes gothic conventions to overturn conventional notions of Native "monstrosity."

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Rishma Dunlop

Psalm for the Beloved

At the moment our bloods cease to mingle
at the instant of retreat of blood, skin, pulse
the clock gears begin to grind and tick
sands pour from hourglasses
dust settles in every corner
chips fly from our bones
the magnolia's pink molts into brown.

In the scent of decay
I will hold you in stillness.
Do not let go of my hand.

Adrienne Weiss

A Canadian girl in training (C.G.I.T.)

a congregation of crows meet. in the
parking lot across from a thread of war-
time houses, brick sanctuaries. they glow
in the blue lamplight, silk & horsehair.
Jackie is 1956 vintage, veneered in
chenille, romance, but the landscape
disappears with Daddy; an accumulation of
God, row of A-frames, teetering dominoes.
his dead face displaying black & white
glamour, limbs & CN scars. she is outside
this picture, searching for the planets,
aligning him. stranded with crows.

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Chasteté et célibat

Elizabeth Abbott
Histoire universelle de la chasteté et du célibat. Fides 29,95$

Raymond Brodeur, dir.
Femme, mystique et missionnaire. Marie Guyart de l'Incarnation. P U Laval 30,00$

Comptes rendus par Rachel Sauvé

Parue d'abord en langue anglaise en 1999 (*A History of Celibacy*), l'étude d'Elizabeth Abbott, professeure à l'Université de Toronto, a été acclamée et a donné suite, en mars 2003, à une histoire des maîtresses (*A History of Mistresses*), tant il est vrai que ces perspectives apparemment éloignées représentent deux volets du même phénomène. En effet, même si la chasteté n'est pas exclusive aux femmes, l'accumulation des faits et des exemples tirés de toutes les époques et civilisations oblige à lier celle-ci à l'histoire de l'oppression des femmes. Que ce soit dans son analyse du sort réservé aux veuves hindoues, aux épouses de maris polygames, ou encore, aux enseignantes obligées de choisir entre leur emploi et le mariage, Abbott, tout en faisant preuve d'une grande rigueur dans l'exposé des faits, sait communiquer son amusement ou son indignation et mettre en lumière les paradoxes frappants qui ont souvent caractérisé la promotion de la chasteté et, en particulier, ceux qu'elle dénonce dans son plaidoyer contre le célibat des prêtres catholiques.

L'ouvrage remonte d'abord aux mythes grecs, puis s'attarde assez longuement sur le christianisme qui a institué, d'une part, des traditions monacales et apostoliques, et a engendré, d'autre part, des excès tels que ceux des saintes martyres camouflant leurs traits sous des barbes hirsutes ou ceux des moines mutilant leurs organes génitaux. Des incursions dans les rituels orientaux, africains et précolombiens confirment le caractère universel de nombreuses pratiques et croyances.

La deuxième partie de l'ouvrage rend compte avec beaucoup de verve et de détails de la variété impressionnante des formes empruntées par la chasteté, et ce, à partir d'une distinction fondamentale, à savoir qu'elle peut être choisie ou imposée. De tous temps, des hommes et des femmes l'ont adoptée délibérément, de façon tantôt permanente, tantôt provisoire, pour des motifs aussi divers que d'échapper au mariage, à la procréation ou encore à une sexualité qui rebute ou qui déroge aux normes, mais aussi, selon des croyances qui ont la vie dure, pour préserver l'énergie vitale nécessaire à la réalisation d'exploits sportifs ou à la promotion d'un idéal politique ou religieux. Imposée parfois cruellement par les ceintures de chasteté, l'excision, la castration, l'enfermement, elle a généralement pour corollaire une recrudescence de la prostitution dans les sociétés où elle est érigée en décret moral. Bien que le chapitre sur la chasteté dans la littérature paraisse superficiel et superflu ici, la conclusion de l'ouvrage, qui décrit les nouvelles tendances du célibat issues des intégrismes de tout acabit, de la crainte du sida mais

aussi, comme l'illustre le cheminement de l'auteure qui s'est convertie au célibat volontaire alors qu'elle travaillait à son livre, de choix personnels devenus légitimes dans une société plus ouverte à la diversité.

Cette histoire fort bien documentée, qui s'autorise de quelques explications sociologiques sans aborder de front la portée ethnologique de son propos, éclaire vivement, sur un ton enjoué mais sans faire l'économie des exposés nécessaires à une présentation contextualisée et nuancée des formes multiples de ce phénomène, une dimension méconnue mais omniprésente dans l'évolution des cultures et des sociétés, et que *Femme, mystique et missionnaire* a illustrée de façon éclatante.

Plus qu'une mystique, Marie de l'Incarnation (1599–1672) fut « écrivaine du grand siècle, historienne, linguiste, éducatrice, entrepreneure, architecte, économiste, » comme l'écrit Ghislaine Boucher, qui signe, comme une trentaine d'autres chercheurs, l'une des études colligées à la suite d'un colloque tenu à l'instigation du Centre d'études Marie-de-l'Incarnation en 1999, à l'occasion du quatricentenaire de naissance de Marie Guyart. Qu'elles soient historiques, sociologiques, théologiques, psychanalytiques, littéraires ou sémiotiques, les analyses se fondent très largement sur les textes de Marie de l'Incarnation, en particulier ses deux *Relations* autobiographiques (1633 et 1654) et son imposante correspondance, qui révèlent une femme complexe, partagée entre la contemplation et l'action, une « Sévigné mystique » conservant pour seul lien avec son fils unique qu'elle a abandonné pour se faire religieuse, des échanges épistolaires où s'inscrivent ses principes et son expérience mystique, qu'elle a formulés dans un langage renouvelé et qui constituent le cœur de la spiritualité de cette femme exceptionnelle dans ses excès comme dans ses réalisations. Marie de l'Incarnation a choisi la chasteté, dont la première raison d'être, à son époque, résidait dans la maîtrise de la pensée et dans la protection contre le danger d'absolutiser le plaisir.

Le recueil présente cinq parties regroupant chacune des textes apparentés par l'approche empruntée. Le contexte historique dans lequel a évolué Marie de l'Incarnation après son départ de la France en 1639 est campé d'emblée : la traversée (qui donne lieu à une métaphore maritime de l'expérience mystique), les rapports avec les peuples autochtones et avec leurs langues, les difficultés de la mission telles qu'évoquées dans ses écrits. La seconde partie, d'inspiration sociologique, décrit quelques aspects du rayonnement social du monastère des Ursulines et de son pensionnat dans la société de 1650. En troisième lieu, on rend compte de l'évolution de la pensée mystique de Marie, qui se formule dès 1627, alors qu'elle n'a que vingt-huit ans, et qui évoluera de l'état de victime et d'anéantissement du moi à travers l'ascèse, vers un « mariage mystique avec le Verbe incarné » qui, du point de vue psychanalytique adopté en quatrième partie, représente l'entrée du sujet dans l'univers du désir (empreint d'érotisme) et de la parole, que Marie mettra au service de l'édification de son fils, qui se fera le biographe et l'exégète de sa mère. Les analyses textuelles de la cinquième partie témoignent de l'intérêt des écrits de Marie de l'Incarnation pour les études littéraires et sémiotiques.

La question d'une spécificité féminine dans les écrits de Marie de l'Incarnation est presque centrale parce qu'elle est liée à celle de l'émergence du sujet, cruciale au XVIIe siècle. Les spécialistes en théologie trouveront dans ce recueil le fruit de travaux multidisciplinaires rassembleurs et stimulants; quant aux profanes qui œuvrent dans d'autres disciplines, ils découvriront avec un ravissement parfois teinté de perplexité, une œuvre et un destin d'exception, observés avec minutie, admiration et perspicacité.

Old Jazz, New Views

David Ake
Jazz Cultures. U of California P $18.95

Martin Gray
Blues for Bird. Santa Monica P $16.95

Richard Stevenson
Live Evil: A Homage to Miles Davis. Thistledown P $15.95

Reviewed by Jack Chambers

Jazz writing is in the throes of change. For almost seventy-five years, it was dominated by men who fancied themselves insiders. Though they usually made their livings as journalists, they doubled as record producers, publicists, concert organizers, or occasional sidemen of the men (and the few women) who made the music. (Leonard Feather, amazingly, was all of the above.) They were sidekicks as much as chroniclers.

They are being supplanted by a generation that never saw the seminal musicians in person. Miles Davis died in 1991, and he had spent his last fifteen years in a kind of influential funk. At that, he outlasted the others by years: Thelonious Monk died in 1982, Duke Ellington in 1974, Louis Armstrong in 1971, Coleman Hawkins in 1969, John Coltrane in 1967, Billie Holiday in 1959. So it goes. The great players since then—Keith Jarrett, Wynton Marsalis, James Carter, among others—make their marks elaborating what they inherited from these seminal figures.

The new writers should have a healthy detachment, but as often it feels like estrangement. Something of this was probably inevitable with the growing respectability of the one-time brothel music. Academic trappings apparently arouse urges to deconstruct, problematicize, minimalize, codify, and obfuscate. They may also bring an intellectual edge that was almost ruled out in the old order.

Right now, the field badly needs a focal point, someone who commands enough respect to define issues and set ground rules. David Ake appears to be a contender. *Jazz Cultures,* his expanded UCLA dissertation, touches all the postmodern bases. Chapter by chapter, he explores race, art and pop, sex ("gender codes"), gesture, ivory-towerism, and conflicting identities. He occasionally quotes gobbledygook ("Davis is signifyin' on all of the versions of the song he has heard, but for his audience, Davis is signifyin' on all the versions each listener has heard," says one Robert Walser), but he himself seldom writes it. He has a weakness for paradox, and that forces him, in the interests of clarity, to begin too many sentences with the qualifier, "I do not mean to suggest . . . ." He has to tell us explicitly that he does *not* mean that Ornette Coleman's music is effeminate, that bebop musicians invented the cutting contest, that Bill Evans and Keith Jarrett are insincere, and so on, because we would otherwise infer that he meant exactly that.

Counterbalancing his stylistic excesses is an incisive ear and the gift for describing in words what he hears. As a professional piano player, Ake has the technical smarts, but his grace in non-technical description is exceedingly rare. His appreciation of Keith Jarrett's solo performances is the best ever published, and he illuminates John Coltrane's development by close readings of "Giant Steps" and "Impressions," and Ornette Coleman's individualism through "Lonely Woman." These are analytic and critical strengths that set Ake apart, and bode well for his future and perhaps for the new jazz criticism.

Surely the most amazing convergence in jazz literature (or maybe any other art form) is the recent publication of two book-length poems on jazz heroes. In *Blues for Bird,* Martin Gray, a veteran of verse biography, traces Charlie Parker's life through twelve books, each made up of a number of stanzas (ranging from twenty-five to forty-seven). Gray uses short lines

(iambic trimeter) intended to model "our natural speech pulse," and about one-third of the text (by his estimate) is made up of quotations. The metre is restrictive, and Gray often lets the metre skew the sense. For instance, he (purportedly) quotes Jimmy Raney on Parker's use of "obscure tunes":

> "Once Bird adopted them
> he'd turn them into hits
> and standards they became."

But Bird was no hit-maker, as Raney knew very well. Raney was also not liable to invert his syntax. What Raney actually said was, "He'd pick up tunes nobody else would play, and they became standards." Nothing about "hits," and no words like "obscure" and "adopted." Gray's quotation marks make Raney sound a bit stupid, and they do a similar disservice to several other sources throughout these 5,665 lines of meticulous formalism.

Live Evil by Richard Stevenson is not a verse biography so much as a cycle of riffs on Miles Davis's life and music. Stevenson learned everything he could from published sources (including my biography), but his quotation marks enclose words of his own invention. Of that there can be little doubt. When Davis's best friend, Gil Evans, talks to him from heaven, we are in the poet's world. About Jimi Hendrix, reunited with Evans in the afterlife, Davis asks, "Can we maybe see / if he's learned to read music yet?" Davis never said that in real life, but he might have.

The voice of the poems is Davis's, except for italicized interludes which are Stevenson's musings on Davis's recordings at each stage of his career. Davis was taciturn, and when he did speak it was often in curses. Stevenson catches that tone faithfully, as when Davis rants at Wynton Marsalis for "dissing" his fusion music:

> You need to ask how come they ain't
> studying Bird or Trane or Monk
> Tatum, Ellington, or Armstrong
> in the academic system you praise [. . .]
> You gotta realize we got
> an academy too, and you ain't
> pissin' down on me from such a
> great height.

Davis's music betrayed a romantic sensibility he was unwilling or unable to put into words, and some of Stevenson's most memorable lines come from his imaginings of Davis's tender side. This is Davis on his first Japanese tour, puzzling over the demure women who "stand at the edge of your vision":

> If there are four
> Japanese women
> hovering near you like that
>
> and you speak to one,
> the others will
> dissipate like smoke [. . .]
>
> I think maybe
> a trumpet solo
> ought to be like that:
>
> a smoke ring halo
> floated just over
> your noble head.

Stevenson's book is best read selectively, best of all with Davis's music as soundtrack. Stevenson switches moods and metres, he howls and coos, shouts obscenities and lays down gentle thoughts. You have to set the book down sometimes, and wait a bit before picking it up again. That's no criticism. Davis's music after 1970 is like that too.

Ethical Semiotics

Karl-Otto Apel
From a Transcendental-Semiotic Point of View.
Manchester UP US $24.95

Jørgen Dines Johansen
Literary Discourse: A Semiotic-Pragmatic Approach to Literature. U of Toronto P $65.00

Reviewed by Charles Barbour

About four hundred pages into Johansen's colossal inventory of semiotic theory, it dawns on the reader that, for all his erudition, Johansen is going to fail—indeed, that

failure is a necessary condition of his project. The messiness or, to use Johansen's word, "protean" excesses of language, literature in particular, will always overwhelm the transcendental systems of classification invented to contain it, control it, or rein it in. Barthes, Eco, Frye, Greimas, Jakobson, Todorov—they all sought a taxonomy of literature. And they were all overwhelmed, finally, by the Proteus they endeavoured to subdue. Johansen, an unrepentant structuralist, employs a slightly different strategy. In an attempt to account for the ambiguities of language in use, he links Peirce's semiotics with Habermasian ethics. The kinds of criticisms Johansen is bound to face are predictable enough. He treats "literature" as a more or less ahistorical, transcultural category. While he confesses it is impossible to define, Johansen is nonetheless happy to assume that we all know literature when we see it. His examples, canonical without exception, carry an implicit definition, one that has been under fire for about thirty years. That complaint aside, for those not inclined towards semiotics or the conceit of "scientific" literary criticism, *Literary Discourse* might be read as a modern defence of poetry—an attempt to prove that literature is "useful" because it enhances human ethical capabilities, especially the faculty of judgment. Johansen's thesis is clearly stated in his final section—"8.4 Literature!"(the punctuation is his)—which explains that literature remains so amorphous and difficult to define because it represents both real and potential worlds, being both an icon of what is and an image of what could be:

> Literature not only presents icons of the human condition, it offers arguments about them. If this sounds familiar, it is no wonder, for that is what we are ordinarily doing when we relate and judge what is happening around us. And this is the point! Literature matters because it is capable both of simulating everyday experiences (obviously including fateful ones as well) and of transforming/transfiguring them as well.

So semiotic analysis, for all its turgid systematizing, is finally an ethical endeavour. It has to do with the construction of what Habermas would call a "horizon of consensus"—a regulative ideal that, while impossible to realize in the here and now, can nonetheless guide rational discourse and collective decisions.

According to Karl-Otto Apel, the same issue has been at the heart of philosophy since Kant. His book divides the history of ideas into three eras—ontological (the Greeks to Descartes), which questioned existence as such; epistemological (Descartes to Kant), which focused on individual consciousness or subjectivity; and semiotic (Kant to the present), which is concerned with communication between subjects, or inter-subjectivity. While serious historians will doubtless view such schematization as reductive, it is really intended as a heuristic device—not an empirical claim, but a way of getting at a problem. Apel's main point is similar to that of Habermas. In order to communicate any meaning whatsoever, he maintains, in order for there to be any signs, we must presuppose a horizon of intelligibility—an unrealizable but still regulative ideal of consensus. Apel refines this theory a little by suggesting that contemporary philosophers replace the Cartesian "I think" with the inter-subjective "I argue." It is not discourse as such, but arguments that locate the subject in a particular life-world, while at the same time necessitating the hypothesis of a universal horizon of consensus. That is to say, in order to *dis*agree with one another, the possibility of universal consensus must have already been granted:

> [W]e must always already presuppose that we have a claim to truth in such a way that we are trying to show that our propositions are inter-subjectively valid,

> that is capable of consensus by all possible members of an unlimited ideal argumentation community which we counterfactually anticipate in addressing our real discourse partners.

The essays, the first significant English translation of Apel's work, discuss this principle in relation to the philosophies of language (Wittgenstein, Peirce); of history (Heidegger, Dilthey, Gadamar); and of science (Popper, Kuhn, Tarski). Missing, however, is any consideration of the more difficult question addressed by Johansen, namely that of literature, and of symbolic discourse in general. What are the ethical conditions of statements that, as in works of fiction, are explicitly false? As cultural creatures, are we not called upon to interpret and judge such statements all the time—more often even than ostensibly factual ones? Or is the philosophical ideal of an ethical community still premised on the exclusion of the poets?

Shadowed Pasts

Jeannette Armstrong
Whispering in Shadows. Theytus $18.95

Beatrice Culleton Mosionier
In the Shadow of Evil. Theytus $19.95

Reviewed by Margery Fee

For readers, these two books are long-awaited second novels: Armstrong's *Slash* was published in 1985 and Mosionier's *In Search of April Raintree* in 1983. *Slash* was the story of Tommy Kelasket ("Slash") who was caught up in the activism in the sixties and seventies, and then returned to his Okanagan reserve. April Raintree was one of the many Native children "scooped up" by social workers from their parents and fostered out to non-Native homes. Both dealt with dramatic themes of wide concern to many First Nations people, particularly the young. Armstrong's novel emerged from an attempt to produce a history for young people; Mosionier's (which has sold nearly 100,000 copies) was written for a young audience, and a revised version for an even younger one was produced at the request of the Manitoba Ministry of Education. These second novels, aimed at an older audience, are written to help heal those whose present lives conceal a past filled with destruction and pain. Both expose how a racist history explains the emotions and lives of contemporary Aboriginal people. Both are semi-autobiographical, dealing with artists who have a strong sense of social justice.

Whispering in Shadows continues the story of an Okanagan activist, this time a woman, Penny Jackson. She works in the orchards of the Interior, and eventually manages, as a single mother with three small children, to go to university, where she studies economics, political science, and anthropology. Becoming a conceptual artist, she is pressured to incorporate Native motifs, what she angrily thinks of as "arrows ploughing into spandex." Finally, she has a confrontation with her agent who wants her to paint something less graphic and disturbing than her works about the destruction of the environment, something "just a teensy titillating and thought-provoking": "Art sells, not politics." She destroys the paintings they are discussing, in the belief that her paintings can only affect rich people, the source of the problem as far as she is concerned, and then turns to the global activist network. Armstrong vividly captures the stress that accompanies work in this field, the plane travel, the constant demands of others, the disconnection from partner, children and family. Worry about superbugs, cloning, mad cow disease, nuclear waste, pollution, biopiracy, the cancer epidemic, the destruction of Indigenous peoples along with their habitat, the loss of biodiversity, junk food: all this consumes Penny. And because she is Aboriginal she is faced with hard truths,

such as that even those in the ecological movement focus on protecting land for parks, while ignoring land claims. Penny works through various stages of activism, but finally concludes that the problem is deeper than she thought. She concludes that all human beings are meant to live as her grandparents did, in small closely knit communities with large families, on land with which they are connected through generations of knowledge. This is the local that has been razed for global capitalism, the people swept off to become "workforce" in polluted cities where, "in the absence of the sacred," they become stressed, caught up in the superficial, and unable to live as whole people.

Mosionier's central character, Christine Pelletier, is also an artist whose connection to nature, particularly wolves, puts her into a troubling conflict with the modern. Her past is a scar, a secret from even those closest to her. The novel continues the story of two Native sisters estranged by having been condemned to different foster homes that was central to *In Search of April Raintree.* Again, Mosionier proves herself a master at showing how emotional reactions work, how children internalize blame, how insecurity curses those who have never been properly loved. Christine loves wolves and dogs because they are not human—human beings have betrayed her, while animals, even potentially violent ones, prove more loyal. As in *In Search of April Raintree,* psychological insight and an ability to show how human beings turn against each other are combined in this novel with a complex and sometimes unbelievable plot and rather wooden dialogue. The plot, however, is a mechanism that forces the characters into explosive confrontations with each other and with the past, showing how feelings based on misconceptions can twist whole lifetimes out of shape. What appears to be simply a mystery story becomes, in the end, a story about the monstrosity of the "scoop-up" and the racism that fuelled it, as well as about how a relationship with nature can heal abused and damaged souls.

Of most interest for me in these novels is their determined combination of politics and art. The aesthetic is a problematic category for activists, since it has been ideologically constructed as necessarily empty of politics, a move required to eviscerate it of its obvious force for change. Armstong manages the problem in part by combining intensely lyrical passages, poetry, and personal letters with the rather plain prose style that was the hallmark of *Slash.* Penny, in a "Letter Never Sent" to a man who almost became her lover, regrets not having gone on with her painting: "I knew that putting images out there changes the world, yet I feared the shadows." Both novels show how important creativity is to the psychological survival of Penny and Christine, although it makes it difficult for them to control their feelings of sorrow, fear and anger. Both novels show how the imagination is vital to all of us, not just to a group classified as artists. Whole cultures are creations and can foster creativity in everyone, not just a selected few. This was the vision of the early Russian Formalists, and it is a recurrent vision of those who reject the slotting of human beings into limited and unfulfilling jobs which leads to "a culture of discontent" ripe for the false promises of happiness provided by advertising, television, and much of what passes for the arts.

Surviving the Future

Luanne Armstrong
The Bone House. New Star $21

Mike Tanner
Acting the Giddy Goat. Cormorant $22.95

Reviewed by Lutz Schowalter

The two novels reviewed here both explore the theme of survival – one in the contemporary urban setting of Toronto, the other

in a dystopian future environment of British Columbia. The first chapter of Luanne Armstrong's novel *The Bone House* depicts a Vancouver that is reminiscent of the unnamed city portrayed in Paul Auster's *In the Country of Last Things*. Affected by severe climate changes, the Canadian metropolis on the Pacific Rim has turned into a chaotic urban environment where "abandoned high-rises by the city's harbour" have "water lapping up to their foundations" and are occupied by a "constantly changing population of unemployed, homeless, mentally ill, illegal immigrants." Gangs roam the streets, staging raids on old people in which everyone is "killed and the apartment lit on fire"; public services and the media have been taken over by capitalist enterprises with catchy names ("EduGreat," "FosterLove") but governed by impenetrable hierarchies and hidden agendas.

The narrative soon leaves the city behind as Lia, one of the main characters, sets out towards the interior of British Columbia in search of her friend Star and of a better living environment. In the rural setting, Lia at first discovers an almost idyllic community of people living and working together in a commune. The enemies, though, remain the same there: the unrelenting chaotic climate, other people, and faceless multinational corporations. A struggle for survival soon takes place in the rural environment and in the wilderness — people "are the endangered species."

Armstrong explores a variety of individual and communal strategies in the fight to survive without simple judgements or moralism. However, in contrast to Auster's dystopia, the novel does challenge its readers to work against possibly destructive current political and ecological developments.

While *The Bone House* provides interesting questions and maintains narrative suspense, the writing lacks stylistic variation. The author's technique of relating information about past events is, to put it mildly, rather awkward. In addition, there are some minor but bothersome incoherencies in the narrative. The author overuses hyperbole when describing sensual experiences and employs an exaggerated symbolism (for example, towards the end of the narrative, a newborn child announcing the advent of better times is named "May. May Flower"). Too much is simply explained and too little is artfully shown in this novel.

The numerous characters introduced in *Acting the Giddy Goat*, Mike Tanner's first novel, all live in present-day Toronto and are between their late twenties and their early forties. Their personalities are of a "more or less average dimension" and they face the mundane problems of the underemployed and young couples. Martin Hedley, for example, a Ph.D. in philosophy, is looking for a teaching position and works at a kindergarten to earn a living. Adam and Connie, a young married couple, consider having children and fight over their bed sheets at night as a result of divergent heat sensibilities. Johnny Raccoon, one of the novel's most memorable characters, has managed to survive as a local musician without a record contract for years, busking and playing to audiences at various bars.

In one significant section of the novel, the characters Susan and Brewmaster Bill visit an art exhibition called *Images of Home*, which features paintings that reflect commonplace experiences in a realistic manner. Bill is fond of what he sees and tells Susan that "a lot of art doesn't reflect most people's own experience. But these paintings here are where a lot of us came from." This partly reveals Tanner's own intent: his novel is about how many Canadians live their lives today.

Yet, *Acting the Giddy Goat* is not a purely realist tale, and Tanner adds a dose of metafiction with short chapters narrated by Brewmaster Bill. Bill contemplates writing a book about the "unconnected and sup-

posedly unimportant things that tell the real story" and how to use his friends and acquaintances as characters of a future novel. Is he the narrator, then, who weaves together the accounts of the various other characters' lives and who imagines the culmination of storylines in the fictional bar The Horse and Groom during a severe thunderstorm? This question remains unanswered and adds an appealing layer of uncertainty to the novel. The same is true for the magical elements that are spread throughout the book – a painting starts talking to its creator, an ancient poet's ghost appears to Bill on the subway. Who is "acting the giddy goat" here? Is it the author or Brewmaster Bill, or are these realistic depictions of mental "problems"?

"How many people eat doughnuts and drink Slurpees in the canonized works of Canadian writing? From snacks to stupid jobs, shockingly few of our writers have had much to say about the mundane details of urban life," complains Hal Niedzviecki in *The Original Canadian City Dweller's Almanac* and proceeds to list some literary works he considers representatives of a "new urban Canadian fiction." He should add the impressive first novel *Acting the Giddy Goat* to his list for a future edition.

Lowry in the Limelight

Frederick Asals and Paul Tiessen, eds.
A Darkness That Murmured: Essays on Malcolm Lowry and the Twentieth Century. U of Toronto P $45.00

Reviewed by Henrik Otterberg

Asals and Tiessen's welcome collection of essays on Malcolm Lowry's life and work is the third such collaborative effort since Anne Smith's *The Art of Malcolm Lowry* (1978) and Sherrill Grace's *Swinging the Maelstrom: New Perspectives on Malcolm Lowry* (1992). *A Darkness That Murmured* reflects on Lowry's literary legacy in light of recent theory. The opening biographical section corrects some of the myths Lowry later propagated regarding himself. Three recently discovered letters home from school, edited by Sherrill Grace, hint that relations within the Lowry family were perhaps not as strained as he would later claim. Judith Adamson maps Lowry's troubled college days romance with Charlotte Haldane, fifteen years his senior and a published author. A brief candid memoir by Alfred H. Mendes, who befriended Lowry in New York during the 1930s, is followed by Jan Gabrial's vivid account of her Mexican days with Lowry, chronicling his dipsomania, absenteeism, and obsession with rare coincidence.

After a frank but sympathetic reminiscence by William C. McConnell, Greig Henderson's contribution moves into academic mode: "To overplay the gnostic element in *Under the Volcano* is to reinstate the darkness that is sometimes domesticated by a redemptive rhetoric of humanitarian afterthought." It is doubtful whether the "general reader" invited on the back flap will dare follow him further. Henderson's is a difficult but ultimately satisfying piece, however, for those with a stomach for jargon.

Pierre Schaeffer's study on the "dialogic evolution" of Lowry's major book follows. Citing Lowry's famous miscopying of a Mexican public notice and his subsequent use of the transcription in the novel, Schaeffer declares it "what I would like to call an *a posteriori* amplification of dialogism." Surely "pun" would suffice? Martin Bock then gives an interesting history of the concepts of genius and degeneration available to Lowry when he was writing *Volcano*, while Patrick Deane investigates *Ultramarine* as a flirtation with proletarian values. Miguel Mota writes on Lowry's *Tender Is the Night* as a *poiumenon*, or work-in-progress fiction.

Cynthia Sugars and Chris Ackerley discuss the vexing matter of Lowry's plagia-

rism, while Mathieu Duplay follows with a fine piece on the role of music in the writer's work. In a comparative section, Patrick A. McCarthy places Joyce's *Ulysses* alongside *Volcano*, Dean Irvine describes Sharon Thesen's documentary cycle *Confabulations: Poems for Malcolm Lowry*, and Margaret Soltan presents a magisterial comparative study of Don DeLillo's *White Noise* and Lowry's *Volcano*. Soltan proposes that the writers share a concern with clarity, coherence, and redeemed moral consiousness in facing a Western culture continually at war with itself.

A splendid concluding essay by Sherrill Grace on Lowry's gradual mental and literary breakdown ties this collection together. Grace diagnoses Lowry as suffering from preoedipal regression, made manifest by his swings from narcissism to hysterical identification with other males in the field, an active seeking of mother-substitutes, and a general difficulty in distinguishing between self and other. In sum, Asals and Tiessen's anthology provides a wealth of new and provocative perspectives on Lowry, proving a worthy addition to extant scholarship.

Desert Books

Niema Ash
Travels with My Daughter. Dundern P $21.95

Lake Sagaris
Bone and Dream. Vintage Canada $22.95

Reviewed by Melanie Kolbeins

Travels with My Daughter and *Bone and Dream* are both memoirs by women travelling across dry land, but they are very different in approach. Ash, a career traveller and music promoter, describes her encounters with Canadian writers in Canada and Morocco in the early 1970s. Lake Sagaris's memoir of her travels in Chile's mountainous Atacama desert examines the effects of copper mining, the nitrate industry, religious practices, Spanish conquest, and archeology on the land and its people. Ash's narrative begins by explaining that her daughter's birth resulted from an unplanned pregnancy that she was unable to terminate while travelling. Because "The Road" is her "university, church, [and] true love," her memoir focuses on travel. However, Ash also writes to "refuse the charge of irresponsible mother." She initially depicts herself as a danger to newborn Ronit. In the worst instance, sleep-deprived and socially isolated, she throws her crying daughter. Ash trusts her readers to set judgement aside and to recognize her physical exhaustion and lack of community at a time when her "only assistance came from the printed word." Ash and her husband open The Finjan, a folk club that brings musicians such as Bob Dylan and John Lee Hooker to Canada and launches the careers of, among others, Leonard Cohen. She credits this "travel substitute" with better parenting. When travel to Morocco emerges, Ash interprets it as a healing journey for her friend (named Rachel in the memoir) and Rachel's son, David. As a result, she describes conflicts between Rachel and Irving Layton and their literary circles in more detail than she does Morocco. Irving Layton and Scott Symons are shown reading and analyzing poetry together in Symons's Moroccan home, and there is an account of Layton's attempts to arrange for an Arab-Israeli cultural conference. Readers may want to compare Ash's account with David Layton's in *Motion Sickness* and Elspeth Cameron's in her biography of Layton.

Rather than positioning Ash as an expert on a complex culture in which she frequently describes herself as clumsy, her memoir combines apology with celebration. At times, it relies heavily on readers' sympathy and interest in literary circles. It would be easy to criticize many of the actions Ash describes herself as taking.

Nevertheless, Ash's memoir, written from the unusual point of view of a woman travelling with her young daughter, offers a fresh look at the members of the literary circles she admires.

Lake Sagaris insists that "in the open reaches of the Atacama, you must define your own form or go to pieces, dissolve in a handful of bone, blown sand dust of glass, sparkling and arid, but silent under the glaring sun," yet her own movement across Chile with her husband and son primarily serves to connect the various voices and span of time that she addresses. The extensively researched *Bone and Dream* defines her as a social historian, political activist, and poet. For Sagaris, this is an effect of the desert, which "turns you outward, stretches you beyond your skin." Imagining the voice of a once-living woman who witnessed many of the major social upheavals in the desert allows Sagaris, a self-described "gringa," entry into the culture of the Atacama. Huillac Ñusta is based on Sagaris's historical research on the Incan creation of the culture of Tiwanaku. Ñusta escapes ritual sacrifice to become a prisoner of Diego de Almagro but escapes again to form her own colony, earning the title of La Tirana and a Catholic festival (with Incan roots) in her honour. Sagaris addresses Ñusta directly, comparing her own responses to the desert. The invocation of Ñusta becomes a rhythmic refrain. By the end of the memoir, Huillac Ñusta speaks and sings in first person through Sagaris's own poetry. *Bone and Dream* imagines the Atacama as a "living book," in part because the salt desert preserves the past in a very literal sense by mummifying those who once lived there. Some of the dead record Incan ritual sacrifice, conquistadors' greed, or brutal dictatorship, while others simply recall fatal weather. Sagaris has past historians, priests, explorers, and striking miners speak for themselves rather than interpreting them as museum exhibits. The history of foremen, workers, and their families comes to life through their songs. Sagaris envisions their daily lives alongside those of Atacamenians currently living. Sagaris's memoir resembles an animita, the roadside shrines that she describes on her journey. The animita honour violent deaths and emphasize the importance of past lives. Such shrines caution, seek justice, or magically offer protection to passersby. Similarly, *Bone and Dream* allows the dead to take their place in history. It remembers, for example, the miners who "disappeared" from the Pisagua prison camp during Pinochet's rule. Their bodies emerge preserved from Sagaris's memoir to accuse their persecutors just as they did in the "living book" of the desert. *Bone and Dream*, like the animita, effectively acts as a warning against such negative forms of human impact.

Two Saskatchewans

Jo Bannatyne-Cugnet. Yvette Moore, illus. *Heartland: A Prairie Sampler.* Tundra $22.99

David Bouchard. Allen Sapp, illus. *The Song within My Heart.* Raincoast $21.95

Reviewed by John Considine and Nicholas Brown-Considine

The genre of book which marries text and large, attractive images is a familiar one in the homes of privileged children. Such a book must often please two judges with rather different criteria, parent and child, as they sit side by side reading it. Both of the books under review here take up this challenge. They also share a point of origin, Saskatchewan.

Jo Bannatyne-Cugnet explains the subtitle of *Heartland: A Prairie Sampler* with a reference to a particular kind of needlework sampler, whose embroidery unites several different pieces of fabric; "[e]arly settlers," she continues, "made sampler quilts . . . . Today, many families display with pride these treasured pieces made by their

pioneer ancestors." One need not have read Alice Walker's "Everyday Use" to get the message. This book is about the lived experience of heritage. It brings together topics from one kind of traditional prairie life — climate, agriculture, mining, play, "traditions and celebrations" — in a cheerful text, accompanied by meticulously detailed paintings in acrylic by Yvette Moore, who also illustrated Bannatyne-Cugnet's successful *A Prairie Alphabet* (1992) and *A Prairie Year* (1994). The paintings' concern to pick out every hair on a child's head or every visible stem in a thousand-pound haybale not only amuses the young reader, whom they provide with many details to be discussed, but also gives them a quality of factual reportage. The text has something of the same strongly factual quality: here are weather statistics, a recipe for saskatoon pie, and instructions for wheat weaving.

But the tone is not didactic: it is idyllic, and little interrupts the idyll. To be sure, there is an acknowledgement that the slaughter of bison in the nineteenth century destroyed the way of life of the First Nations of the prairies ("soon they were confined to life on reserves," where, apart from a subsequent account of birch-bark biting as an art form, the story leaves them), and a slightly blunter admission that some animal species have become extinct "because we have not been good stewards." Bannatyne-Cugnet is a farmer herself, and tells us that now as in the past, "many a farmer goes to bed wondering if she or he can cover expenses." But cheerfulness keeps breaking in: it's a pity about the "Natives" and the animals, and more money for farmers would be welcome, but what matters is really the hockey and the voices of the coyotes, the dramatic weather and the community potluck suppers. The main text ends with the reflection that "we thank our lucky stars we live on the Prairies, and wish on a falling star that others could have what we have."

Like Jo Bannatyne-Cugnet and Yvette Moore, Allen Sapp and David Bouchard both grew up in Saskatchewan. Like *Heartland*, their book is in large oblong format, with coloured reproductions of paintings facing a text about a traditional way of life. There the resemblance ceases. *The Song within My Heart* presents a selection of Allen Sapp's renowned paintings of scenes from his childhood on the Red Pheasant reserve near North Battleford. Those reproduced here were executed at intervals over the last eighteen years, and each has its title, dimensions, and date given below it, as they might be in a book whose primary focus was Sapp's art. This book, however, has a balanced double focus: on the title-page, the legend "Paintings by Allen Sapp" is above "Story by David Bouchard," but offset far to the right, so that the two appear equally prominent. Bouchard's facing text, a poem in loose four- or six-line stanzas, unifies Sapp's pictures into a simple story.

This text begins with a call to its audience, which opens "Listen to the beating drum / It tells a hundred stories / Of our people, of our homeland / Some of birds and beasts and sweet grass." The periodic appearance of lines in the *Hiawatha* metre raises several questions. Nor is it the only puzzle here, for the referent of *our* is unclear: does the young Canadian of non-First Nations ancestry share in the *our* of "our homeland" but not in that of "our people"? These uncertainties, particularly the sense of possibly not belonging to what's going on in the text, work well with Allen Sapp's paintings, which characteristically show the purposeful, mysterious lives of adults from the perspective of a child partially excluded from what is happening. Faces are often averted or blurry, significant actions are decipherable only from captions. This is not the sharply lit, uncomplex world of *Heartland*.

Bouchard's story moves into the narrative voice of a First Nations boy who hears the

drums starting up for a pow-wow and asks his Nokum (his grandmother) to explain what the drumbeats mean. (Sapp's grandmother helped to bring him up, and a number of his paintings of her are reproduced here.) The answer is that they tell stories, as do the songs which go with them: "Your stories, songs and beating heart / Are truly yours and yours alone." This point is made at some length, embellished with a sort of backing track — "HI hey hey hey HEY hey hey! BOOM boom boom boom BOOM boom boom boom" — printed with pleasing irregularity, and in grey ink. Sometimes the text is just as idealistic as that of *Heartland*: "So much of what the drummer feels / Is clear with every beat you hear. / He bares it all, he cannot hide. / He's sharing what he is inside."

Of the two present reviewers, the older had reservations about Bouchard's text for *The Song within My Heart*, but admired the book as a whole: Sapp's pictures are very powerful, and the text and the design of the book bring them together to good effect. The younger had examined both *Heartland* and *The Song within My Heart* repeatedly and carefully while this review was in preparation; offered one or the other as a bedtime story just before the review was completed, he chose the latter without hesitation.

Community Chest

Clark Blaise
Pittsburgh Stories—Selected Stories: 2. Porcupine's Quill $18.95

Sheila Peters
Tending the Remnant Damage. Beach Holme / Porcepic $18.95

Reviewed by Barbara Sibbald

There seems little to bind these two collections of short stories in a single review. One is a first collection, the other the newest offering of a seasoned master of the genre. One author is Canadian, the other a hybrid Canadian-American. One collection is set in contemporary, bucolic BC, the other in 1950s industrial Pittsburgh. Nevertheless, the stories are linked by a significant and perennial Canadian theme: the search, nay the need, for community.

Clark Blaise's young protagonists inhabit the bleak post-industrial landscape of Pittsburgh where pecuniary ambition reigns supreme, where families pursue the American dream, and where young boys raise themselves. Sheila Peters's stories offer a more optimistic view, stemming in part from their rural and small town settings, which are physically more beautiful and more conducive to community if only because survival often depends on cooperation. Her damaged characters—Aboriginals, disenfranchised urban youth, escapees from family carnage—manage to form a community with what can be found at hand.

To read Blaise's new collection is to rediscover the short story form at its poignant best: accessible and entertaining, yet multilayered and complex. The stories reflect Blaise's peripatetic cross-border existence. Born to Canadian parents (French and English) in North Dakota, Blaise spent an itinerant childhood with a gregarious, untrustworthy furniture salesman father and a reliable, university-educated mother. In *Pittsburgh Stories* he continues exploring

his theme of displacement and the experience of outsiders, which dominated his first collection, *A North American Education* (1973). In his self-described "personal fiction," Blaise revisits his life's experiences, rearticulating and reshaping them. These stories imply that we are all outsiders, displaced persons. According to *Pittsburgh Stories*, there is no simple reason for this, given the vagaries of the individual, but Blaise seems to suggest that this displacement may stem in part from the endless quest for the American dream, the need to pursue, to physically move, and in the process to lose community and identity.

Time and again, families are set adrift in the American landscape in the endless, often fruitless search for success and happiness. In "The Waffle Maker," success requires that one deny one's roots and give up both art and dignity. Adults are torn by conflicting attractions and realities: disreputable and established social position; poverty and prosperity; ignorance and knowledge; disjointedness and continuity; dishonesty and assured values. Characters live in a depraved environment of extra-marital affairs, neglectful mothers, still-born siblings, fundamentally incompatible parents, failed and failing businesses, dishonorable business practices.

This culture of degeneration is reflected in the degraded environment, where white curtains need a weekly cleansing, and trees are coated in black soot, and the city, the glimmer of enlightenment for all it contains—libraries, art galleries, the university—is all but lost in a haze of smog. In "The Unwanted Attention of Strangers" and "Dunkelblau," Europe is a metaphor for civilized life, while America represents nihilism in the midst of sad commercialism. Not surprisingly, people are reduced by these circumstances. These stories contain "dark clouds giving birth to truth and destruction" (as Blaise puts it in "The Birth of the Blues"). In "The Seizure," the protagonist is profoundly affected and shamed by the need to seize furniture from a poor family, and in "Sitting Shivah with Cousin Benny" we realize the shiva is actually for Benny, the death of hope for a child prodigy. These powerful stories linger and merge in memory, to deliver a powerful warning about the pitfalls of rampant individualism.

By contrast, Peters's stories have a more optimistic tone. Her damaged creatures—drifters, loners and refugees—are mired in self-doubt and rootlessness, hiding from life in small communities or rural areas, but in the end they find or are at least headed toward finding their place in society. The rural settings are, for the most part, still pure and pristine, although man is beginning to make his mark.

This first collection from Peters contains ten stories, six of them previously published. The first seven stories cleverly mirror the evolving links formed between the characters, expanding the repertoire of character and allowing for development—a rare opportunity for the short-story writer.

The first three stories and the seventh, the title story, involve the same group of characters in the Queen Charlotte Islands. Regrettably, the lead story, "The Belair Beach Bar Roundup," is overwritten; the hummingbird metaphor becomes irritating, as does characters' endless pontification on the meaning of life delivered without knowledge or grace, and, most importantly, without irony. But Peters makes a stunning comeback in the next two stories. "Shooting in the Dark" is a difficult, complex story with poignant imagery both in the internal domestic scenes and external forest. And Peters is deft at drawing characters, particularly older people; the self-confessed "not a nice person" in "Shooting in the Dark," the wise Native woman and an elderly couple in the beautifully told love story, "Cultivation," are memorable for their ability to deal with life's raw deals and still preserve their dignity.

Even more memorable are the kindred

spirits who inhabit the trio of stories set in a small town in the interior of British Columbia. In "Divining Isaac" the town hobo's unflagging love for a benefactor redeems and releases his small, odd community in their grief. Peters's portrayal of how men cope with death is remarkable. In "Disappearance," three damaged souls find themselves in each other, and although the metaphors in "A Fool's Paradise" are overwrought, the story itself is a poignant retelling of the search for Mecca.

The final three stories of the collection have a different voice altogether. "Cultivation" and "Delivery" are simply told, almost like allegories that evoke an immediate and sustained sympathy in the reader. The final story, "Breathing Fire," written in two voices, reveals an exceptional grasp of the male psyche, and is among the best in the collection.

From Speech to Silence

Christian Bök
'Pataphysics: The Poetics of Imaginary Science. Northwestern UP US $22.95

Maurice Blanchot
Faux Pas. Stanford UP US $13.97

Reviewed by Charles Barbour

Christian Bök's *'Pataphysics: The Poetics of Imaginary Science* proposes that Alfred Jarry and Steve McCaffery can be seen as bookends for twentieth-century avant-garde thought, placing Derrida and Serres, Deleuze and Guattari, Baudrillard and Lyotard, as it were, in between them. Pataphysics is a neologism that Jarry, the father of absurdist theatre, invented to describe a science that exceeds both physics and metaphysics, or that is to metaphysics what metaphysics is to physics. It operates by privileging exceptions as opposed to rules—indeed by suggesting that there are only exceptions, and that the postulate of a rule is always arbitrary. Absurdity is revealed through an analysis of the overwhelming detail of all things, especially machines.

Quite deliberately, Jarry's idea oscillates between pseudo-science and a serious insight. For his part, Bök seems interested in how it articulates the relationship between science and poetry or science and language. For the 'pataphysician, Bök suggests, science is not opposed to poetry. Its more clever students (and Bök is nothing if not clever—astonishingly, often exasperatingly clever) know full well that science draws poetry closer precisely there where it feigns to push it away. Science plays a game of "*fort-da*" with poetic metaphors. And just as, for Freud's nephew, the toy represents a father who has been called away to fight at the "fwont," so too does science reveal the identity of its absent progenitor whenever it toys with the poetic. But unlike Freud, Bök does not want to point beyond the pleasure principle or towards the inevitability of death. An heir to Nietzsche, he seems concerned less with death than with life–with sustaining pleasure through continuous supplementation. To this end which is not one (this *télé sans telos*, this sending of messages void of intended addressee), Bök marshals three "Jarryite" concepts: *anomolos*, or "the principle of variance"; *syzgia*, or "the principle of alliance"; and *clinamen*, or "the principle of deviance." According to Bök, variation, alliance, and deviation are the theoretical coordinates of "pataphysics," while Italian futurism and Canadian language poetry are its *praxes*.

The range of references in *'Pataphysics* is decidedly outrageous—from Epicurus and Copernicus to Paul McCartney and Margaret Atwood. In effect, this assemblage of figures and names performs Bök's argument. It enacts the principles of variance, alliance, and deviance. None of this is intended to establish any substantial claim, of course. Following Nietzsche, Bök points to the theological "belief" at the heart of Enlightenment reason. "Why believe in truth?" he wonders.

"Why not believe in untruth? Why does belief in either case take itself so seriously? Why does belief in effect believe in itself? Why not move from the deceit of truth to the truth of deceit?" The claim is far from original, and variants of it have been formulated in exactly these terms throughout the history of skeptical thought. But Bök makes some use of the skeptical mode, particularly in his critique of science—the seriousness of which, like everything else in Bök's book, is always left up in the air.

While, for Bök, language is a matrix of signs referring to other signs, for Blanchot things get interesting only when we begin to distinguish between different levels of surface and depth, internality and externality. First published in 1943, *Faux Pas* collects a series of essays, or what Blanchot calls "digressions," on everything from myth and linguistics to novels and painting. His tastes are cosmopolitan, but generally rooted in the canon—Goethe, Gide, Rimbaud, Kierkegaard, Balzac, Woolf, Mallarmé, Melville. These short works interrogate the tangled relationship between solitude and writing, or the path, as Blanchot puts it, from anguish to language. What does it mean to write alone, or to write that one *is* alone? "The writer," Blanchot maintains, "is not free to be alone without expressing that he is . . . . That which destroys language in him also makes him use language."

Blanchot believes profoundly in an internal world of solitary contemplation and emotion—a world which thinkers like Bök represent as the secondary effect of external relations and semiotic exchanges. He locates the source of literature in a privacy no semiotics could analyze. Thus Blanchot is less interested in a writer's publications than in his or her journals and notebooks. There he finds individuals struggling with what it means to write when one, and that one, is alone. For Blanchot, though, the experience of literature is of the false steps and mistakes which, like Kierkegaard's ethical decision taken at a moment of madness, locate us in the world exactly there where we most desire to abandon it.

Hockey, Camping, and Art

David Bouchard. Dean Griffiths, illus. *That's Hockey.* Orca $19.95

Nancy Hundal. Brian Deines, illus. *Camping.* Fitzhenry & Whiteside $19.95

Ian Wallace
The Naked Lady. Roaring Book $23.95

Reviewed by Anna M. Wittmann

Three new picture books by Canadian writers cover a wide gamut: hockey, camping and artistic creation. Nevertheless, all three deal with experiences and activities central to children's lives, and in each work, a first-person narrator records a significant childhood discovery.

That's Hockey joins Canadian hockey classics for and about children, taking up Roch Carrier's and Sheldon Cohen's theme of the hockey sweater and Ken Dryden's reminiscences about backyard hockey in *The Game* (1984). This new book injects a vigorous note that challenges gender stereotypes that still exist in what is often viewed as an all-boys' sport.

Plunging directly into animated dialogue, the first-person narrator (whose gender is not specified until the final page) is visiting her cousin for a weekend of hockey: "'What's all this?' I said when he tossed me a toque and an old, ratty Montreal *Canadiens* sweater. 'I've given away stuff twice this good! Where are our skates? Our pads and gloves?'" The urban cousin is going to find out what real hockey (rural children's style) is about. In a lively account, accompanied by vibrant two-page spreads of illustrations with interestingly varied positionings of text, the narrative hurtles its readers through the excitement of a day of hockey among children in a small community that could be anywhere in Canada. The game is democratic.

Not only does the narrator—a mere city kid—win the players' praise, but everyone scores. Showing a wisdom far superior to that of adults, the players dispense with winning and losing. When they head home, both teams have answered the victory call. The most memorable touch, however, is saved for the ending, where readers discover that the enthusiastic narrator is a girl. Now grown up, she passes on her "ratty" *Canadiens'* sweater to her daughter: "With this sweater, sweetheart, you'll do just fine."

Action crackles through the illustrations as well as the words. The integration of text and picture, with a strategic use of white space and a variation of long, medium, and close perspectives, leads the eye forward, eager for the next page. The figures, individualized by their variety of boots, toques, makeshift equipment and gestures, alongside the deft depiction of the occasional set of lop-sided glasses and gap-toothed grins, move on the page.

By comparison, *Camping* and *Naked Lady,* while fine achievements in their own ways, are somewhat disappointing. They will be harder sells, picture books that parents might choose for children but that will, for all but a few readers, prompt the response, "Can't we read something else?"

The theme of camping has potential, but Hundal and Deines' book tries too hard to create a tone of enthusiasm. It falls short. We meet a family who, because of financial constraints, forsake holiday dreams of museums, art galleries, hotels, arcades and Disneyland to go camping. This could well be a journey of adventure, but the camping experience does not really take off. The illustrations, in spite of the subtlety of the photographic realist style, do not move. Happy family members, all wearing expressions of rather feckless contentment, remain in static poses. The words and pictures do not combine into a dynamic unit. The reader will suspect that days when "Mom reads. Dad snoozes, Laurie stares at the sky. Duncan watches ants on parade. I stare down a mosquito" are really not what they are cracked up to be. The illustrations succeed somewhat better than the text. Subtle oil strokes create a sense of dappled daylight interspersed with light-flecked nights, suggesting the shrouded enclosure of the campground. But in a campsite of gravel-crunching cars and friends who come to play, where are the other people? We do not see or hear them.

Naked Lady takes on an even more difficult task, that of making a visual artist's inspiration and experience come to life. This is a thoughtful book, the meditative tone maintained by muted colours in a combination of pencil and watercolour.

In spite of its provocative title, the book is unlikely to evoke outraged responses from moral-majority parent groups. The "naked lady" is a classic sculpture created by a grieving artist (Wallace's first art teacher; the story is autobiographical) to commemorate his wife. Nevertheless, seeing a naked lady in an open field causes the first-person narrator to drop the raspberry pie his mother has sent the new neighbour. Soon, however, the boy discovers that "Pieter had lit a fire inside me. I wanted to be an artist, too."

Wallace's style of illustration, like that of his first art teacher Pieter Doef, is realist, and the result is pensive but not dynamic. The layout is classic, with text on the left page and pictures (a variation of long and medium views) on the right. As with *Camping,* the human figures remain static, as when, for instance, in a somewhat failed attempt at humour, the narrator's father tries to imitate the statue's pose. The story suggests that art grows from human experience and transplants itself into the earth, but the scenes depicting the artist's sculptures do not work. Particularly in snow-covered surroundings, the sculptures are overwhelmed by the landscape. Nevertheless, this book is likely to inspire a few thoughtful, artistically inclined young readers.

Other Stories

George Bowering
And Other Stories. Talonbooks $24.95

Gerald Lynch
The One and the Many: English-Canadian Short Story Cycles. U of Toronto P $21.95

Reviewed by Claire Wilkshire

George Bowering got tired of reading the same old stuff. He went looking for something different, and the result is the anthology *And Other Stories.* The introduction is annoying at times (what kind of writer says "equine manure"?), but it delivers an impassioned argument in favour of innovation. What is innovation, in Bowering's view? Unclear. He dislikes realism, opposes the idea of a national literature, favours the global thing, Kroetsch, Ethel Wilson, early Ondaatje. "I do not want," he writes, "to extirpate description and characters altogether. I just want readers to notice the writing." And the writing, as it turns out, is worth reading.

The stories fall into three broad categories. The first is Freshly Disappointing: stories you think will work better now than the last time you read them. (You are mistaken.) Not many of those here. In Margaret Atwood's "Poppies: Three Variations," the words of John McCrae's famous poem are separated and woven into a very short story, three times. The words to the poem appear in italics, which makes them shoot off the page at you: "*Between the* rock and the hard cheese, that's where she sits . . . making little *crosses* on the wall . . . counting the stitches *row on row,*" etc. Why Atwood thought this would be a good idea remains a mystery. Another example of innovation that comes off looking trite is David Arnason's "A Girl's Story," in which the narrator goes on and on about how he is making or might make the story happen. A girl slips a ring off her finger; the next paragraph begins, "You see? I could do a lot more of that but you wouldn't like it. I slipped a lot of details in there . . . That's called foreshadowing." That's called irritating. Some stories seemed destined for this category but escaped. Although Diane Schoemperlen's work falls into gimmickry at times, "Railroading," a story divided into sections with titles that include the word "train" ("Love Train," "Freight Train," "Train Tracks") hovers on the brink of the Silly Premise abyss, but it turns out to belong to category two—Surprisingly Fresh—because it's vivid and interesting. Another surprise comes in the form of Candas Jane Dorsey's "Sleeping in a Box." Most stories containing the phrase "visitor from Earth" in the first page should be avoided at any cost, but this elliptical tale of isolation and confinement possesses a curious power. The third category is Freshly Rewarding: the kind of story that stands out as a fine piece of fiction every time you read it. Clark Blaise tops the list with "Meditations on Starch," a title that suggests the kind of formulaic premise that fails in "Poppies," but "Meditations" opens out far beyond title into an exploration of national, cultural, and personal identities. This is a rich and intelligent story about who people are and where they come from, one which compels the reader to do what Bowering wants, to "notice the writing": "Is there a taste explosion in the world finer than the first lick of the Dairy Queen cone, the roughened vanilla from a freshly opened tub, the drowning in concentrated carbohydrate where fats and starches come together in snowy concupiscence?" Keath Fraser's "Taking Cover" and Leon Rooke's "Art" also belong in this group.

Of the twenty-three works collected in *And Other Stories,* all were published in the 1980s and 1990s except for the selection from George Elliott's *The Kissing Man* (1962), a book to which Gerald Lynch devotes a chapter in *The One and the Many: English-Canadian Story Cycles.* Lynch's

study examines the story cycle over a period of about a century, exploring the genre from the outside and the inside—that is to say, Lynch addresses the context, the historical issues which make the cycle a particularly apt genre through which to explore certain kinds of themes, and the internal structure of the cycle, such as patterns of repetition and development, and key features of closing (or "return") stories.

The One and the Many includes chapters on well-known cycles, such as Duncan Campbell Scott's *In the Village of Viger* and Alice Munro's *Who Do You Think You Are?* but it also considers works that have received little attention (*The Kissing Man*), or that few people have heard of (J.G. Sime's *Sister Woman*, 1919), or that are not generally considered story cycles (Emily Carr's *Klee Wyck*, Frederick Philip Grove's *Over Prairie Trails*). This is a careful study: the chapters are full and thoughtful, and each book is given the attention it deserves. Lynch makes a convincing argument for the cycle as the genre most suited to convey anxiety about urbanization, industrialization, and the dismemberment of small, cohesive rural communities (as in Scott and Elliott). At the same time, throughout the last hundred years, he points out, it has worked as a structural figure of unity-with-fragmentation in explorations of selfhood and identity (as with Carr or Munro). Lynch's title underlines the tension between plurality and singularity that he identifies as the most significant feature of the story cycle. His book is an important contribution to Canadian genre theory.

Trans-Atlantic Views

Hans Braun and Wolfgang Klooss, eds.
Giving Voice: Canadian and German Perspectives. Schulz-Kirchner Verlag n.p.

Klaus-Dieter Ertler and Martin Löschnigg, eds.
Canada 2000: Identity and Transformation / Identité et transformation—Central European Perspectives on Canada / Le Canada vu à partir de l'Europe centrale. Peter Lang US $42.95

Reviewed by Martin Kuester

These are conference proceedings from European Canadian Studies centres. *Canada 2000: Identity and Transformation / Identité et transformation* brings together a wealth of divergent papers by Canadians and Europeans presented on the occasion of the opening of the Centre for Canadian Studies at the University of Graz in Austria. As is to be expected from the title, the eighteen contributions vary in quality and approach, but essays on the Canadian literatures are at the centre here. As far as English-Canadian literature is concerned, the book is framed by two personal contributions by the eminent narratologist and established Canadianist Franz Karl Stanzel, who looks back at the history of Canadian Studies and affirms the importance of a "traditional" thematic and imagological approach for European newcomers to this field. Waldemar Zacharasiewicz follows suit with a study of the (not always positive) images of Austria in Canadian literature. Michelle Gadpaille traces the importance of border imagery in Canadian prose fiction at the millennium. Carla Comellini studies expressions of identity in several writers leading up to Ondaatje's concept of a new postcolonial identity. Wolfgang Klooss contributes a solid reading of Canadian historical fiction in which he sees Canadian nationality being replaced "by a post-colonial notion of an identity beyond nation." Martin Löschnigg looks at the identities of

literary figures in Atwood, Shields and Urquhart, while Di Brandt discovers "distinct chunky flavours" in Adele Wiseman's multicultural Winnipeg, and Aleksander Kustec comments on Northrop Frye's views on twentieth-century changing identities.

The contributions in French start with the memoir "D'une prison à l'autre" by Négovan Rajic, a Canadian writer of Serbian origin who describes his postwar odyssey from Belgrade through a Graz prison to Paris and Montreal. The memoir is followed by Ljiljana Matic's emotional eulogy of the author. Micheline Cambron traces the construction of a national identity in the nineteenth-century periodical *Le Canadien*. Essays by Alessandra Ferraro, Peter Klaus, and Klaus-Dieter Ertler deal with the important contributions of immigrant writers, *l'écriture migrante*, to Québécois literature, with discussion of works by Monique Bosco, Régine Robin, Fulvio Caccia, Sergio Kokis, Ying Chen, and Marco Micone. Éva Martonyi outlines three stages in the quest for identity in Québécois literature. Two final essays introduce an interdisciplinary perspective: the linguist Elke Nowak looks at the relationship between world view and vocabulary in Inuit languages, and Willibald Posch studies the legal systems of Austria and Quebec from a comparative perspective.

In *Giving Voice: Canadian and German Perspectives*, some contributions interpret the title as relating to literature. Eric Annandale discusses the appropriation of Aboriginal voice in Nancy Huston's fiction. Markus Müller discusses multicultural voices in Prairie writing while Kathryn Young analyzes the construction of women in poetry published in the *Quebec Gazette*. But "voice" is also extended to such topics as university surveys and the criteria they leave out in evaluating students (James M. Dean) or the effectiveness of multiculturalism in furthering community-building (Lance W. Roberts, Mathias Boes, Susanne von Below). Derek Hum and Rüdiger Jacob see the Census as a postmodern text or a contribution "to empowering people to raise their own voice," whereas Hans Braun and Alexandra Caster discuss methods in which clients can be given a voice in the choice of welfare services and providers. Barry Ferguson and Derek Hum describe the way in which Chinese immigrants to Canada are first barred from and later entitled to having their own voice, while Fred Stambrook discusses two phases in German and Austrian history in which minority voices that have long been forgotten once existed.

Saint-Denis: Two Views

André Carpentier. Leonard Sugden, trans. *Rue St-Denis: Fantastic Tales.* Ekstasis $18.95

Michel Tremblay. Sheila Fischman, trans. *The Heart Laid Bare.* Talonbooks $19.95

Reviewed by Roseanna L. Dufault

André Carpentier's 1986 collection of nine short stories reveals a dark, mysterious side of Montreal's Rue St-Denis. Leonard Sugden's 2001 translation makes available in English this eclectic array of tall tales, which include the occult, time travel, haunted houses, and crime. The colourful characters represent a range of evil perpetrators and naïve victims. Two of the stories offer an intriguing historical perspective: "The Between-Time Bookshop" describes the topography of nineteenth-century Montreal, while "Bi's Bell" alludes to economic and political conditions in the 1930s. Two additional stories explore disturbing notions of the cosmos: in "The Heaven-Sent World Map," a well-meaning man and his grandson unknowingly inflict terrible disasters as they point to geographical locations on a mysterious sort of atlas; in "Ogda's Double," our universe is a cosmic incubator in which God attempts to grow a replacement for Ogda, his beautiful but unfortunately mortal companion. In yet

another story, a young woman falls prey to a devilish scheme when she reacts to a lovers' quarrel by impetuously buying an antique chest. In sum, imaginative plot twists and surprise conclusions make for enjoyable reading.

Sugden's translation includes an introduction by Michel Lord, as well as a chronology outlining Carpentier's long involvement in Quebec arts and literature, his teaching at the Université de Québec at Montreal, and his interest in promoting literature of the fantastic, science fiction, detective novels, and comic strips.

In *The Heart Laid Bare*, Michel Tremblay provides a different perspective of Rue St-Denis as a place where his gay characters stroll and cruise. This love story, first published in French in 1986, chronicles a tumultuous time in the lives of Jean-Marc, a jaded French teacher, and Mathieu, a budding actor who works part-time in a department store. Their at first hesitant relationship grows in fits and starts as both characters adjust to one another's circumstances. The novel is divided into sections that alternate between Jean-Marc's point of view and Mathieu's, with a few additional passages devoted to Mathieu's ex-wife Louise, and his child Sébastien. Themes pertaining to family ties and tolerance necessarily dominate the plot.

In addition to his protagonists, Tremblay develops a number of credible and entertaining secondary characters including Louise's bigoted new husband; Jean-Marc's arrogant, promiscuous ex-lover; a compassionate lesbian housemate nicknamed "The Mother of Us All"; and, of course, Matthieu's adorable four-year-old son.

This excellent translation by Sheila Fischman is actually a reprint. Although the original text and translation date back to the 1980s, a fresh publication in English provides a welcome opportunity to revisit Tremblay's humorous, yet sensitive and affirming treatment of a very human gay couple.

Mouvance(s) dramatique(s)

Nicole V. Champeau
Moulinette. Vermillon 16,00 $

Herménégilde Chiasson
Laurie ou la vie de galerie. La Grande Marée Prise de parole 18,95 $

Claude Guilmain
La Passagère. Prise de parole n.p.

Comptes rendus par Sylvain Marois

Trois textes dramatiques. Trois auteurs—une Ontarienne, un Québécois et un Acadien, trois éditeurs, trois mouvances. . . voilà bien un portrait représentatif de la vivacité de la dramaturgie franco-canadienne.

Moulinette, pièce en un acte écrite par Nicole V. Champeau, est le premier volet d'une trilogie intitulée *Le Moulinet*. À la fin des années 1950, le Canada en entier vivait un moment historique : l'ouverture officielle de la Voie maritime du Saint-Laurent. Cette étape importante n'est rien de moins que la suite logique de la Conquête de l'Ouest. Si les conséquences économiques de la construction de la Voie maritime et de l'aménagement des rapides du Long Sault sont assez bien connues, il en est autrement de l'impact sur l'environnement et sur les habitants des régions inondées pour faire place au progrès. En effet, cette gigantesque entreprise permettrait d'augmenter la circulation, et donc le tonnage, sur le Saint-Laurent. Terminés les détours et les portages d'antan. Pour ce faire, il faudra toutefois relocaliser plus de 6,500 personnes et inonder sept villages entre Cornwall et le Lac Ontario (le sujet de *Mémoire des villages engloutis*, un livre de Champeau publié en 1999). *Moulinette* nous raconte la vie des habitants de ces régions disparues en mettant en scène la vie de ces personnages en attente d'un cataclysme annoncé.

La belle poésie de Nicole V. Champeau sert bien les personnages de *Moulinette* et compense pour le manque de substance de certains de ces derniers. Un triangle amou-

reux formé de François, William, et Marianne constitue la trame principale. Xavier, père de Marianne, est échevin, un « élu du peuple » blâmé pour sa lâcheté, car il aurait dû se battre et résister aux pressions. On reconnaît dans ces personnages les archétypes du Français, aventurier, amant de la nature, de l'Indien, qui souhaite conserver les choses telles qu'elles étaient et à qui on a appris le français; Marianne, la belle; et son père, l'homme de pouvoir, brisé et incompris qui se confie à un Étranger... *Moulinette* est un texte très intéressant du point de vue historique, mais comporte une certaine lenteur qui se prête peut-être mal à la scène. Cela dit, on y apprend, par exemple, que cette vaste inondation effaça à tout jamais des villages dont les noms faisaient références aux allées et venues des Français dans la région (une carte de 1757 de Jean-François Bellin en témoigne au début du livre).

Ce n'est pas la qualité de l'écriture qui distingue le plus *Laurie ou la vie de galerie* de *Moulinette*—Herménégilde Chiasson est sans doute un des meilleurs auteurs dramatiques au Canada—, mais bien l'humour qui, s'il est quasi absent chez Champeau, occupe une place de choix dans cette comédie dramatique de Chiasson. En fait, le réalisme du texte est parsemé d'ironie, d'absurde et de savoureux dialogues qui ne sont pas sans nous rappeler Ionesco.

La pièce se déroule en une seule journée alors que Laurie et son ami et futur beau-frère, Euclide, se préparent à boire de la bière, bien confortablement installés sur la galerie, alors que les femmes, Bénalda et sa fille Georgette, vont travailler à la « shoppe ». C'est sur cette seule galerie, là où « y'aura jamais de plus belle vie » que se déroulera toute l'action. Alors que les femmes quittent la maison pour le travail, Laurie revient, « avec une caisse de douze sous chaque bras », d'un voyage de trois heures à pied pour « quérir la bière ». Ce long périple l'a non seulement mis en rogne : il l'a surtout assoiffé! Débutent ainsi les nébuleuses palabres entre Laurie et Euclide où tous les sujets seront couverts, surtout l'importance de ne pas travailler et de boire « d'la bière » : « le plus beau passe-temps qu'une parsonne peut trouver ». La journée se termine avec le retour des travailleuses et le mariage « forcé » de Georgette et Euclide....

Le talent de Chiasson ne réside pas seulement dans sa capacité à couvrir des sujets comme le nationalisme canadien, la folklorisation de la société acadienne, les nombreux problèmes liés au chômage ou le statut du français au Canada, mais bien à en parler avec une légèreté apparente, sans en avoir l'air, dans un discours émanant de deux hurluberlus dont le seul but semble être de boire de la bière en attendant « le bundle » (une compensation d'assurance invalidité que Laurie attend depuis longtemps). La première scène de l'Acte II, où l'on assiste à l'arrivée d'Ella Sincenne—animatrice à la radio de Radio-Canada—toute heureuse d'avoir trouvé « deux intervenants avec accent », est très représentative du ton de la pièce.

La beauté de la langue, tout autant dans l'écriture que dans sa couleur acadienne, et l'action théâtrale incorporée à la structure même de certains dialogues, font de *Laurie ou la vie de galerie* un texte dramatique exemplaire tant par son contenant que son contenu.

La langue est certainement une des thématiques la plus présente dans le théâtre franco-canadien. *La Passagère*, de Claude Guilmain, ne fait pas exception à cette règle. L'auteur, originaire du Québec, nous propose l'histoire, très bien ficelée, d'une jeune québécoise qui, au début du XXième siècle, poursuit son rêve de devenir cantatrice. Elle partira pour le Conservatoire de Paris—« la meilleure école au monde »—et cette aventure parisienne fournira le matériel nécessaire aux clichés sur le français de France *versus* celui du Québec, le snobisme de certains européens envers les visiteurs

originaires des colonies et leur accent de paysans, etc. Cela dit, en dosant plutôt bien ces clichés (qui font partie, il faut bien l'admettre, de l'époque représentée dans la pièce), l'auteur a évité de tomber dans la dissertation linguistico-théâtrale. Il nous offre plutôt un drame de facture classique où les dialogues, parfois syncopés, intercalent les multiples relations entretenues par les personnages.

Ève-Marie Guérin, jeune et ambitieuse, quitte Montréal en 1910 pour le Conservatoire de Paris. Son ami d'enfance, Maurice Kleiman, pianiste, l'accompagne pour, lui aussi, réaliser ses ambitions artistiques. Malgré des débuts parfois difficiles, Ève-Marie brillera et, ce soir-là, un bel étranger l'entendra chanter. Ce bel étranger n'est autre que Gustav Schmidt, célèbre et richissime architecte maritime, héritier de la fortune des Industries Schmidt et maître d'œuvre de L'Imperator, transatlantique destiné à être le plus grand navire du monde. C'est donc sur un fond de course internationale de construction navale que se déroulera l'histoire d'amour entre la cantatrice et l'armateur dont l'ultime objectif est de construire un hôtel flottant, le plus grand du monde : « l'expression ultime de ce que nous [les Allemands] sommes capables ». Une touche d'antisémitisme, quelques références à la guerre des sexes, l'appel dans la fiction à des personnages réels (Emma Albani, par exemple) et une superbe construction dialogique fournissent à ce texte dramatique tous les ingrédients indispensables à la scène.

Native Representation

Elizabeth Cook-Lynn
Anti-Indianism in Modern America: A Voice from Tatekeya's Earth. U of Illinois P $45.95

Gretchen M. Bataille
Native American Representations: First Encounters, Distorted Images, and Literary Appropriations. U of Nebraska P US $29.95

Armand Garnet Ruffo
(Ad)dressing Our Words: Aboriginal Perspectives on Aboriginal Literatures. Theytus $22.95

Reviewed by Deanna Reder

I'd recommend that you not read Elizabeth Cook-Lynn's latest work, *Anti-Indianism in Modern America*, over a strong cup of coffee. There is enough heart-racing polemic in this book to keep you alert and awake without any additional stimulant. In fact, I made the mistake of reading Cook-Lynn's discussion of the life and work (and subsequent suicide) of Michael Dorris while on an airplane and gasped audibly and often enough to be embarrassed as well as enthralled.

Certainly Cook-Lynn's criticism of much of Dorris's work is legitimate. But while it might be justifiable to repeat the accusations of child abuse made against Dorris before his death, Cook-Lynn includes unnecessary salacious detail about the unresolved case and his suicide. And her complaint that he belittled her while talking "off the record" to a radio host, dismissing her as "a very unhappy woman," is remarkably petty.

While Cook-Lynn ventures ill-advisedly if fearlessly into the personal, she makes her point that American Indian Studies has neglected the political aspirations of Native Americans and instead has focused on issues of identity and authenticity, issues that she contends should be regulated by Native communities. When the academy accepts individuals like Dorris, "described in the media as a foremost native scholar/writer," but who, she contends, has no documented ancestry in any specific

indigenous community, the authority of Native American groups to nominate their own representatives is undermined. Cook-Lynn argues that Dorris, the former president of Dartmouth College (and the ex-husband of celebrated Native American author Louise Erdrich), built his career on intellectual dishonesty, pandering to the tastes of mainstream academia, and by doing so usurped the acclaim deserved by more worthy candidates. American Indian Studies, she suggests, should be more focused on the political goals of Native Americans, who are more concerned about treaty agreements than debates in literary criticism. She asserts that anti-Indianism is endemic in modern America, citing contemporary struggles that Native Americans face, including ongoing oppression and genocide, while scholars debate postcolonial or multicultural theory. The discipline needs scholars, she proposes, who think of themselves as "Native indigenous nationalists." As for discussions of representations of the Indian in mainstream popular culture, she asks, "Do we really need more Buffalo Bill stories?"

While I do not agree with many of Cook-Lynn's arguments and am often horrified by her tone, I cannot dismiss her most salient points. When I picked up *Native American Representations*, edited by Gretchen Bataille, I could not help but ask whether or not we need any more discussions of the image of the Native in North American culture. This anthology brings together many eminent and prolific scholars in the published proceedings of a 1997 symposium in France. The discussion of "real-life, self-created Indian Jamake Highwater" in Kathryn Shanley's "The Indians America Loves to Love and Read" is engaging. And John Purdy's essay on the influence of Disney on baby-boomer artists (Native or not), New Age believers, and cultural consumers, "Tricksters of the Trade: 'Reimagining' the Filmic Image of Native Americans," is insightful. But I could not help but wonder if the attention focused on the image of the Native reveals less about aboriginal and more about dominant culture. Still, for the graduate student compiling a bibliography on Native American Literature and Criticism, Bataille's anthology is an excellent starting point. Most major authors and current debates that are significant in Native Indian studies are cited in this text.

The late Native American scholar Louis Owens, who passed away prematurely in July of 2002, begins the anthology with his essay, "As If An Indian Were Really An Indian: Native American Voices and Postcolonial Theory." He decries "the absence of Native American voices in works by major cultural theorists and respected writers." For example, in *The Location of Culture* "nowhere, not even in a whispered aside, does [Homi Bhabha] note the existence of a resistance literature arising from indigenous, colonized inhabitants of the Americas." Citing Gerald Vizenor's contention that "the 'Indian' is a colonial invention," Owens argues that "in imagining the Indian, America imagines itself" while Native Americans remain unseen and unrecognized. Consequently, only aboriginal writers who learn to "write like the colonial center" receive recognition. Owens does not offer a solution but challenges those who employ postcolonial theory to "give voice to the silent," to recognize that "we unavoidably give voice to the forces that conspire to effect that silence."

I'd also recommend Kathleen M. Sands's essay "Cooperation and Resistance: Native American Collaborative Personal Narrative." She intentionally parodies herself as she sets out to establish credibility and authority as the Euro-American researcher and editor, revealing the tripwires for the white academic in collaborations with Native American storytellers. It is not particularly useful reading for the

Native scholar, but at least Sands does not narrowly address a specifically white audience. Jarold Ramsey, in "Telling Stories for Readers: The Interplay of Orality and Literacy in Clara Pearson's Nehalem Tillamook Tales," explicitly refers to these narratives as "radically different from *our* own" (emphasis mine) and compares the Tillamook cultural way with "our own way." It is pretty clear that he is addressing members of a homogeneous majority.

In the introduction, Bataille begins with the long-standing European and American fascination with Native America, suggesting that this anthology demonstrates the improved status of Native studies and the increased study of Native literature. I find it disheartening that only two of the eleven contributors to this volume are Native American, suggesting to me that not enough has changed. I'm not suggesting that all scholars in American Indian Studies must be aboriginal, but increased Native American representation is needed to subvert the tradition that continues to position the indigenous person as the subject of study.

This is precisely why I find *(Ad)dressing Our Words: Aboriginal Perspectives on Aboriginal Literatures*, a collection of essays by Canadian First Nations academics and writers, so encouraging. The contributors are not as conventionally accomplished as those in the Bataille anthology, as only two of the fourteen authors hold Ph.D.s, with several of the others currently in graduate school. But many of the essays, while not as polished as those written by more established academics, are ground-breaking.

For example, more than half of the essays in this anthology are unapologetically personal. Contributors like Neal McLeod and Janice Acoose grapple with the intersections of literary theory, Native texts, and the stories told them by their families. McLeod asserts that for the Native person living in a diaspora, it is possible to "'come home' through stories." Acoose concludes that rather than draw on postcolonial theory, she prefers to rely upon the cultural inheritance passed on to her through storytelling to approach Indigenous literatures and "chase away the Wintigos."

Other essays, too, discuss often ignored topics: Kateri Akiwenzie-Damm perceptively discusses the lack of Indigenous erotica; Greg Young-Ing argues for the need for culturally appropriate editorial guidelines; Jonathan Dewar energetically and earnestly considers the position of the aboriginal scholar. Whether it is Randy Lundy's excellent discussion of misogyny in *Dry Lips Oughta Move to Kapuskasing*, Rauna Kuokkanen's insistence on an Indigenous paradigm in her essay on Sami literature and identity, or many of the other works in this anthology, you are likely to read something you have never seen before.

Re-imagining a Myth

Claudia Dey

The Gwendolyn Poems. Playwrights Canada P $15.95

Reviewed by Dorothy Shostak

Claudia Dey's two-act stage play, *The Gwendolyn Poems*, which was nominated for a 2002 Governor General's Award, is based on Gwendolyn MacEwen's writings but borrows many of its psychological insights from Rosemary Sullivan's award-winning biography of MacEwen, *Shadow Maker*.

Dey distills from this life only a few key characters: the parents, Alick and Elsie; the husbands, Milton and Nikos; "MO," who seems to stand in for all of MacEwen's women writer-friends; and T.E. Lawrence, her muse and escort into the afterworld. The Prologue presents an older, alcoholic Gwendolyn in her dark apartment, emerging out of confusion to reclaim her story, as she assumes control and leads us into the play. Then Act One begins with Gwendolyn's announcement to her parents

that she has discovered that she is a poet and must drop out of high school to follow her calling. Elsie is critical: "You'll starve and become one of those strange women who likes cats more than men." Alick is more supportive: "Seems to me the important thing is that she knows what she wants to be." This scene is fanciful, for in real life MacEwen's parents had separated when she was twelve, but it preserves the psychological truth of this family's relationships, as the focus of the scene quickly shifts away from the teen poet to Elsie's obvious mental illness and the parents' quarrels. Alick and Elsie are both beautifully characterized, and they remain important presences throughout the play: their supportive comments, warnings, and demands frequently break through whatever action is unfolding, even from beyond their graves.

Another early scene highlights MacEwen's first marriage, to Milton Acorn, and again, Dey gets to the core of the relationship, showing, in only two brief dialogues, both the attraction that brought the two poets together and the inevitable souring of their short marriage. Acorn is vividly portrayed and, like Gwendolyn's parents, remains one of the most important figures in the play. His voice, too, continually breaks into the action, his verbal attacks haunting Gwendolyn, much as the embittered Acorn did in real life through his letters. The acute professional rivalry felt by Acorn for his ex-wife brings Act One to its dramatic close as Gwendolyn wins her first Governor General's Award and, simultaneously, Acorn holds court in Grossman's Tavern as the "People's Poet." In fact, Acorn steals the show here. We understand perfectly where he is coming from, but we have had little to go on to understand why Gwendolyn's work wins the prize, for we have not heard the poetry. Ironically, Gwendolyn seems to fade into the background.

As if to satisfy our desire for a taste of MacEwen's work, Act Two opens with the poet reading "The Gwendolyn Poem," a work composed by Dey. It is a lovely poem that does capture, like the second poem Dey contributes, something of the flavour of MacEwen's own work, but we never hear any of MacEwen's real poetry—a significant absence, for, without the poetry, it is difficult to understand why we should care about this poet's tragic life. Act Two focuses on Gwendolyn and Nikos' marriage and its deterioration, her descent into alcoholism, and her struggles to free herself from this disease. MacEwen was haunted and driven by, as Sullivan's biography puts it, a sense of "sinking into the womb, the black hole of non-being." Sullivan's biography gives readers some hints about where this sense of lost being might have come from: not only her mother's insanity, her father's alcoholism, and her divorce from Nikos, but possibly an early trauma that MacEwen tried unsuccessfully to repress. The hints are compelling, including MacEwen's conscious obliteration of memories that surfaced when she found herself alone and vulnerable to unwanted sexual advances on trips to Israel and to Egypt in the 1960s. Dey has chosen not to include these incidents, perhaps wisely, for the sorts of connections to other pieces of the puzzle made by the biographer—always aware of the dangers and provisional nature of doing so—would be nearly impossible to make on stage. But without this detail, we are much less sure about where Gwendolyn's demons came from. Still, Dey's profoundly moving passage toward the end of Act Two redeems the many absences in the play. It begins, "Soon we will wake up to a dreadful silence," giving us Gwendolyn's vision about our collective loss of language, as Gwendolyn rediscovers her poetic inspiration. Finally, Dey's vision of Gwendolyn as a mythic poet is beautifully staged as Gwendolyn follows her muse Lawrence on her bicycle into the afterlife, surrounded by a flight of birds, "to communicate with entire other worlds."

And The Beats Go On

Diane di Prima
Recollections of My Life as a Woman: The New York Years. Viking $29.95

Allen and Louis Ginsberg. Michael Schumacher, ed.
Family Business: Selected Letters between a Father and Son. Bloomsbury $37.50

Reviewed by James Panabaker

"Certain times, certain epochs, live on in the imagination as more than what they 'actually' were, and there is always a price to pay for them." So says Diane di Prima in her memoir chronicling the frenetic world of the New York avant-garde during the late 1950s and the early 1960s. As a writer of the Beat generation, di Prima takes us into a bohemian world "full of bravado and playfulness" as well as poverty and pain, where artists of all stripes offered resistance to the degradations of the spirit brought on by Cold War politics, McCarthyism, and rampant materialism. Di Prima's New York is the world where Jean Cocteau and Jean Genet, Allen Ginsberg and William S. Burroughs, Billie Holiday and Charlie Parker all "electrify the senses," and offer countercultural visions of freedom and possibility. The memoir—which Anne Waldman considers "the strongest literary genre" of the women of the "so-called Beat generation"—offers an intimate and unromantic look at di Prima's artistic and feminist journey of discovery. As di Prima explains, in a phrase that captures the content and method of her memoir, the "pragmatic and magical were so interwoven in our lives, in my life, that I would have been hard put to untangle the threads."

"I saw the best minds of my generation destroyed by madness," Allen Ginsberg's *Howl* famously begins. Di Prima's memoir is equally frank about the gains and losses inherent in the Beat program of resistance. While *Recollections* recounts the excitement of di Prima's explorations of alternative lifestyles and politics, its tone becomes increasingly elegiac when considering the dissolution of the movement. The Beat resistance—on political, artistic and sexual levels—to the paranoid and repressive culture of post-WWII America gives way to deflation and disappointment. Di Prima's friendship with soul mate and fellow "outlaw" Freddie Henko, begun in 1957 at the "birth" of an alternative vision and ending with his suicide in 1964, frames this darker subtext.

Recollections is informed by the perspective of the survivor—a point underlined by interpolated commentary from the present. While the memoir aims at a sense of immediacy about di Prima's experience of repression and constraint in her middle-class upbringing, the reader is always conscious of this mediating voice and, despite a considerable amount of detail, rarely feels completely immersed in the past. The focus of the book is personal and aesthetic. Too often the historical context is limited to passing references to issues that affected di Prima's circle.

Di Prima's passionate engagement in art and politics she ascribes to her immigrant roots—the powerful influence of her Italian-born paternal grandparents. In contrast, she sees her parents as emotionally and psychologically crippled by the dictates of the "American Way." In the voice of herself as a child (with precocity that stretches belief), she describes her parents as "bowed: sad, intimidated people, and I suspect . . . somewhat stupid." They embody a world of conformity where a veneer of normality hides sickness and abuse. To avoid the imposed stereotype of her mother's overbearing conventional femininity, di Prima resolved early on to become a "girl-man"—anticipating the unique hybrid, shamanistic figure of her later Loba poems. In fact, one impetus for her memoir is "to try to understand what messages I got

about being a woman. What that is. How to do it. Or get through it. Or bear it. Or sparkle like ice underfoot." Her alienation from her own body—ensured by her mother's view of the female "as commodity" to be bartered to the male in exchange for security—instills an ambition to create art that will "reclaim the body" without "losing [her] passport to transcendent worlds."

The development of di Prima's later Loba persona and her revisionist, feminist vision (with its mythical dimensions) forms the backdrop of the book. This personal account of the emergence of her feminist sensibility makes *Recollections* a valuable contribution to understanding the evolution of her poetic vision.

Allen Ginsberg's letters to his father and fellow poet, Louis, also speak to the struggle of the Beat Generation to free the American mind. Here, both sides of the generational clash are present in full voice. What is unfortunate is that the dialogue is not complete—some letters were destroyed and those reproduced are a selection. While gaps exist—a notable example is the absence of Allen's side of the Vietnam debate during 1964—the bulk of the correspondence provides considerable insight into the relationship of poet-father and poet-son as they debate aesthetics, politics, and religion.

Louis is cast in the unrewarding role of a reactionary and defensive liberal. In 1963, he provides a telling profile: "In politics, I am a theoretic Socialist somewhat deflated by the New Deal . . . ; in religion, my heart is like Einstein, in awe and wonder at the harmony of the universe, but my head is agnostic and scientific; in poetry, I am a pluralist or an eclectic, seeking the best in all types." While Louis acknowledges the genuine revolutionary fervour of his son's politics, he pulls no punches when pointing out the perceived inadequacies of Allen's positions. Take this example from Sept. 30, 1964: "I stand in awe of your omniscience and infallibility. Your humble smugness in granting such unflawed knowledge, italicized by your dogmatic self-righteousness, really touches my heart." His objections could also get personal; on occasion, he ascribes his son's politics to the influence of Allen's mentally unbalanced mother. Allen is equally frank in his response to what he sees as a failure of imagination (if not moral courage) on his father's part; note this statement from a 1961 letter about Cuba and The Bay of Pigs: ". . . I see you as inundated by History, by a USA that wd have been inconceivable in Roosevelt's day, by a US that is suicidal and unable to straighten out in time to prevent itself from being blown up by the communist world, and that will steadily lose ground & degenerate & get more right wing every year, no matter what party is in power." The tenor of the prose ranges from touching to acid. (My personal favourite in the latter category is Louis's shortest letter: "Dear Allen, Exorcise Neal. Louis.") It is clear, though, that both men were comfortable expressing their views in a written mélange of passion, outrage, respect, and tenderness.

Both Ginsbergs also believed completely in the power and validity of poetry. While the political gap might widen, their shared respect for poetry never wavers. Louis writes, "While our methods in writing poetry may differ, we both aim at the central ideal of greater awareness, deeper insight, and richer delight in the astonishing phenomenon of life." After years of debate, this agreement to disagree is touchingly reiterated by Allen's poetic elegies for his father (included in the book) and his introduction to Louis's last volume of poetry.

Moving the Margins

Arif Dirlik and Xudong Zhang, eds.
Postmodernism and China. Duke UP US $25.95

Ralph A. Litzinger
Other Chinas: The Yao and the Politics of National Belonging. Duke UP $21.95

Reviewed by Maria Noëlle Ng

Postmodernism and China, edited by Arif Dirlik, a historian, and Xudong Zhang, a professor of Comparative and Chinese Literature, is a collection of sixteen essays with an introduction and epilogue by the editors. Its aim is to make "the problems of a Chinese postmodernity explicit and available to critical interrogation." The admitted tasks of the editors and contributors, then, are "to map out the terrain of what might be construed as postmodern in intellectual and creative activity" and "to engage the question of whether postmodernity and postmodernism are relevant concepts for grasping the condition of contemporary Chinese societies." Keenly aware of the contradictory nature in the desire to "authenticate," as it were, a category identifiable as Chinese postmodernity, Dirlik writes in the introduction, "[W]hile the ultimate justification for the use of the term may lie in spatial fracturing and temporal dissonance, which call into question any claims to cultural authenticity, Chinese postmodernists insist nevertheless on marking Chinese postmodernity as something authentically Chinese." The pan-Chinese process of identification—"[a] situation of simultaneous unity and dispersal"—in which all ethnic Chinese within the PRC, Taiwan, and other centres of the diasporic population participate in varying degrees, is reflected in the range of Chinese contributors who are stationed in PRC, Taiwan, the United States, as well as Hong Kong.

In the essay "On Be(ij)ing in the World," Anthony D. King and Abidin Kusno examine the way "in which China has become part of this world of global capitalism" by contributing to "the same urban symbolic language" and by speaking "in the same architectural and spatial terms" that exist globally. The critics select three architectural forms as illustrations: the skyscraper, the apartment, and the villa. Needless to say, these building forms are foreign to the traditional, horizontal courtyard housing that is being destroyed in big cities in China's push to catch up with the world. As replacements, Profit Tower and City Plaza greet the international business class that China courts. (The critics do point out in their conclusion that "heritage and preservation projects in many cities" are being carried out.)

To Dai Jinhua, "this process of the giddy and aggressively rapid urbanization," while bringing "joy and excitement of discovery," is causing concerns among contemporary Chinese people, especially the intellectuals: the "Chinese [are] suddenly stripped of hometown, homeland, and home country." The 1990s could be seen as a decade of the "individualist dream of wealth." For the intellectuals, therefore, "nostalgia is a strategic need, a necessary spiritual space for imagining and for consolation." Dai traces in "Imagined Nostalgia" nostalgic representations through films, television soap operas, and literature. Unfortunately, many of her examples are not available to western readers, with the exception of *The Bridges of Madison County,* both as novel and film. Though Dai believes that the Chinese audience liked this sentimental product because it "indicates a space, a destination, for the contemporary Chinese urbanite's harborless ship of nostalgia, a resting place for the individual's remembrances," the argument is not entirely convincing. Her analysis of contemporary writers such as Wang Shuo and Jiang Wen is accurate, and her comments on "the reversal of cultural representation" from north to the south are timely; though to

Southerners, southern cities such as Shanghai and Guangzhou have always been more alluring than the North.

Postmodernism and China is a complex and rich collection of essays, touching upon diverse disciplines, including cinema and the visual arts, literature, urban planning, and history. This diversity is rationalized by Zhang Xudong (in the epilogue) regarding any examination of Chinese postmodernism, which involves "an intense force field in which one thing readily becomes an allegory of another," and any comparative study of postmodernism in China and the West involves "analysis of cultural fluidity conditioned by a multiplicity of socioeconomic and ideological contexts." This statement very much sums up the collection.

As further evidence of Zhang's claim, Litzinger's *Other Chinas*, a study of the ethnic minority Yao in China, shows the reader an aspect of Chinese history and society that is little mentioned in mainstream western discussions. These non-Han ethnic people live in "south-central and southwestern China," with an estimated population of "over 2 million," and are popularly written about as hill tribes that exist in "another place and time, a world where history stood still and people lived close to the natural world." In other words, the Yao have been romanticized for general consumption. Litzinger, a cultural anthropologist, became interested in Yao culture through contacts with the Yao diaspora in the United States in the 1980s. His project in recuperating Yao culture and history from Chinese dominance, which Litzinger calls "the politics of ethnic marginality," is grounded in changes in the discipline of Cultural Studies after the end of the cold war and the emergence of transnational movements.

His examination begins by juxtaposing western ethnographic narratives before Communist China, which "saw the upland people . . . as historically isolated peoples," and present-day studies of the Yao within China, narratives that "point to alternative ways in which a subaltern subject was being imagined." The Yao, then, are being reimagined in a China in which "debates about the nation, its relationship to its socialist past, and its place in the new global order of late capitalism raged on almost daily." The midsections of *Other Chinas* consist of reports of the fieldwork Litzinger conducted in Jinxiu Yao Autonomous County as well as his analysis of Chinese ethnography during the Cultural Revolution and after. *Other Chinas* is thus not just about the Yao minority, but also about the construction of identity through ideological representations. The book concludes by reminding the reader that "Centers and peripheries have not faded with . . . the rise of a new and more pervasive global capitalism . . . or with the diminishing role of the nation-state." Like *Postmodernism and China*, *Other Chinas* foregrounds the complexity and cultural fluidity implicit in any scholarly undertaking concerning Chinese cultures in the twenty-first century.

Frye's Critical Comedy

Michael Dolzani, ed.
The "Third Book" Notebooks of Northrop Frye: 1964–1972. Collected Works of Northrop Frye, Vol. 9. U of Toronto P $80.00

Robert D. Denham, ed.
Northrop Frye on Literature and Society: 1936–1989. Collected Works of Northrop Frye, Vol. 10. U of Toronto P $80.00

Reviewed by Graham Forst

With the publication of these two volumes, the University of Toronto Press has completed one third of its long-range objective to publish Frye's complete works.

The *"Third Book" Notebooks* contain the extensive notes Frye kept, mostly in the

late 60s, towards the writing of a projected "third book" (that is, a sequel to *Fearful Symmetry* and *Anatomy of Criticism*). His modest ambition with this project was to rival, in criticism, Dante's *Divine Comedy*—that is, by providing a vision of a "Critical Comedy," in which the divinely inspired critic would lead us through the hell of single vision (literalism) to the purgatory of intellectual understanding (historicism, rhetorical criticism, and so forth), to the heaven of enlightenment—the state achieved when we receive the vision of how we are conditioned by our mythologies.

On the surface, Frye's project seems about as realistic as Casaubon's ambition in *Middlemarch* to compose the *Key to All Mythologies*. However, Frye was no pedant, and these extraordinary notebooks fascinate, partly for the light they shine on Frye himself (Dolzani calls these notebooks "the secret imaginative background of all [Frye's] thought") and partly—and surely accidentally—for the way they reveal the weaknesses, if not the hubris, of logocentricity itself.

For as we watch Frye endlessly define and redefine his terms, reinterpret his purposes, and re-invent his "elaborate schemata," we see how the lever with which even this greatest of logocentrists would lift the world wiggles, how the ground he would stand on quivers, how the centre he would fix shifts; and how his goal constantly recedes before him.

Probably, then, these notebooks themselves make better reading than anything Frye might have accomplished by way of bringing the "Third Book" to life (and Dolzani reminds us that the "Third Book" was only a minor part of an even greater scheme of Frye's: a Tower-of-Babel-like project he called "The Great Doodle," which was ultimately to record a complete "cyclical quest through all phases of human experience" and provide "a complete guide to the symbolic universe").

The *Third Book Notebooks* are meticulously edited by Dolzani, who provides over one hundred pages of painstakingly recorded notes.

Volume 10 of the Frye *Collected Works* brings together various of his previously unpublished articles, speeches, and reviews, dating from a paper he wrote on Chaucer in 1936 while a student at Oxford, to a Convocation Address he delivered at the University of Bologna in 1989.

This volume begins with a 125-page (184 pages in Frye's original!) unfinished "sketch" of a history of English literature, originally intended, as Robert Denham tells us, as an introduction to a projected anthology which never got published. Clearly intended for an undergraduate audience, the essay is, untypically for Frye, liberally illustrated, although, more typically for Frye, heavily weighted in favour of canonical writers, especially of the Renaissance and the Romantic periods. Given this limitation, this is still an extraordinary document: clearly and gracefully written, wondrously learned and documented. No one interested in English literary history could fail to be enlightened by it. (Frye surely got carried away here, as Denham suggests, and one wonders how the editors who had requested a simple introduction to their anthology would have felt on receiving this 50,000-word tome.)

Unfortunately, Frye arrested himself in mid-flight before he reached the twentieth century ("To hell with it. I'm getting bored" he wrote on the MS); but his flight, if attenuated, is still phenomenal, and quite reflective of how valuable these volumes can be, at their best.

Among other notable papers in *Northrop Frye on Literature and Society* is the historically significant address on the literary archetype Frye delivered at the 1952 MLA convention. Denham notes that much of this paper ended up in *Anatomy of Criticism*, but it's fascinating to see exactly

how early Frye had worked this subject up, and also to see how coherent and confident he was five years before the *Anatomy* in stating the practical use for archetypal criticism.

Among other significant inclusions here are four delightfully witty sketches of the lives of Milton, Blake, Swift, and Shaw originally prepared as talks for the CBC; equally salty and perceptive are the television reviews included here which Frye prepared for the CRTS on everything from *Monty Python* to *Sesame Street* to beauty contests to American football.

Elsewhere included in this volume is an articulate and trenchant address on the difference between boredom and leisure ("Leisure goes to a hockey game to see a game: . . . boredom goes to see one team trample the other into the ice") along with a good many pieces on Frye's lifetime concerns: the social relevance of poetry in "assimilating nature to human life and emotion," the role of criticism in making us aware of our "mythological conditioning," the difference between belief and imagination, and of course the overriding need to develop "a unified theory of literature, or any sense of its total shape, which would tell us what is central and what peripheral, what elementary and what advanced."

There are numerous misprints in the poetry passages Frye quotes—some of them making nonsense of the original, as here, from Blake's "The Human Abstract": "And mutual fear brings peace: / Till the selfish loves increase. / That [*sic*] Cruelty knits a snare, / And spreads his baits with care."

But otherwise, here is Frye's plenty: all the things admirers of Northrop Frye love about him are present in these two volumes, along with something new—a crabby, vulgar, impatient, but sublimely over-reaching persona disclosed in the *Third Book Notebooks*, which reveals that even Frye's strugglings are magnificent.

Il y a des chemins . . .

Marcel Dugas
Psyché au cinéma: poèmes en prose. Triptyque 12. 00$

Gary Klang
La terre est vide comme une étoile : poèmes. Humanitas 8,00$

Jean-Marc Lefebvre
La tentation des armures. Noroît 15.95$

Comptes rendus par Estelle Dansereau

Par cette juxtaposition d'un recueil de poèmes en prose publié d'abord en 1916—*Psyché au cinéma* de Marcel Dugas—et deux recueils de vers libres très actuels—*La terre est vide comme une étoile* (2000) et *La tentation des armures* (2001)—nous mettons en valeur l'étonnante originalité des vers de Marcel Dugas (1883–1947), compte tenu des quatre-vingt-cinq ans écoulés depuis leur première parution. Les éditions Humanitas fournissent par cette publication une édition éminemment accessible à toute une génération de nouveaux lecteurs des textes modernes de Dugas qui traversent plusieurs genres dont le poème en prose, le conte, l'essai, la méditation poétique et la fable. Membre d'une côterie littéraire initiatrice de la modernité au Canada français comptant Paul Morin et Guy Delahaye, Marcel Dugas présente avec *Psyché au cinéma* des textes d'artistes—abstraits, spirituels, secrets—dans lesquels prédominent les impressions et les sensibilités suggestives quelque peu symbolistes. Dans ces textes, il refuse la linéarité de la prose et invoque un langage poétique truffé d'images baudelairiennes et de rythmes rimbaldiens et empruntant à l'imaginaire d'un Cocteau.

Le titre souligne à la fois cette affinité pour l'esthétique symboliste et parnassienne—par son appel à la figure de Psyché inspiratrice d'art et de littérature—et pour la nouvelle technologie du début du siècle—en particulier le cinéma qui met en ques-

tion pour lui la représentation. Le recueil est conçu pour présenter à un lecteur non initié un des importants textes de la modernité canadienne française : une préface d'introduction par Sylvain Campeau qui sert à la fois de biographie et d'histoire littéraire; et neuf poèmes en prose nommés « douches » suivis d'une brève bibliographie. En qualifiant par alternance les douches d'agréables ou de désagréables, Dugas prête à ce recueil une cohérence difficilement repérable par la thématique; ses douches sont « tièdes, » « frivoles, » « rapides, » « brûlantes, » « italiennes, » « antimilitaristes, » « crispées, » « mourantes, » ou « gémissantes ». Chaque poème à sa façon opère par antithèses en jouant sur « le chaud et le froid » de l'existence : ainsi le « pauvre petit jeune homme » meurt « dans son rire »; les « petits chapeaux » de la rue Sainte-Catherine empêchent peut-être le bonheur; Le Tristan, devenu un homme d'ordre, « adore se sentir délicieusement malade au sein de l'ordre trouvé qu'il va connaître et, peut-être. . . , troubler ». Pendant les années vécues en France—1909–1914 et 1920–1940 comme attaché aux Archives canadiennes à Paris—, Dugas a voulu échapper à l'étroit provincialisme de sa province natale dans les salons littéraires de la capitale française où il a connu des esthétiques et des élans créateurs nouveaux à la portée de son ambition littéraire. Ce recueil représente bien cette quête.

Dans son recueil de poèmes, *La terre est vide comme une étoile,* Gary Klang cherche à dire l'innocence originelle, la pureté du mot et de l'âme dans des textes revêtus de l'impossibilité de dire : « L'infini m'encombre », « Fasciné par l'abîme / Mon texte dira l'ailleurs / L'impossible harmonie ». L'élan poétique est marqué par un profond désir relationnel : « On cherche / Le double / Le frère / l'union d'avant, » mais le vide guette tout espoir de rapports avec l'autre : « On heurte / L'amer / La faille / L'inadapté » , d'échappatoire à la solitude : « Percer l'indifférence / Sortir du long couloir » , au silence : « La mer / Qui ne dit mot / Et l'arbre / Atteint d'immobilisme » , au délaisssement : « Le monde se vide comme une étoile » . Dans ce paysage évanescent car menacé, naît le mot, la seule réalité traduisible : « Rien ne naît sans l'obscur / Les mots demeurent » ; « J'écris pour dire le rien / Mais dans ce rien le tout » . Enfin, les quelques images heureuses dans ces poèmes de Gary Klang ne peuvent exprimer une vision personnelle suffisamment distincte. Déjà annoncés dans le titre, les échos d'autres voix poétiques s'étalant sur tout un siècle troublent les élans d'originalité et enfin banalisent le dire.

Plus originale et pertinente à notre société bruyante et mouvementée est la vision de Jean-Marc Lefebvre dans *La tentation des armures.* Déjà sur le point de basculer dans le vide, le monde précaire partout se désagrège, mais sans provoquer la profonde angoisse normalement associée à la perte. Dans des poèmes brefs et aérés, le poète sollicite et exalte les synesthésies du vide: « J'écoute la lumière / disparaître / dans l'odeur du crépuscule » ; il se plaît à s'enfoncer dans la matière : « Du sommet de l'être / au calvaire lumineux du silence / je plonge dans le bruissement / des choses tranquilles » . Sa « Fresque » rend palpable l'espace et le temps lorsqu'ils sont tracés par le couple amoureux : « L'espace s'infiltre / entre les rencontres / donne au temps / l'ampleur d'une fresque. » . Chez Lefebvre le recueillement mène à la parole : « Je ne retiendrai de l'instant / que la résonance de l'émoi / l'odeur farouche de l'écrit / ses craquements » , et à une appréciation quasi mystique de l'univers : « Le chant des choses usées / de plus en plus m'accompagne » . La tentation des armures semble aboutir à son contraire, au désir de s'ouvrir aux éléments, au désespoir, à la mort, et d'y porter sa plume et son regard : « Dans la lente érosion / des espaces libres / je sème le hasard / de présages anodins. / J'avance

sans trop de cris / sans autre gravité / que le poids d'un regard » . Avec sa compagne, il sort du cataclysme. Voilà chez Lefebvre une vision profondément personnelle et cohérente, mais dont l'intimité absolue semblerait exclure le lecteur.

« Il y a des chemins où la rencontre s'opère » écrit Dugas dans *Apologies* (1919). Il faut le dire, les lieux de rencontre dans ces trois recueils restent un peu trop ésotériques.

Video Memory

Gary R. Edgerton and Peter C. Rollins, eds. *Television Histories: Shaping Collective Memory in the Media Age.* U P of Kentucky US $24.00

Jenny Lion, ed. *Magnetic North.* U of Minnesota P US $25.95

Reviewed by Will Straw

Across these two very different anthologies, may we glimpse a shared vision of the televisual? *Television Histories* focuses on the most official and even stuffy of television genres, those we might loosely designate as historical. Its sixteen chapters examine a number of documentary programs, fictional series, televisual genres, and specialty networks, all of which engage with social or political history. Richly detailed but theoretically cautious, *Television Histories* is a highly readable collection slightly lacking in polemical spark. *Magnetic North*, in contrast, explores the terrain of video art, ranging across a variety of practices and historical moments whose common feature is that they are Canadian. Like the Dutch architectural books whose design principles it borrows, *Magnetic North* is often a struggle to read, with tiny text running in narrow columns against brightly coloured backgrounds. Nevertheless, its busy interweaving of images, interviews, analyses, and historical timelines successfully conveys the rich—albeit chaotic—legacy of video art-making in Canada over the last thirty years.

Polemic is everywhere in *Magnetic North*. Based on a retrospective of Canadian video art held at the Walker Art Gallery in Minneapolis and Video Pool in Winnipeg, the book begins by locating itself within the troubled context of US-Canadian trade wars. Various essays take up the broader relationship of video art to broadcast television and its commercial imperatives. The longstanding question of video's relationship to other media forms is reinvigorated here. As editor Jenny Lion argues in her introduction, video art is not the "bastard child of cinema," though artists such as Al Razutis might turn to video to extend the historical project of experimental cinema. At the same time, video art is not television, Lion insists, "[b]ut it's not not television either." In the 1980s, in his book *Impureté*, French theorist Guy Scarpetta argued that video was not one art form *more*, but, paradoxically, one *less* (*en moins*)—in other words, video found its place and purpose through the subtraction of elements taken to typify cinema or broadcast television. As a "minor" form, video art, according to Lion, has drawn much of its urgency from the political impulses (rooted in community and identity) it has eagerly embraced and whose cultural marginality echoes its own:

> Video isn't a clean or contained medium, which is perhaps why it has lent itself so well to representing all sorts of things that are often perceived as dirty or out of bounds: the body, rebellion, sexuality, narcissism, marginality, decay, politics, death, humour. It isn't stable. And because of the continual activity of the electron gun spraying electrons in hundreds of sequential horizontal lines across the phosphorescent coating inside your television screen, the image isn't actually over there; yet it's not there; we see it.

Later in *Magnetic North*, in an analysis of Jan Peacock's 1990 work *Whitewash*, Sarah Diamond suggests that historical memory,

of the sort that once gave a place and importance to new works of art, has given way to the experience of repetition and routine. "Video artists use repetition," Diamond claims, "as a means to no end, to underline and undermine the transient, iconographic, and self-referential nature of the video form." In his introduction to *Television Histories*, Gary R. Edgerton circles around some of the same themes. Television's attempts to convey history struggle against the medium's penchant for intimacy and immediacy, Edgerton suggests. These render television almost incapable of expressing any moment but the present. This is a common, even clichéd claim about television, but it needs to be revisited. In historical documentaries, it may be argued, the phenomenological "present-ness" of television confronts all those ways in which television's colours, styles, modes of address, and attitudes age and come to seem strange with time. The dilemma of history on television is not (or not simply) that its sense of immediacy effaces historical understanding. Like other audio-visual forms that revisit the past, television documentaries struggle to be meaningful amidst the deterioration and obsolescence of the languages and styles from which they are built.

Television Histories locates itself within the transdisciplinary field now known as memory studies, in which the role of media as carriers of collective memory has become a central concern. The strongest analyses in this volume are those of fictional dramatic series, like *Quantum Leap*, *Star Trek* or *Dr. Quinn, Medicine Woman*, which regularly revisited familiar historical moments in order to reinvest them with contemporary, liberal sensibilities. One unexpected point of overlap between the two books reviewed here comes in the attention each gives to Hawaii, and to attempts to restore to popular memory those parts of Hawaii's history that were erased by US-dominated education and media systems. In *Television Histories*, Carolyn Anderson offers a detailed account of the 1987 making of a three-part history of Hawaii by the Hawaii Public Broadcasting Authority. The unexpected popular success of this series inspired the production of further documentaries, each of them challenging longstanding versions of Hawaiian history. Anderson's article describes the ways in which the makers of these works used the film festival circuit, internet advertising, mail-order marketing, and a variety of alternative means of promotion and dissemination to find audiences and recover costs. *Magnetic North*, in turn, contains the transcript of a long telephone conversation between the Hawaiian activist Puhipau and Nunavut film/video artist Zacharias Kunuk (now celebrated for the film *Atanarjuat, The Fast Runner*). In the comradeship which develops over the course of this dialogue, a prominent theme is the role of video and other ephemeral media in knitting together dispersed movements for indigenous rights. For Puhipau and Kunuk, television has ceased to be the powerful mass medium of the postwar cultural industries. Rather, it has become a medium for tentative, marginal, and wilfully transgressive engagements with history and politics.

Poor Relations

Bill Gaston
Mount Appetite. Raincoast $19.95

Shaena Lambert
The Falling Woman. Vintage $22.95

Eugene McNamara
Waterfalls. Coteau $19.95

Diane Schoemperlen
Red Plaid Shirt: Stories New & Selected.
HarperCollins $29.95

Reviewed by Allan Weiss

Perhaps the rarest thing in contemporary fiction is a happy marriage, and close bonds between parents and children may be equally hard to find. These four short-story collections are markedly diverse in style, ranging from the mostly linear narratives of Bill Gaston and Eugene McNamara to the formal playfulness of Diane Schoemperlen. Yet they all deal, to some extent, with various forms of domestic betrayal. Two of the collections—those by Gaston and Shaena Lambert—contain new works, while the others gather stories that have appeared in earlier collections and span more than two decades of the authors' work in the short story.

Gaston's *Mount Appetite* is about human desires and our generally futile, sometimes self-destructive efforts to satisfy them. Its title and theme, we are indirectly told by Malcolm Lowry's illegitimate son in "A Forest Path," derive from Lowry's planned last work. The embittered narrator—one of several in the collection—provides new insights into Lowry's "The Forest Path to the Spring, " but mainly reveals his own obsession with frustrated desire, especially his need to be acknowledged by his father. In "The Little Drug Addict That Could," Jack agrees to take in his addicted nephew Tyson and help the young man through withdrawal. But Jack's own weakness for intoxicants and desire to be liked by his nephew lead to a series of ironic reversals. In "The Hangover," classical musician Keith allows himself to be dragged by his rough brothers on a dangerous boat trip. Keith's wish to be accepted by Phil and Raymond overcomes his reservations about the trip, with tragic consequences. Arguably the clearest portrait of blocked desires is "Comedian Tire," the darkly comic account of a day when everything that can go wrong does. In most of the stories, characters yearn for stronger relationships with family members, friends and so on, but are forced to accept unsatisfying substitutes.

The protagonists in Lambert's *The Falling Woman* also struggle to cope with broken relationships, especially decaying marriages. In "Resistance," Kaye must find the strength to deal with the revelation that her husband is having an affair, although the wall she has built around herself for years may itself be a source of alienation as well as protection. The title story portrays a woman attempting to come to terms with the exercise of raw power that she associates with her mother and her own childhood torturing of a cousin who revealed a terrible family secret. In "Sea Lions," Ian is about to put his father in a nursing home, and would very much like to forgive him for cheating on his mother, yet cannot quite do so. What may be the best story in the collection is "Levitation," the moving account of a nineteenth-century doctor's attempts to reconcile his grief over his wife's death with his socially required maintenance of discipline over himself and his son. Young James wants to use the incantations he heard at a magician's show to raise himself from the ground, and initially Dr. Flemming has no patience for such fanciful nonsense. The story shows that sometimes love can conquer rigid beliefs about proper behaviour and appearances.

Eugene McNamara has been publishing fiction since the early 1970s, and *Waterfalls* brings together his best short stories along with new stories and a novella, "Home in

the Dark," also published here for the first time. McNamara frequently writes about academics or their offspring engaged in somewhat empty romantic pursuits. "The Search for Sarah Grace" concerns a graduate student who becomes oddly infatuated with a minor Canadian poet; as he learns, the "facts" he has uncovered through his careful research may well have no relation whatsoever to the real person. Conrad, the professor attending an academic conference in "The May Irwin-John C. Rice Kiss," and Alan, the writer at an artist's colony in "The Dark Summer," seem far more interested in romantic adventures than intellectual or artistic enrichment. Conrad specializes in film studies, and many of the stories in the collection feature allusions to movies as characters are contrasted with cinematic ideals—ideals they fall far short of. McNamara uses montage in a number of his more experimental stories, particularly "Freeze Frames," in which an estranged daughter learns from a tabloid about her actor father's death. McNamara's characters cannot achieve any sort of deep connection with others; some become obsessed with relatives who are dead and represent lost opportunities for closeness. The shorter works are stronger than the novella, a somewhat unfocused account of various associates and family members gathering to scatter the ashes of composer Trevor Herrick. The characters' lives are stories of thwarted ambition and betrayal, but the scope of the work—covering too many characters and periods of time—diffuses its impact.

Schoemperlen's collection is the most postmodernist of the works under review. She writes fragmentary texts, dividing her stories into short sections that constitute a more radical form of montage than we see in McNamara. A number of the stories are metafictional, such as "Stranger Than Fiction" and The Antonyms of Fiction," and many challenge the boundaries between genres, incorporating other texts or styles—like the statistical passages in "Weights and Measures" and the pseudo-tourist guide language of "This Town." Schoemperlen's stories generally portray extramarital affairs, putting them in an ironic light through supposedly "objective" or "neutral" structures and diction. For instance, "A Simple Story" is given the form of a series of writing exercises, but through the tale we see the pain of the characters and also how many people become implicated in Richard and Marilyn's affair. In "How Deep Is the River?" she constructs a harsh contrast between the traditional math problem of two trains approaching a bridge from opposite directions and the possible human reality behind it. She frequently uses structural conceits, tracing a single idea through various permutations; in the title story, for example, she gives us details of her characters' lives through associations with articles of clothing, including their fabrics and colours. Throughout her work, Schoemperlen effectively undermines comfortable notions about the gap between fiction and reality, and in her most moving stories, like "Tickets to Spain" and "The Look of the Lightning, The Sound of the Birds," she explores our tendency to construct stories to deny the extent of the damage we inflict on each other.

All four collections examine the difficulty we have establishing true relations with each other, or our self-absorbed unwillingness to try. The stories portray contemporary alienation not from our society so much as from spouses and family members. In rare instances characters succeed in creating bonds, but more often than not they must face the frustration of their yearnings. Whether using chronological narrative or non-linear forms, all four authors paint memorable portraits of human loneliness as characters struggle against the barriers separating them from each other—barriers they have often constructed themselves.

Factual Picture Books

Celia Godkin
When the Giant Stirred. Fitzhenry and Whiteside $22.95

Sheryl McFarlane Kirsti Ann Wakelin, illus.
A Pod of Orcas. Fitzhenry and Whiteside $17.95

Laurie Skreslet with Elizabeth McLeod
To the Top of Everest. Kids Can P $18.95

Reviewed by Lynn Wytenbroek

When the Giant Stirred, A Pod of Orcas, and *To the Top of Everest* are wonderful examples of top-quality picture books that are either completely factual or fact-based. They are also marvelous tools for teaching about the natural world.

When the Giant Stirred is about the cycle of life on a volcanic island. Starting with the life already established, Godkin describes through words and stunning illustrations the richness, diversity and beauty of the flora and fauna on and around a tropical volcanic island. She also depicts the people living on the island, explaining something of the life of the people of the Pacific Islands that are, from time to time, rocked and even destroyed by the very volcanic forces that gave them life. She follows the cycle of life to the reawakening of the volcano, and the flight from the island, first of birds and then of the people.

But the book does not stop there. The centre page has no words in it—it simply shows the tremendous eruption that leaves the island a hollowed out semi-circle devoid of life. Then Godkin tells the story of the cycle of death to rebirth, showing how life begins again, with seeds and insects being blown over from other islands, birds and turtles arriving, and life re-establishing itself where there was, only years before, emptiness.

Godkin is a biologist, and her attention to detail makes the illustrations exquisite. The reader can almost smell the flowers and hear the birds, they are so vivid and alive. Godkin's one weakness is her humans—they are not very well drawn and they all seem to wear the same expression on their faces. However, as they feature very little in the book and are rarely the centre of the illustrations, this detracts only a little from the excellence of the overall work. The story is simply enough told for Grade One and Two children to enjoy, yet has enough information to keep older children interested. By telling the history of a volcanic island in a narrative format, Godkin makes the information in this book accessible to both science lovers and children who simply love a good story.

A Pod of Orcas is a book for even younger children than Godkin's. Aimed at children just learning how to count, it is a counting book with a difference. Set on the West Coast of British Columbia, the book teaches children to count up to ten, with each number counting either sea creatures or sea-going vessels or activities that children could be involved in at the beach and so on.

There are two numbers every second page, with rhymes that explain what each number is counting. The rest of that page and the one across from it is taken up with vivid watercolour paintings by Kirsti Anne Wakelin. The illustrations are so utterly real that the reader can, as with Godkin's book, experience the scenes. The faces of the seals bobbing just above the water, the bodies of the orcas flinging themselves out of the water or the eagles sailing calmly through the sky are perfect. Again, the only weakness is the humans. The shapes are fine, and the children assume very natural poses, but the faces are not particularly good. However, this artist too has concentrated on the natural scenes and, overall, the book is excellent.

To the Top of Everest is slightly different. The autobiography of Laurie Skreslet, the first Canadian climber to reach the summit of Mt. Everest, it provides a bit of background about Skreslet and then devotes the

rest of the book to the climb, from establishing the base camp through to the return from the summit of Everest. It is realistic and honest about the hardships of such an undertaking, such as the deaths of four members of the climbing team and the injuries of others that stopped them from making it to the summit themselves. But it is equally honest about the joys and triumphs of the expedition. The book is full of facts about mountain climbing, but also about mountains themselves, and draws very clearly a picture of the people who are driven to climb. It is an inspirational book and yet is designed to challenge young people to face their own fears, as well as their dreams.

The pictures in *To the Top of Everest* are photographs which chronicle much of the journey the team undertook, as well as showing the reader the people themselves, their camps, and the conditions under which they both lived and climbed during the expedition. The photographs help bring the expedition and the people to life in a way that would, otherwise, be impossible. At 56 pages, the book appeals to younger readers, but its factual and photographic art address significantly older readers as well.

Ideas of North

Sherrill Grace
Canada and the Idea of North. McGill-Queen's U P $49.95

Renée Hulan
Northern Experience and the Myths of Canadian Culture. McGill-Queen's U P $27.95

Reviewed by John Moss

Sherrill Grace's *Canada and Idea of North* is a postmodern *wunderkammern*, filled with the strange and marvelous souvenirs of an astonishing journey. The author has travelled through innumerable dimensions of North and returned to share a taxonomy of her discoveries and insights that will delight the most naïve spectator but intrigue and educate the scholarly enthusiast, even the ones who have preceded her among the contours and planes of northern experience. Like Rudy Wiebe's *Playing Dead* or my own *Enduring Dreams*, her particular cabinet of wonders is a postmodern text: the discursively constructed personality of the author within her work provides the main rhetorical and aesthetic device to give it coherence, meaning, impact and significance. Yet where Wiebe was informed by moral outrage and I by a personal quest, Sherrill Grace adapts the paraphernalia of scholarly discourse to illuminate a political vision. She writes to bring Canada together.

The subject and the object of Grace's book is "the discursive formation of North," a phrase she repeats as often as five times on successive pages, a sort of mantra to remind both herself and her reader of what she is writing about, and why. Ranging through a voluminous selection of materials, she collapses boundaries among disciplines, genres, cultural and geographic territories. She moves easily from discussions of Glenn Gould's celebrated radio broadcast, "The Idea of North," to Tomson Highway's seminal novel, *The Kiss of the Fur Queen*, from considerations of national origins in writing by Harold Innis and by Robert Kroetsch to critiques of cultural theory by everyone from Michel Foucault to Alootook Ipellie. She offers brief accounts of a staggering variety of texts, images, and personalities which speak to the North, about the North, for the North, and from the North, and with these to provide the rhetorical links, she provides in-depth analyses of singular moments in the formation of what she takes to be our distinguishing national characteristic, our northern sensibility, our northerliness.

While music and mapmaking, racial stereotypes and racist erasure, gender distortions and historical blunders, are all given due attention in articulating the

diversity of what has been constructed as North (neither place nor direction but condition of mind), Grace falls back on her primary area of expertise for her most persuasive and insightful commentaries. The literary text is, for her, familiar territory. She is an established critic with a strong background in cultural theory. Her assessment of paintings, films, and musical compositions concerned with the North is primarily from a poststructural perspective, informed by semiotics but concerned more with the discourses of power than the power of discourse. When she addresses individual texts, she is a maverick Leavisite and postcolonial scourge, succinctly cutting to the heart of a work while demanding its evaluation in a context of social function—that is, where it fits within the discursive formation of North. The combination of close readings, expansive vision, and cultural mission makes Grace's book a formidable complement to the vast array of northern materials it so artfully subsumes.

Renée Hulan has published quite a different book of North. *Northern Experience and the Myths of Canadian Culture* is a luminous scholarly deconstruction of the very North that Grace posits as the source of our collective identity. While not so autobiographical—time and again Grace's book declares its rhetorical intent in terms of a personal agenda—it is vitally concerned with experiential features of literary representation. With critical intensity, Hulan argues that the historical formation of north (lower case 'n') has provided us with myths that transcend, constrain, or even erase the essential differences among us. Implicitly, her work is as political, if not so visionary, as Grace's epic discursive adventure.

Hulan explicates the north as a primal aspect of the evolving Canadian zeitgeist, but in radical opposition to Grace's revisionist critique, she argues that it has little to do with the "specious notion of a national consciousness." *Northern Experience and the Myths of Canadian Culture* is a highly original, dynamic study, meticulously executed, exhaustively researched, and elegantly stated. While it isolates myths of the north for analytic discussion in a cultural context, the principal thrust of the book is to interrogate assumptions in a postcolonial context about the relationships between place and culture, history and presence, sovereignty and belonging, imagination and collective experience, to show how the formation of north has distended and distorted the polyphonic, multicultural, pluralistic, discursive Canadian identity. For Hulan, the imagined north has been wishful thinking, neither map nor mirror but mythic enterprise of a cultural minority.

Her emphasis on ethnography, both as a discipline and as an entry point into a broad range of writing from early travel literature to postmodern metafiction, gives Hulan's book comprehensive and yet concentrated authority. Her observations about racist and sexist misprision and misapprehension are reinforced by the work of others. Commentaries on the north from historians such as Shelagh Grant and Bruce Hodgins, critics like Sherrill Grace, and literary populists like Farley Mowat have exposed the imagined north as the product of white male imperialist desire. But where others write to clarify the record, or to modify it, Hulan subverts it. "This study," she ingenuously writes in her epilogue, "has sought to unsettle the idea of north . . . ." And so it does.

At the same time, Hulan cannot escape the profound intertextuality of the discursive formation of North. Her work participates in the worlds being deconstructed. Her close readings of texts, her acute sense of historical imperatives, her unflinching judgements of ethnocentric bias, her celebration of indigenous voices and disdain for the so-called authenticity of personal experience make this book ironically, if not paradoxically, a significant addition to

Northern literature. I did not find comparable errors to those in Grace's book (Grace uses the word Inuuk as a feminine form, when in fact it is limited plural; that is, one Inuk, two Inuuk, many Inuit), but then its reach, while more radical, is not so daring. Sherrill Grace draws attention to the postcolonial differentiation between English and english. In reading these two books concurrently, the reader is struck by the conflict between Grace's North and Hulan's north. For a discussion of either, however, both are necessary.

Hulan's is a work with a profoundly disquieting thesis, yet it is argued with quiet authority. Where Grace strides through the project of building a national identity, immersed in the muck with a lovely confusion of blueprints in hand, Hulan observes from the catwalk. Grace could not have written her book without travelling North; Hulan might never have left academe. Inevitably, the latter articulates a disciplined, coherent, and convincing argument for questioning Canada as a northern nation, Canadians as a northern people, while the former provides affirmation that it is, and we are. For the reader, the difference is between participating in an exhilarating process of discovery and sharing in the beautifully articulated product of thought.

Generational Ethnicities

Lisa Grekul
Kalyna's Song. Coteau $19.95

Reviewed by Sneja Gunew

This would be an excellent text to give those who pontificate about the assimilationist behaviour of third-generation "immigrant" children. Whether these be policy analysts or despondent first-generation immigrants who lament that all traces of the homeland, the home culture or language are lost or ignored by this stage, or the anxious "ethnics" who embark on a quest for their lost roots and reinvent themselves accordingly, *Kalyna's Song* is the novel to give them in order to complicate their assumptions.

Grekul has skillfully captured the complexities and pitfalls of occupying the third-generation position, and she has created a worthy protagonist to shoulder this rather hyper-cultural burden. Colleen Lutzak straddles those difficult years between childhood and adulthood—starting at thirteen and progressing to nineteen—as a completely credible, volatile character who survives (often clumsily but saved by her humour) the snakes and ladders of these years. Passionate about everything, Colleen is also fortunate to be thrust into locations and situations that test her.

Growing up in Alberta, Colleen is partially enmeshed in the contradictory temporal claims made on her by her Ukrainian-Canadian family and community (who try to link her to the somewhat anachronistic rituals and beliefs that shore up and sustain their ethnic nostalgia) and the contemporary feminist and postcolonial ideas swirling about her through contact with school and the outside world. For example, her mentally challenged cousin Kalyna is revealed to have been damaged by prolonged spousal abuse which was known and to some degree condoned by the extended family. Loyalty to her ethnic roots becomes productively contaminated by her feminist recognition of the toxicity of domestic spaces when relegated to silence and secrecy.

To counter these fraught revelations there are wonderfully comic moments such as Colleen's persistent quests for ur-Ukrainianism, which are regularly confounded when she encounters those who outdo her in access to the "real thing," whether it be a crowd of bored and barely polite university peers who sit through her mispronounced rendition of a traditional folk song or the Black Rotarian who unmasks her performance of being a suit-

ably grateful, deprived Ukrainian student singing in Polish costume in Swaziland. Colleen is forced continuously to re-evaluate her ethnicity in relation to her attempts to function as an ethical subject in the world. A sojourn in Swaziland compels her to reassess her previous conception of herself as the heroic warrior for oppressed Canadian-Ukrainian ethnic survival when she witnesses other battles for survival in Africa. Music sustains her and provides a resolution, possibly too neat, for charting the generational differences attached to ethnicity in diaspora. At the end she attempts to weave together both Africa and the Canadian-Ukrainian references in the piece she composes for her dead cousin Kalyna, a threnody which is meant to register the hybrid metamorphoses of contemporary diasporan ethnicities.

Charting Asian America

Helena Grice
Negotiating Identities: An Introduction to Asian American Women's Writing. Manchester UP $38.95

Miles Xian Liu, Ed.
Asian American Playwrights: A Bio-Bibliographical Critical Sourcebook. Greenwood P US $94.95

Reviewed by Lily Cho

As Asian American literature has become consolidated in the North American academy, there has been an increasing need for critical texts that provide comprehensive and coherent accounts of the field's trajectory. Both Helena Grice's *Negotiating Identities* and Miles Xian Liu's *Asian American Playwrights* accomplish precisely this kind of work.

Grice's book is meant primarily as an introduction to Asian American women's writing. In some ways, it picks up where Elaine Kim's ground-breaking *Asian American Literature* leaves off. Grice attempts to provide a comprehensive overview of Asian American writing, in particular that of Asian American women. She delineates several thematic approaches to Asian American women's writing such as mother-daughter dyads, the problem of home and citizenship, and the problem of genre. This approach leads to several concise summaries of many of the major critical debates about Asian American literature. To that end, the book is very useful as an introductory text, even though these summaries feel a little tired. This is ground that has been covered before but has not yet been so succinctly assembled.

The fourth chapter, "Writing Red China: Recent Chinese American/British Narratives," is easily the most innovative section of the book. Grice takes note of the recent surge of interest in writing by women about the experience of living under Chinese Communism. Books such as Jung Chang's *Wild Swans*, Adeline Yen Mah's *Falling Leaves*, and Jan Wong's *Red China Blues* have been on bestseller lists on both sides of the Atlantic and have garnered critical acclaim. Reading these books within the context of the politics and history of western engagement with Communist China, Grice provocatively argues that a new orientalism is emerging in the exoticizing of China under Communism. She is absolutely right that these books which "write Red China" constitute a new (sub)genre in Asian American women's writing and that we need to engage more seriously with the ways in which they construct Chineseness and the politics of its circulation. In many ways, the Left has still not come to terms with the disappointments of Chinese socialism and I cannot help thinking that progressive politics in Asian North American studies must find a way of criticizing the oppression of the PRC's governmental regime without colluding with the thinly veiled racism of US imperial triumphalism. To that end, I wish that Grice

had given more space to this chapter and unfolded her arguments more substantially.

Negotiating Identities relies heavily on a handful of the major texts in Asian American women's writing, including Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior* and *China Men*, Joy Kogawa's *Obasan* (which is, of course, Canadian—an issue over which Grice slides a little too easily), and Amy Tan's *Joy Luck Club*. While there is no doubt that these texts have profoundly changed Asian American literary studies, Grice's repetitive turn to them means that her readings of other texts such as Sara Suleri's *Meatless Days*, Cynthia Kadohata's *Floating World*, and Theresa Hak Kyung Cha's *Dictee* verge on being perfunctory. Clearly, no book can do everything. At the same time, Grice's reliance on Kingston, Kogawa, and Tan also highlights significant generic omissions. There is virtually no discussion of poetry or drama by Asian American women in *Negotiating Identities*. While this omission reflects the tendency in the field to privilege novels, memoirs, and autobiography, it is unfortunate that a new book on Asian American women's writing only reinforces the longstanding privileging of particular forms of narrative over others, despite the rich work of poets and playwrights such as Jeannie Barroga, Kimiko Hahn, and Mei Mei Berssenbrugge.

Finally, a small but nonetheless disappointing aspect of *Negotiating Identities* is its incomplete index. There are no entries for some of the authors that are discussed in the book such as Rachel Lee, Garret Hongo, Sharon Lim-Hing, and Will Kymlicka; also, the entry for a word such as "diaspora" that has come to be increasingly important for Asian American studies does not acknowledge all references to it in the book itself. I realize that this is a minor point but it matters for a text that should serve as a potential teaching or resource text.

Miles Xian Liu's *Asian American Playwrights* fulfills precisely the promise of its subtitle: it is a comprehensive and very fine bio-bibliographical critical sourcebook for the study of Asian American drama, a genre that is too often overlooked in discussions of Asian American literature. Containing entries for fifty-two Asian American playwrights from Brenda Wong Aoki to Chay Yew, the book is an important, informative, and well-organized resource. Each entry consists of four sections: biography, major works and themes, critical reception, and bibliography. Together, these sections work to give an excellent introduction to individual playwrights; the book's documenting of the overall vitality of Asian American theatre is also especially notable.

Both *Negotiating Identities* and *Asian American Playwrights* attest to the vibrancy of Asian American studies. Future work needs to move beyond the borders of the US. The increasing turn to thinking through Asian American literature in the context of transnationalism, diaspora, and denationalization raises the question of the constitution of "American" in Asian American literature. That, however, is a question for the texts that will take up where Grice and Liu have left off.

Satisfaction Guaranteed

Kristen Guest, ed.
Eating Their Words: Cannibalism and the Boundaries of Cultural Identity. State U of New York P $59.50

Jana Evans Braziel and Kathleen LeBesco, eds.
Bodies out of Bounds: Fatness and Transgression. U of California P $31.50

Reviewed by Marilyn Iwama

Fat people and eating them—when did literary criticism become this tantalizing? From the moment scientists first admitted that cave dwellers could distinguish beauty from the need to procreate, Kenneth Klein

seems to say, with lavish descriptions of the Venus of Willendorf and Rubens's *Graces.*

Jane Evans Braziel and Kathleen LeBesco must have smiled at this submission, determined as they are that their collection render "the fat body visible." But while Klein's essay might appear the most overtly erotic of the fifteen that comprise *Bodies out of Bounds,* several of its contributors focus on the relationship between fat and desire in their attempts to "reconfigure corpulence." In their essay on exercise videos, Antonia Losano and Brenda A. Risch detail the tragicomic effect in the conspicuous statues of generously proportioned classical goddesses that line a space meant for replicating a hard male physique in soft female bodies. The paradox is heightened by the position of the only fat woman in the class: masked in grey sweats and barely visible in the back corner. If such "pathological" discourses of fatness have rendered fat people invisible, say the editors—include here the "untheorized" fat body in feminist scholarship, Cecilia Hartley adds—the next step is to "unravel" those discourses and explore how fat people understand and represent their own experience.

This unravelling reaches from the redefinition of fat subjectivities (Joyce L. Huff, Hartley, Kathleen LeBesco); through the representational indices of nation, gender, sexuality, and fatness (Marcia Chamberlain, Losano and Risch, Le'a Kent); the reconstruction of corpulent sexualities (Neda Ulaby, Jerry Mosher) and the deconstruction of the carnivalesque (Angela Stukator, Sarah Shieff, Braziel); to corpulence and performativity (Sharon Mazer, Petra Kuppers). *Bodies out of Bounds* considers fat as political fashion and utopian freedom from capitalism, fat as nationalist rhetoric, fat as ethnic hot potato, fat as cannibalism, fat as disease, fat as disguise, fat as abnormal, abject, class-inflected, and just plain wrong. Completing this catholic collection is a sometimes performative and abstruse dialogue between Michael Moon and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick on what they call "representational inversions" of a wide range of fat discourses.

Mostly, *Bodies out of Bounds* unravels language, remembering the significance of language (à la Judith Butler and Monique Wittig) to material change. After all, a body is just a body. It is language that makes a body "fat." The clearest consensus in this book is that language is constitutive of identity and shot through with ideology. But discourse has rendered fat people voiceless as well as invisible. If we are to subvert that process, several contributors insist, it will only happen through performative reenactment of multiple, ambivalent fat identities, such as Moon and Sedgwick model in their collaborative readings of Divine's performances of gender in the films of John Waters.

Eating Their Words also ends with strong support for the performative. In this essay, Geoffrey Sanborn chides fellow critics for regarding cannibalism as descriptor rather than performative, "a designation that establishes a presence." No doubt this goal is more attainable with a discourse like cannibalism that is in less danger than fat is of being literally enacted. However, scholars attempting to consider fat as a reiterative or citational practice also flirt with the substitution of performance for the performative. Moon and Sedgwick warn against such "perfunctory aestheticizations" and "less searching experiments," while Sharon Mazer offers a vigorous exposition of the performative in Katy Dierlam's sideshow act as "fat lady" Helen Melon.

It is as metaphor that cannibalism—"a symbol of the permeability of boundaries . . . between a civilized 'us' and savage 'them'"—appears in *Eating Their Words.* And, argue many contributors, it is because the act of cannibalism is a myth (read "lie") that the metaphor works. "Red herring," counters Sanborn. The critically productive

site is that very "crisis embodied in the encounter between westerner and cannibal." A crisis, Mark Buchan echoes in his re-reading of *The Odyssey*, in which the "savage" Cyclops can be read as a symptom of our own desire. Where Moon and Sedgwick's collegial caution seems tagged on, the bristle of Sanborn's and Buchan's intra-textual dialogue adds significant productive tension to *Eating Their Words*.

Cannibalism as a sign of the permeable self is the theme in Santiago Colás's discussion of the "*anthropofagist*" poets of Brazil and the Caribbean. These writers invoke cannibalism of Europeans and European cultural norms as the limit to imperial dominance in the New World. Not the best tool for revolution, notes Colás, since eating your enemy suggests mimicry and a desire to identify with him. Nonetheless, the metaphor's ambivalence suits the intellectual ambivalences of revolution.

Most of the essays sustain the metaphorical connection of cannibalism to imperial/colonial/capitalistic greed. (In *Bodies out of Bounds*, Huff does the same, connecting the fat person's consumption of limited resources with cannibalism.) Others, such as Robert Viking O'Brien in his essay on Spenser's *Faery Queen*, observe variations in the degree and nature of cannibalism: the Irish are cannibals because theirs is a degenerate civilization, while North American aboriginal cannibalism is the outcome of a complete lack of civilization.

These books would benefit from more thematic cross-fertilization. Although Minaz Jooma balances the heterosexual bias in criticism of *Robinson Crusoe* by treating the homoerotic elements of that text, *Eating Their Words* is shy on sex. And Marcia Chamberlain's essay on Oscar Zeta Acosta's *Autobiography of a Brown Buffalo* is the only one in *Bodies out of Bounds* that deals substantially with race and ethnicity. These discourses are too central for a major work not to engage thoroughly with them.

Small Towns, Big Evils

Kristen den Hartog
Water Wings. Knopf $29.95

Kelly Watt
Mad Dog. Doubleday $29.95

Sue Goyette
Lures. HarperCollins $32.00

Reviewed by Laurie Kruk

The Canadian novel is often thought of as preoccupied with the small town. The use of this archetype in these three first novels has little in it of Mariposa—except perhaps Leacock's darker moments of sarcastic deflation. Yet each of these accomplished novels looks towards the past and losses that indelibly mark their heroines or heroes, showing that evil acts, if not people, do exist, while "Love was hit and miss. Everywhere you looked it hung in the air, longing to be invited in," as Kirsten den Hartog observes.

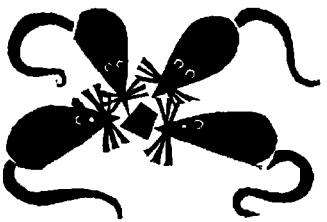
Den Hartog's *Water Wings* contains an unusual insect motif, and the story itself has an apt circular structure, spiralling back into the small town past, as if returning the butterfly to its cocoon. Three young women, two sisters and their cousin, reflect on their overlapping past through the occasion of gathering for their mother/aunt's second marriage, at age forty-nine, to "the shoe-store man," despised Reg Sinclair. The voices of Vivian (the older sister), Hannah (the younger), and cousin Wren (of the mysterious "webbed"—winged, her father insists—hands and fascination with insects), alternate as each puts together her version of growing up in an Ottawa Valley town. Darlene's more conventional sister, Angie (who once was tempted to drown her "freak" baby), fills in gaps with an older perspective. The double loss of father/uncle Mick haunts everyone. First, he left good-looking but shallow Darlene, and then he died in a boating accident. In this world, the men appear more nurturing than the women—

idealized Mick, Uncle Charlie, even Darlene's pathetic suitor Tim—and the girls increasingly detach themselves from Darlene and her limited horizon (casual affairs, pretty clothes) as they grow up. However, the temporary evil that "visits" Stuart Fergus dampens their optimism as the gender-rebel Gabrielle drowns at his hands and Stuart impregnates Wren. She nearly becomes another teenage abortion statistic, but finds stubborn redemption in her daughter Brie (a short form of Gabrielle?), whom she raises alone in the narrative present. Then the trailer left behind as a gift from one of Darlene's admirers becomes a vehicle for Vivian's escape, while her sister boldly creates a wildflower bouquet for her mother's wedding-day triumph. These young women seem to be the inheritors of a daughter-centred feminism, while keeping men at a distance.

Kelly Watt's *Mad Dog* is also a retrospective tale of the hidden evil in a small town. In spare, active prose, she describes the summer of 1964 in the life of fourteen-year-old Sheryl-Anne MacRae. Abandoned by her mother, she lives with her uncle, aunt, and cousin on an apple farm in Eden Valley on the Niagara peninsula. The biblical reverberations are introduced with the epigraph from *Paradise Lost* and the entrance of Peter Angelo. Loss of innocence in the apple orchard appears imminent as Sheryl attempts to seduce the older boy, yet her dreams, juxtaposed with the daily routine of the farm, show us that she is already "fallen" into a world of dark deeds and perverse sexuality. "You're not supposed to talk about the night during the day," is a recurrent refrain and warning to Sheryl. A Gothic chill pervades this story, as her charismatic Uncle Fergus is revealed as a local cult leader, picking up credulous runaways like Peter and playing on their dreams while perpetrating his own power-hungry schemes. These include selling drugs from his pharmacy and re-enacting pseudo-Celtic fertility rituals to support an apocalyptic 1960s "new morality." The "mad dog" of the title, which appears to refer to Lupus, the crippled farm dog, obviously relates more and more to Fergus and his megalomania. By her inevitable awakening, Sheryl realizes that her dreams, cosily labelled "the sight" by her uncle, are really suppressed memories of sexual experiments turned into pornography. Her sudden revelation and escape seem a bit disappointing—Where is she running to? What has she learned? What about Peter? She does, however, let the real canine free at the end, a development reminding me of the animal motif dear to her mentor, the late Timothy Findley.

The *Globe and Mail* recently listed Sue Goyette among "10 New Canadian Writers to Watch," an assessment I would endorse after reading *Lures*. Although the book began, she says, as "really bad poems," it has a strong narrative structure to go with its poetic imagery, and the widest perspective of the three texts, moving inside the heads of men and women, from the young boy Curtis to the town bully and drug dealer, Ralph. Her town is Beaumont, Quebec, in the 1970s, and the politics of communication is heightened as she presents two Anglo families struggling with various degrees of separation. Seventeen-year-old Grace is first seen locked out of her home; she then wanders to the warm household of her friend, bookish Lily, who is obsessively copying encyclopaedia definitions into a series of notebooks. With her cold, clean-freak mother Sheila, gadget-buying father Les (who also stalks young boys in secret), and pothead brother, Grace is attracted to Lily's more open and affectionate family life. Yet if her family suffers from coldness, Lily's father Stan is too hot; as a result of a fight with Stan, the oldest child, Jerry, has left home to wander on the mountain, becoming a local curiosity known as "Rave." The family dwelling

looms large as a place of both confinement and temporary comfort, as the recurring element of the passing train and changing seasons draw French and English together, huddling in the dark against the threats of freedom and change. The major loss here is the loss of a child—as in *Water Wings*, the occasion for some of the most powerful writing—as Gary walks into a train one night, partly intentionally, in anguish at his father's secret sickness. Sheila's inevitable and heartbreaking response is to clean: "She'd spend entire days tidying up her grief, polishing it, sponge-mopping it, and when that didn't do the job, she'd get down on her knees and scrub it, scrub it until it shone and she could see herself, her red and sweaty face reflected back up to her from the floor." Grace finds solace and hope of renewal in the love offered by Jerry and in his gentler perspective, gained in close contact with the natural world. In this story, the narrative perspective broadens to include the town-at-large, which, even if without a rallying figure, shares an unconscious dream of a common language. The title refers to Les's need to compare his boy-stalking to the sport of fishing, which he shared with his father, but many more people are "lured" out of their houses into danger and newness here. This novel moved me the most. It made me care about characters in a real family, their anger and affection, their individuality, and the things its members have in common. All three remind us, to quote the epigraph to *Water Wings*, that "stories . . . are the branches of a family that we have to trace back, and forward."



Splendid Mappings

Derek Hayes
Historical Atlas of Canada: Canada's History Illustrated with Original Maps. Douglas & McIntyre/ U of Washington P $75.00

Reviewed by Heinz Antor

In his famous "Conclusion to a *Literary History of Canada*," Northrop Frye wrote about the features of Canadian culture, and he listed among them "its fixation on its own past" and its perplexed reaction to the question of "Where is here?" There is plenty of material to be found in Derek Hayes's *Historical Atlas of Canada* that is relevant in this context. In this richly illustrated volume, the reader finds more than 420 maps dating from the fifteenth to the mid-twentieth century: these map the history as well as the geography of Canada, from the mythic journey of Saint Brendan around 570 AD to the evolution of Canada's provincial boundaries.

Hayes's volume is the first to rely exclusively on original historical maps rather than on modern redrawn ones. This approach has the advantage of greater immediacy and of providing the reader with a fascinating glimpse into the development of geographical knowledge about Canada. It also affords us direct access to the various ways in which formative events in the country's history were conceptualized in their period. Unfortunately Hayes must depend on the sources that have survived and so the ephemeral quality of native maps, such as those drawn on birchbark or on the ground, results in an inevitable emphasis on European examples. But this is an unavoidable shortcoming that Hayes frankly acknowledges, and he does produce maps of Beothuk, Blackfoot or Cree origin where he can.

All of the maps are arranged in short thematic chapters and are presented both with a concise historical comment on the chap-

ter topic and detailed explanations referring to the individual maps. The various chapters are frequently cross-referenced so that the reader can discover interesting connections and differences between maps. The material collected by Hayes comes from libraries around the world, and it reflects perceptions of Canada from the point of view of explorers and imperialists, settlers and natives, and many other groups. Indigenous maps are represented by a nineteenth-century birchbark map of the Ottawa-Lake Huron watershed, for example, and by a map drawn by Shanawdithit, the last of the Beothuk. Some of the maps reproduced are of doubtful authenticity, such as the famous Vinland map, based on Norse voyages and supposedly dating back to 1440 but considered by many to be a fake. Its inclusion here is justified on grounds of the heated debate it has sparked off about the origins of Canadian cartography. There are many other maps in this splendid volume that make for intriguing mysteries, such as that of the Spanish cartographer Juan de la Cosa, which raises important questions as to what happened to John Cabot on his fateful second voyage of 1498 and points in the direction of Cabot not only having made a landfall at Newfoundland but possibly even having sailed as far as the Caribbean before he disappeared.

Hayes's maps provide fascinating evidence of how early cartographers tried to fill, through a mixture of speculation and rumours, the blanks left by their lack of knowledge. A map published in 1752 by the French cartographer Joseph-Nicolas de L'Isle, for example, actually shows an enormous mythic Sea of the West and many northwestern rivers based on the wish for a Northwest Passage. Many other maps reproduced here also clearly reflect the wishes and interests of the people they were made for and thus provide evidence for the constructivist aspects of cartography. Thus, the Venetian Zeno map of 1558 reflects Venice's attempt to claim a role in the discovery of the New World in competition with Christopher Columbus's home town of Genoa; Joseph La France, in 1742, produced a map with a totally hypothetical "unknown western coast" linked to Hudson's Bay in order to cater to the needs of Arthus Dobbs, a merchant obsessed with the idea of a Northwest Passage and the imperial and commercial advantages it could bring him.

The *Historical Atlas of Canada* discusses the origin of geographical names such as Repulse Bay, and we are told about the ideological (ab)uses of maps for imperialist and other purposes. It is a pleasure indeed to browse through this lavishly illustrated volume. The excellent reproductions of historical maps are aesthetically pleasing, and the concise text is very helpful in interpreting them. The book is fully indexed so that it can also be used by the reader interested in a specific aspect of Canadian history.

Censure au Québec

Pierre Hébert avec la collaboration de Patrick Nicol

Censure et littérature au Québec. Le livre crucifié 1625–1919 Fides 29,95$

Compte rendu par Maurice Lemire

Pierre Hébert affirme qu'au cours du XIXe siècle, il n'y eut que trois livres de mis nommément à l'Index au Québec, soit les deux *Annuaires* de l'Institut canadien de Montréal et *Le clergé canadien, sa mission, son œuvre* de L.-O. David. On pourrait donc s'étonner qu'il ait réussi à faire une histoire de la censure avec si peu de matière. En fait, son livre porte plus sur la politique du clergé catholique face à la lecture que sur la censure proprement dite.

Les trois parties portent des titres pour le moins ironiques : « L'Église souffrante », l'ère pré-censoriale (1625–1840); « l'Église

militante »: grandeurs et misères de la censure proscriptive (1840–1910) ; et « l'Église triomphante »: le virage prescriptif (1896–1919).

Dans la première partie, Hébert nous montre une Église encore peut sûre de ses moyens et qui négocie plus qu'elle ne condamne, comme le prouve l'Affaire du Tartuffe, de la *Gazette littéraire* et la saisie du *Canadien*. Les débordements incontrôlés des abbés Chaboillez et Pigeon témoignent de la faiblesse de l'autorité ecclésiastique. Mais ces expériences malheureuses servent d'apprentissage. Quand Mgr Bourget accède au siège épiscopal de Montréal en 1840, il sait comment agir avec efficacité. Surtout intéressé par la diffusion de l'imprimé, l'auteur attire l'attention sur l'augmentation du lectorat: un véritable système d'instruction publique se met en place, les journaux se multiplient et l'importation des livres augmente, et quelques bibliothèques ouvrent leurs portes. Le clergé, qui avait jusque là contrôlé assez bien l'information, entre en concurrence avec les nouvelles. Plutôt que de les interdire tout simplement, il cherche à les combattre sur leur propre terrain avec un journal comme les *Mélanges religieux*, l'*Oeuvre des bons livres*, et les bibliothèques paroissiales. Mais cette politique se heurte à la conception libérale qui veut que chaque individu soit personnellement libre de ses lectures. On voit bien dans le texte comment les positions catholique et protestante au sujet de la lecture s'affrontent.

En tant que dépositaire du donné révélé, la Magistère de l'Église catholique s'est toujours cru seul autorisé à en faire l'interprétation, tandis que les protestants accordent à chaque fidèle la liberté de faire son interprétation personnelle. Les uns interdisent la lecture de la Bible, alors que les autres la recommandent. Les Canadiens qui vivent dans le cadre d'institutions britanniques ne pouvaient, malgré leur catholicisme, rester imperméables à ces influences. Une certaine jeunesse, plus attirée par la politique que par la religion, réclamait, dans le cadre de l'Institut canadien de Montréal, un accès à la lecture. Rappelée à l'ordre, elle ne se rangea pas. Face à cette rébellion, l'Église n'avait d'autre recours que la censure. Après sa condamnation, l'Institut canadien ne sera plus bientôt que l'ombre de lui-même.

D'après Pierre Hébert, cette expérience douloureuse pour les deux parties amène l'Église à modifier sa politique. Même si elle continue à appliquer la censure à l'occasion, elle se rend compte que cette mesure n'est pas des plus efficaces et qu'il vaut mieux de prévenir que de guérir. Le clergé, comprenant qu'il est moins nuisible d'exercer la censure en amont qu'en aval, oblige tous les auteurs catholiques à soumettre leur manuscrit à un censeur pour obtenir le *nihil obstat* avant l'impression. Mais, comme cette mesure ponctuelle ne suffit pas à elle seule à endiguer le courant libéral, les autorités concluent qu'il vaut mieux travailler à changer les mentalités. Les différents mouvements, comme l'ACIC, les Semaines sociales, l'Oeuvre des tracts, l'*Action sociale catholique* seraient le résultat d'une concertation pour contenir le lectorat, comme si cette initiative ne concernait que le Québec. Je crois bien que cette orientation n'est pas le seul fait du clergé québécois et que l'Église romaine tente de reconquérir tant le monde étudiant (JEC) que le monde ouvrier (JOC). Cette démonstration s'appuie sur une documentation de première main. Pierre Hébert a examiné les mandements des évêques, fouillé dans les archives de l'Archevêché de Montréal, et il a lu les thèses les plus récentes sur le sujet. Certes, il n'évolue pas toujours en terrain inconnu, mais souvent il apporte des précisions sur certains points restés obscurs ou jette un éclairage nouveau sur des événements pourtant connus.

Censure et littérature au Québec n'est pas à proprement parler de l'histoire littéraire,

mais contribue grandement à sa compréhension. Même si les mises à l'Index n'ont pas été plus nombreuses ici qu'ailleurs, il reste que la puissance morale du clergé s'exerçait au pays avec une efficacité rarement atteinte à l'étranger. Le Conseil privé a eu beau trancher en faveur de Guibord, l'opinion publique appuyait le clergé. Ainsi l'Église exerça-t-elle sur la littérature une mainmise que ce livre aide grandement à comprendre.

Unique Childhoods

Tomson Highway
Caribou Song/atíhko níkamon. HarperCollins $19.95

Andrea Spalding
Solomon's Tree. Orca $19.95

Larry Loyie, with Constance Brissenden
As Long as the Rivers Flow. Groundwood $18.95

Luther Schuetze
Mission to Little Grand Rapids. Creative Connections $24.95

Maureen Garvie and Mary Beaty
George Johnson's War. Groundwood $12.95

Reviewed by John Moffatt

The publication of a new book on First Nations themes for children or young adult readers is a significant event. Any such book has the ability to plant indelible images of Aboriginal culture in the minds of young people who read it. With one possible exception, the titles reviewed here specifically allow children, regardless of background, to explore the unique experiences of First Nations children past and present. Written by both indigenous and non-indigenous authors, the texts evoke, often in lyrical terms, the integrity of the specific cultures portrayed, while generating opportunities for further discussion of cultural, spiritual, and historical issues important to the dialogue between First Nations and non-native society.

Joe and Cody, the young protagonists of Tomson Highway's *Caribou Song/atíhko níkamon,* live "too far north for most trees" and follow the caribou herds with their parents. The world portrayed in the bilingual Cree and English text and in Brian Deines's vibrant illustrations blends the modern and the ancient; Highway's first book for children evokes a way of life in which relevant measures of time are found in the elemental relationships between people and their environment. The story refrains from direct comment on the spiritual relationship between Joe and Cody's "Caribou song" and the caribou herd, so the dramatic arrival of the migrating animals will allow children to discuss their own understanding of the event's meaning.

Spiritual communication between nature and First Nations children is also a key theme in Andrea Spalding's *Solomon's Tree,* and here too that communication emerges in art, in the carving of a Tsimshian mask. Traditional spiritual beliefs and practices appear throughout the book; Solomon's uncle teaches him a song at the beginning of the carving process, and Solomon, wearing the finished mask, dances to the drum at the end. The focus, however, is consistently on the boy's relationship with the tree from which the mask is carved and whose spirit the mask comes to embody. Solomon talks and listens to the old maple, minimally anthropomorphized in Janet Wilson's illustrations, and his grief when the tree is blown down in a storm leads his uncle to create the mask as part of a healing process. The text and illustrations follow each major step in the mask's production. Tsimshian carver Victor Reece prepared a special mask for the story, and an author's note emphasizes the collaboration between Reece, Spalding, and Wilson in establishing an authentic template for the book to follow in representing First Nations tradition for a wide audience.

Both Highway and Spalding emphasize harmony and continuity between the past

and the present, as when Solomon dries his traditional mask in the microwave "three times, at three minutes . . . with lots of turns." Values survive technological change and, by implication, social change.

Larry Loyie's autobiographical *As Long as the Rivers Flow* also depicts children nurtured within the traditions of their Cree community, but harmony and continuity are threatened by the reality of residential schools. It is 1944 in northern Alberta, and ten-year-old Lawrence and his brothers and sister share in the work and play of the family's summer camp, learn traditional skills and stories under the supervision of relatives, and have adventures that will interest most children in the ten-plus age group, as Lawrence takes care of an orphaned owl or encounters a grizzly. Loyie contains the nostalgic tone, however, through the whispered threat of what awaits the children at summer's end: "[Mama] looked at Lawrence, then lowered her voice even more. He could only hear part of what she said. It was something about prison . . . ." The unanswered questions that haunt Lawrence make the children's abrupt removal from home and their family's powerlessness to stop it all the more devastating.

Parents and teachers will welcome the epilogue which follows the story. Illustrated with personal and archival photographs, it provides a concise overview of the life children like Lawrence experienced in the residential schools, as well as further information on Cree family life.

The late Reverend Luther L. Schuetze's *Mission to Little Grand Rapids: Life with the Anishinabe 1927-1938* might be expected to sit uneasily on the shelf alongside Loyie's story. This memoir of a United Church missionary's experience among the Anishinaabeg of the Berens River system straddling the Manitoba/Ontario border necessarily deals with the kind of colonialism for which residential schools were the instrument. However, the Brazilian-born Schuetze's sympathy for the people among whom he and his family lived and worked resists narrow stereotyping on both sides of the cultural divide. His observant, anecdotal account of a society in transition is both informative and entertaining, and supplements existing work on the Berens River people, in particular the well-known studies of the American ethnographer Irving Hallowell (who was observing the same community in the same period). The often humorous narrative pays as much attention to the author's role as husband and father as it does to his challenges as lay minister, teacher, dentist, and doctor—a focus that enhances the text as a spiritual autobiography.

Maureen Garvie and Mary Beaty explore a more distant historical past in *George Johnson's War,* a historical novel for readers aged twelve and up, set during the American War of Independence. George Johnson, who narrates the novel, is the youngest son of the powerful Sir William Johnson and of Molly Brant, one of the most influential First Nations women in colonial America. George's war mostly unfolds away from the battlefields, and the novel focuses on his Loyalist family's efforts to cope with its reversals, under the stubborn leadership of Molly. Garvie and Beaty develop George's character between the ages of six and thirteen in terms of competing ambitions and loyalties, as his desire to emulate his father and brothers on the battlefield clashes with a conflicted sense of being both responsible for and dependent on his mother and sisters.

While Molly Brant's Mohawk identity and prestige among her people are clearly delineated, George's sense of his dual heritage is implied rather than explored in the novel. We learn that George speaks Mohawk, and that he lives temporarily in various Six Nations communities, but on the whole he remains detached from the Mohawk context. His ambivalence should

perhaps be seen as part of a continuum that includes his mother's traditionalism and his sisters' cultivation of European manners, as well as the racism they occasionally experience. A similar ambivalence exists in the novel's treatment of slavery: the Johnsons' ownership of Black slaves is frankly acknowledged but is not a subject of debate within the novel. While some readers may be troubled by George's tacit acceptance of slavery, the authors' decision to avoid moral anachronism in this situation may be seen as an opportunity for younger readers to learn more about an often ignored part of Canada's history.

Reading Lives

Lynette Hunter
Literary Value/Cultural Power: Verbal Arts in the Twenty-First Century. Manchester UP US $24.95

Paul John Eakin
How Our Lives Become Stories: Making Selves. Cornell UP US $17.95

Reviewed by Jeanne Perreault

Auto-criticism is not my favourite mode of expression. Too often I find the critic telling me much more than I ever wanted to know about her/himself and far too little about the subject that drew me to the book in the first place. Lynette Hunter and Paul John Eakin might force me to reconsider that cherished stance. Hunter is Professor of Rhetoric at the University of Leeds, known for the range and depth of her work in the Renaissance, Canadian literature, feminist thought, and the history of publishing, among other things. Eakin is one of North America's most influential theorists in auto/biographical studies. Though these books are quite different in tone and topics, the author of each makes a personalized voice an aspect of the investigation in ways that genuinely extend the range of the study and the grasp of the reader.

In *Literary Value/Cultural Power*, Hunter's aims are ethical and communal, intellectual and scholarly. She explains that her challenges to the aesthetic standards explore "how reading/writing, speaking/listening, can be situated within specific work so that labouring on texts becomes a way of communicating to other people, making communities, cohering needed values." Hunter's approach is designed not to develop a common critical language but to find "common grounds for value [that] cohere not only around similarity but around the recognition of the differences in which we participate." The precision of phrasing ("differences in which we participate") is typical of this book, which treads with delicate but firm step through a wide range of textual communities.

The chapters construct these communities in ways that do not seem obvious: English-language writers in places other than England are the subjects of the first chapter on national identity. Hunter brings a fresh view to the familiar complicated problems involved in making narratives of nationhood when the language used "is imbued with the traditions and structures of another nation." Hunter uses her own experiences as a cross-cultural reader to demonstrate how easy it is to confuse issues, ask the wrong questions, or get in one's own way. By moving us through her responses ("I simply did not know what to make of it"), explaining her discoveries ("I began to recognize . . .") and then her conclusion ("The engagement is a way of moving toward the valuing of ways of life I do not conventionally understand"), Hunter offers an unguarded articulation of an experience she encourages readers to undertake.

The chapters on new technologies, hyperspace, and synergetic texts are great fun. Less tentative than the earlier chapters, these explore questions of literary communities in fully confident, playful, and stimulating ways. For readers like myself, whose

cyber world is sadly unmapped, "Electronic Etiquette" and "Lost in Hyperspace" are wonderfully informative and, as with earlier chapters, encourage one to become "a friend to the text" by surrendering familiar patterns of thought and evaluation. In the third segment of the book, Hunter takes up letter-writing, diaries, and forms of self-writing, asking again questions of literary value and cultural expectation. Some of the issues raised here may be more familiar given the huge increase in the production and examination of such materials, but Hunter's questions and her take on familiar issues are consistently thought-provoking. Asserting that she is not willing to give up the concept of value and since "after all, aesthetics are there to introduce ethical and moral issues into skilled play or work" (a provocative assertion in itself), she insists that "our failure to understand these . . . stories means that we are kept apart from the communities that produce them, and they are kept apart from us." She asks "Who do I mean by 'us'?" and then answers: "I mean *me*." When she examines what that means, her description becomes an extended ethical meditation. This book is a pleasure to read: it is tough-minded, personal, and wide-ranging.

In *How Our Lives Become Stories*, Paul John Eakin explains why he prefers "to think of 'self' less as an entity and more as a kind of awareness in process." Like Hunter, Eakin makes the ethics of reading integral to his project. The first chapter neatly picks up threads of autobiographical thought from Descartes to Sidonie Smith, lingering over the death of the subject and its recovery in feminist and neurological conceptions of self. His engagement with feminist theorists' discussion of selfhood and identity grounded in relational lives brings him to ask important questions: "Why . . . did it take me so long to respond to the relational dimension of identity experience if it is indeed as fundamental as I now claim?" I'm not sure that Eakin answers this question fully. He finds the answer in literary habits which make it easy to obscure women's scholarship.

The later chapters move away from textual treatment of community/identity to an examination of memory, in particular representations of childhood memory. Eakin looks to neurology, sociology, linguistic theory, and developmental psychology to inquire into "identity through self-narration." His concluding chapter considers the commodification of lives in autobiography. He wonders whether a woman's story of her sexual relation with her father would have gained such attention had she not been described as "an attractive" woman; he pushes questions of privacy, of appropriate tellings, of stories some do not think should be told and what such views say about these critics. Eakin attends to those who are repelled by the "urge to confess," and he talks about telling all as a cultural imperative that may, for example, be costly to the families of memoirists despite the therapeutic value such confessions might have. The ethics of privacy, the fact of relational lives, and the moral strictures that shadow autobiographical tellings bring Eakin to ask, "What is right and fair?" One of the most affecting sections is Eakin's discussion of Philip Roth's memoir of caring for his father through his final illness, a story the father had begged Roth not to tell. Eakin admits the difficulty of his questions throughout, and nowhere does he give us facile answers.

Multiculturalism?

Elizabeth Kim
Ten Thousand Sorrows: The Extraordinary Journey of a Korean War Orphan. Doubleday $32.95

Yi Sun-Kyung
Inside the Hermit Kingdom: A Memoir. Key Porter $26.95

Reviewed by Miseli Jeon

Ten Thousand Sorrows is an autobiography by Elizabeth Kim, a Korean-American journalist, who was adopted at about seven years of age by a childless Fundamentalist pastor and his wife in the United States. Kim's story begins on the night she witnessed her mother's murder in a conservative village near Seoul some time in the late 1950s. In the name of "honour," her grandfather and uncle killed her mother, a young, unmarried Korean woman who had fallen in love with an American soldier and given birth to a *honhyôl* (mixed-race) child, tainting their "pure" Korean blood. Without any opportunity to grieve for the loss of her mother, she was immediately put in an orphanage, and some months later, taken to America as an adopted child.

The hardships she experienced growing up in a Fundamentalist family in an all-white American community stemmed not only from cultural displacement and racism, but also from the omnipresent misogynist ideology that underlies even such dissimilar cultures as Korean Confucianism and Christian Fundamentalism. Juxtaposing Korean Confucian demands for women's unconditional obedience with the Fundamentalist belief in God's will manifested in parental control and domestic submission, Kim concludes: "In that respect, my American life was no different from *omma*'s [Mom's] life in Korea."

Kim's life story is punctuated by a long series of tragedies. She is half-forced to marry a deacon in her stepfather's church, who turns out to be a psychotic, a wife-beater, and womanizer. Even after escaping the maniacal violence of her husband with her baby daughter in her arms, she faces financial difficulties, falls victim to a rapist, and suffers a debilitating disease, one misfortune succeeding another. When she finally gains some financial security, she is felled by a mental breakdown. Only in the psychoanalytic process of revisiting the childhood trauma of witnessing her mother's murder does she discover the repressed source of her sorrow and lack of self-worth: "Dreams of reuniting with my mother were accompanied by the belief that I needed to suffer as badly as she suffered."

At one point, Kim speaks of her encounter with a Korean man who confirms the practice of "honour killing" in Korea: "I'm not saying it's right, but you have to understand. That's the way the culture is." This remark may strike some Korean readers as problematic, especially in its use of the present tense: even if this practice existed as late as the years following the Korean War, it is now part of the past. However, it seems that Kim's emphasis is not on whether "honour killing" is still practised in Korea, but rather on the atrocities practiced worldwide in the name of cultural, religious, and racial purity.

In her work as a journalist, Kim learns that "honour killings" are practised in many countries other than Korea; for example, in Israel, China, Iran, and India. Most of them are recorded as suicides. The crucial issue, however, is not whether these deaths were murders or suicides, nor is it whether "honour killing" actually forms an integral part of traditional culture in any one of these countries. Rather, it is the appeal to readers' ability to reexamine themselves by asking *different* questions: Are we, as a cultural or ethnic group, as tolerant to differences as we believe ourselves to be?

If Kim and her mother fall victim to cultural dominance within the schema of the

"one nation, one blood" ideology of Korea and the "melting-pot" policy of America, Yi Sun-kyung in "multicultural" Canada seems no better off. Yi journeys to Korea to gain a sense of belonging, but the experience leaves her as alienated by Koreans and their culture as ever. It seems that Yi, without realizing it, has come to embody the dominant cultural values of her part of Canada, that is, the English language and culture.

Yi Sun-kyung and her family came to Canada when she was nine. After graduating from university, she worked for the *Globe and Mail* and various other newspapers in Toronto. She was with CBC Radio when an opportunity to visit North Korea, the most secretive country in the world, presented itself. *Inside the Hermit Kingdom* is a travelogue of her visit to North Korea, and a year later, South Korea.

Inside begins with the account of Yi's childhood in Korea and her life in Canada, growing up as the oldest daughter of an immigrant family. Throughout her almost twenty years of life in Canada, Yi harboured an intense nostalgia for the old country and a hope to go back some day. Through all the ravages of time and the tricks of imagination, Korea remained in her memory a fantasized home to which she might never return. This imagined "Korea" turns Yi's real journey to Korea into an adventure into the unknown rather than a homecoming, though Yi only realizes this in hindsight.

At one point, Yi expands on the reason for her subtitle, "A Memoir." Pressured by both the North and South Korean governments not to disclose anything negative about them, Yi needed to demonstrate her political neutrality by making the work an account of her personal and subjective experiences. However, by renouncing the dangers of political narrative for something more personal, she offers readers much more than a polemic: a vivid picture of her psychological struggle, living as an ethnic minority in the multicultural society of Canada, where English and French, by necessity, are the official and dominant languages and cultures. Yi's admirable honesty with herself is what enables readers to witness this process.

While growing up in Canadian society, Yi suffered from the polar attractions of Korean and Canadian culture, and the clash of the two conflicting identities within herself: Angela, westernized and outgoing, and Sun-kyung, a docile and obedient Korean girl. By the time she had developed the ability to wear and drop the masks of her different identities at will, she began to feel a nagging sense of guilt that she had not been true to either of her selves. The ideal of multiculturalism seems to fail in the face of Yi's increasing identification with the official common language and culture, and her desire to distance herself from the Korean community and its cultural heritage.

Even after her visits to two Koreas, Yi does not feel any closer to her cultural heritage. She is now supposed to command a "better" view of the overall political situation than anyone in either of the two Koreas. However, the "better" view comes at a high price: only an outsider can achieve this objective perspective. Her wish to belong contradicts the outsider's point of view that she has brought with her. Moreover, the "better" view from this outside standpoint may be neither "better" nor desirable when seen from the different realities of different Koreans, depending on their political stances.

At one point, Yi refuses to answer a question from South Korean student activists about the true political and economic situation in North Korea. Instead of exploiting her chance to become an "authority," Yi decides to write a "memoir," a choice that underlines the subjective character of her narrative. Although she came back from Korea profoundly disappointed, her honest account of her struggle to belong and her

inevitable collision with her own cultural bias will make readers in any immigrant society feel that they are not alone.

A Glimpse of Something

Larissa Lai
Salt Fish Girl. Thomas Allen $23.95

Reviewed by Guy Beauregard

Since the 1970s, Asian Canadian cultural workers have engaged directly with questions of community, representation, history, and the collective project of social transformation. The ambitiousness of this project—which is not always recognized in contemporary scholarship in Canadian literary studies—has led many Asian Canadians to work in various capacities as community organizers, social activists, editors, curators, educators, social historians, and cultural critics. Larissa Lai has contributed to community projects including the catalogue for *Yellow Peril: Reconsidered* (1990); the *Writing Thru Race* conference (1994); the special issue of *West Coast Line* called *Colour. An Issue* (1994); the Prairie Asian Project and the subsequent *Prairie Asians* special issue of *absinthe* (1998); and the activist group DAARE (Direct Action Against Refugee Exploitation), about which Lai has written passionately in *Fuse* (2000). Lai also wrote *When Fox Is a Thousand* (1996), an acclaimed first novel that was shortlisted for the Chapters/*Books in Canada* First Novel Award.

Salt Fish Girl (2002), Lai's second novel, links a historical narrative in late nineteenth-century China with a dystopic narrative in the middle of the twenty-first century in the Pacific Northwest. The novel builds on the "myths of history" Lai explored in her first novel and extends their implications to a future marked by biotechnology, cloning, corporate rule, and the exploitation of workers. *Salt Fish Girl* takes sharp jabs against anti-immigrant attitudes, racialized sexual harassment, corporate jurisdiction over the social spaces in which the characters live, and the bioengineering of women of colour (with .03% freshwater carp) to reduce labour costs in shoe factories. The novel provides powerful descriptions of the Unregulated Zone (the bombed-out social spaces outside the immediate jurisdiction of corporate rule) and, crucially, the acts of resistance of its inhabitants. As Evie quips, "They couldn't control for everything. Maybe the fish was the unstable factor." Workers in shoe factories organize and protest, imprinting text on a newly poured sidewalk:

> *materials: 10 units*
> *labour: 3 units*
> *retail price: 169 units*
> *profit: 156 units*
> *Do you care?*

In this way, Lai ties the narrative to contemporary protests against corporate globalization and its racialized and gendered effects.

Salt Fish Girl deliberately blurs historical and future narratives, calling into question notions of temporality, memory, and history—all of which are relevant to the dreaming disease that afflicts the lives of the characters in the future. Miranda (who, along with the Prospero figure of Dr. Flowers and the Caliban figure of Evie, connects Lai's narrative to *The Tempest*) attempts to make sense of her memories and desires:

> I had recognized something, but had no idea what. It felt as though something inside me was stretching, had always stretched to that moment of recognition, in the past, a stretching without knowing, a longing without certainty of the object, but in that moment when [Evie] rose from the chair, pulled the needle from her arm and ran out the door, I knew. Or rather, I had a glimpse of something. I could not name it, but I knew it mattered.

Miranda's "glimpse of something" stands as an invitation for readers to imagine the

past and the future and their potential points of connection.

Despite the promise of many of these ideas, *Salt Fish Girl* is hurt by a meandering creation scene that opens the novel. There are also odd shifts in tone (such as when the late-nineteenth-century narrator shifts from a quietly formal voice to announce: "Give 'em salt fish congee early and you'll forget about 'em sooner and vice versa") and historical anachronisms (the narrative refers in passing to a Malaysian girl at a time when there was no "Malaysia"), strange geographical references (China is referred to as the "eastern rim" of the Pacific Economic Union), maudlin passages (especially those describing Miranda's deceased mother and her singing career), and the repeated use of coincidental meetings to keep the plot moving forward. The proofreading could also have been better. All these examples deeply compromise the readability and the potential power of the story Lai has chosen to tell. But my sense is that Lai's novel nevertheless remains significant because it attempts to connect our understanding of Asian Canadian pasts with a glimpse of its potential futures. This "glimpse of something" can also direct our attention to the broader Asian Canadian project of representing and challenging the effects of corporate globalization in the contemporary world.

Testifying to the Invisible

The Latina Feminist Group
Telling to Live: Latina Feminist Testimonios. Duke UP $19.99

Ruth Jacobsen
Rescued Images: Memories of a Childhood in Hiding. Mikaya P $27.95

Reviewed by Manuela Costantino

Telling to Live: Latina Feminist Testimonios is the product of seven years of collaboration among eighteen women who define themselves as *Latina* feminists. Their multiple ethnic origins (Cuban, Dominican, Mexican, Native American, Puerto Rican, Spanish), their diversified religious backgrounds (Catholic, Jewish, Mormon, Protestant), and their different sexual identities (heterosexual, bisexual, lesbian, celibate) reflect the diversity of *Latina* experience in the United States. The members of the *Latina* feminist group work as professors, writers, oral historians, social workers, activists, and artists, both inside and outside the academic world. This extremely diverse group collaborate to voice the personal experiences of *Latinas* and to find a common ground on which to build cross-cultural coalitions.

The women of the *Latina* feminist group chose the *testimonio* to tell their stories and the stories of their communities. The *testimonio* is a form of expression that enables the storyteller to bear witness to and inscribe into history lived realities that would otherwise be erased. This form of storytelling also has a political dimension as the confession often comes out of intense repression or struggle and marks the storyteller's attempt "to assert [herself] as a political subject through others, and in the process to emphasize particular aspects of [her] collective identity." The *testimonios* presented in this volume take the form of autobiographical narratives, short stories, poems, plays, dialogues or essays; they are

written in English, Spanish, or Spanglish; and they are left unsigned when the experiences that they relate could happen to any *Latina*.

The members of the group claim a common *Latina* feminist identity, but they also wish to confront a feminist movement that often ignores the tremendous internal differences among women of colour. They intend the diversity of their *testimonios* as a way of unveiling the complex connections between ethnicity, nationality, class, gender, and sexuality and of analyzing the role these connections play in the articulation of multiple identities. They also use the *testimonio* as a means of empowerment because it gives voice to and documents silenced histories. They consider the *testimonio* a powerful tool to develop political consciousness and to create "politicized understandings of identity and community." Their authority emerges from their "collective and mutually validated . . . stories" and enables them to shape new knowledge and to critique official versions of reality. "This," Aurora Levins Morales argues, "is how homemade theory happens."

Telling to Live is divided into four sections. The first, entitled "Genealogies of Empowerment," delineates complicated structures of inheritance and retraces the legacies of colonial and patriarchal subordination that have influenced the storytellers' formative years. The second section, "Alchemies of Erasure," unveils many forms of discrimination and abuse that the storytellers encounter in the academy and brings to light the ways in which their voices are often silenced. The third section, "The Body Re/Members," documents how the bodies of women of colour are damaged by institutionalized racism and by structures that ground privilege in gender and class. The fourth section, "Passions, Desires, and Celebrations," celebrates the pleasures of writing and working with other *Latinas* and "the ecstasy of physical love." The volume ends with an extensive bibliography, most valuable to anyone interested in *Latina/o* studies.

In this unprecedented volume, the *Latina* feminist group successfully shape narratives that make women's lives accessible to multiple audiences and give meaning to lived experiences that are often erased. Their *testimonios* enable them to speak back to oppressive structures. Their political agenda, however, tends to be overshadowed by their very personal desire to testify. The telling of hardships and abuse, a crucial and necessary step in recovery and empowerment, often takes precedence over analysis and theorizing. As the volume progresses, the theoretical frame loosens as many of the storytellers focus primarily on sharing intimate confessions (proclamation of self-love, illicit sexual encounters) detached from their social context. The quality of the *testimonios* is uneven, but the volume as a whole is a fascinating and challenging read.

In *Rescued Images*, Ruth Jacobsen succeeds in bringing past experiences back to life. Although her experiences are very different from those of the *Latina* feminists, she chooses as they do to make visible a past that official history has erased. An American artist born in a German family of Jewish descent, Jacobsen fled Germany for Holland in 1939. In 1942, her family was forced into hiding. She was separated from her parents and placed in several homes over the course of the following two and a half years. The end of the war saw the slow disintegration of her parents' marriage and her mother's suicide. As a young adult, she immigrated to the United States where she learned of her father's suicide and inherited the familial photo albums, last mementos of her shattered past. She had left the photo albums in the attic for forty years, until she found the courage to "move the photographs out of the albums and into [her] life."

As she worked on creating collages that

included these original photographs, other images, letters, and acrylic paints, her memories started to come back. Jacobsen records these memories in a touching narrative that, combined with her vivid collages, tells of the uncertainties of life in hiding, of the forms of discrimination and abuse that her family had to endure, and of the courage and generosity of people who risked their lives to help her family.

Jacobsen's testimonial is filled with blanks marking what she cannot remember. Her text analyzes this inability and subtly uncovers the complexity of the silencing structures that kept her past invisible for decades. She testifies to the silencing power of Nazi propaganda, of the Dutch resistance, and of her own will. In a simple narrative, Jacobsen tells of her own complicity in the oppressive structures that erased her experiences. Silence and forgetting were essential to her survival and to the survival of her saviours: total invisibility was the only way to stay alive.

If Jacobsen's text marks her absence from her own past, her visual art does just the opposite. Jacobsen and her relatives are present in most of the book's collages. Jacobsen uses the collage technique to reposition herself and her family in the historical context of World War II. This visual testimonial speaks to the textual blanks of the narrative as it unveils the hidden presence and experiences of the autobiographer and her family. The polyphony that emerges from the combination of textual and visual testimonials enables Jacobsen to articulate multiple versions of her story and to reclaim her place in her own past. Like the *Latina* feminists, Jacobsen uses autobiography to voice experiences silenced by history, to speak back to oppressive structures, and to claim new positions of power.

The Private Voice

Nancy Lee
Dead Girls. McClelland & Stewart $22.99

Timothy Taylor
Silent Cruise. Vintage Canada $25.00

Rachel Wyatt
The Last We Heard of Leonard. Oolichan $19.95

F.B. André
The Man Who Beat the Man. NeWest P $16.95

Charles E. May
The Short Story: The Reality of the Artifice. Routledge $29.95

Reviewed by Michael Trussler

When Edgar Allan Poe reviewed Nathaniel Hawthorne's *Twice-Told Tales* in 1842, he used the occasion to formulate a poetics of the short story. It is perhaps fitting, then, that the books considered in this review include collections of short fiction and Charles E. May's *The Short Story: The Reality of the Artifice*, a critical study that offers both an historical overview of the genre and theoretical speculations as to its nature. I shall return to May's book later; for now, let me mention that one of his major contributions to short-story theory has been his insight that novels and short stories manifest different philosophical approaches to the question of what constitutes human experience. The novel, according to May, largely perceives human reality as mediated by communal and historical forces whereas the short story identifies a mode of being that can't be defined by the social. May first presented this thesis in a seminal 1984 article. Some scholars have contested his argument; however, this compelling idea, subsequently refined in his criticism, has proven invaluable in short-story studies.

Because of the current Vancouver police investigation into crimes involving murdered women, Nancy Lee's *Dead Girls* has taken on a certain grisly notoriety. While I suspect that this correspondence between

her fiction and actuality dismays her, in her collection I believe that Lee's readers will recognize the intricacy and compassion. Opposed to the sensationalist and perfunctory treatment such crimes receive in the news and popular culture, Lee's examination of lives damaged by this and other kinds of brutality testifies to art's honesty, its rigorous, disturbing acuities of perception. Though a local serial killer forms the collection's dark centre—glimpses of him recur in various stories—the book has a multitude of distinctive characters, and a truly astonishing range of narrative situations that give them life. In each of her stories, Lee pays close attention to her characters' bodies. The body becomes an enigmatic, frequently overpowering double that haunts, indeed saturates, an individual's sense of self and others. Lee's skill at observing the body's nuances is enriched by her creation of delicate, disconcerting details. In "Rollie and Adele," Lee offers an image of dusty plastic key chains hanging on a curtain rod, souvenirs given to a woman over the years by friends who once were lucky enough to travel. There are many details such as this one, each condensing a character's private (and often rebellious) response to living within a confusing world in which loss is commonplace.

An antique dealer in the story "Doves of Townsend," from Timothy Taylor's *Silent Cruise*, comments on the importance of distinguishing between what is fake and genuine, though she recognizes that, to some enthusiasts, the ersatz is well worth coveting. In Taylor's stories collecting is often seen as a philosophical activity with which to examine authenticity, whether of an object or experience. That the stories in *Silent Cruise* return to several existential and aesthetic questions, almost replying to each other, makes the collection intensely satisfying to read. May points out in his study that closure is particularly important in short fiction. Taylor is very adept at plot—the novella "Newstart 2.0™," featuring a Canadian Dadaist, is a captivating art mystery worthy of Umberto Eco—but it is the magic with which these stories end that takes the reader's breath away. Moving a story to a different level, subtly rewriting what has come before, Taylor's endings turn a well-crafted narrative into a brilliant aesthetic object. Re-reading them confirms the sophistication and generosity of these stories; ultimately, each story reaches out to the reader as a gift. A painter in the book refers to the "cascading instant" in which a potential aesthetic solution presents itself to him; dazzling moments in *Silent Cruise* similarly reveal unsuspected patterns to the reader, patterns that, extending beyond individual stories, deepen the intellectual and emotional scope of the collection.

Rachel Wyatt's *The Last We Heard of Leonard* contains some of the strangest and most mysteriously crafted stories I've ever read. Comprised of nine sections, the collection begins with a pair of finely observed, interrelated realist stories involving minor obsession and marital angst; but as the collection develops, it's as if the stories mutate and shift, exploring the bizarre nature of the mind's inclination toward repetition, until the final group of stories, an extraordinary series called "The Harold Sequence," completely undermines realism's boundaries, and the collection becomes genuinely uncanny. I assume that most people have experienced moments when their minds stall, and, suddenly disoriented, they find themselves briefly open to the invisible pasts and alternative futures that surround them, latent possibilities and lapses that ordinary life necessarily ignores. Wyatt's stories seem to take this condition as their starting point. Some of Wyatt's characters spend their lives stumbling over ancient misunderstandings and miscommunications, others seek to undo trauma; most are caught, spellbound and thrashing, in what might be the most inscrutable of all

human relationships: the family. The wonderfully elastic dialogue Wyatt creates for a Thanksgiving dinner not only captures precisely how people speak both to and past each other, but it also functions as a zany compression of human limitations. May suggests that narrative voice is of primary importance to short fiction. Wyatt's narrators are capable of summoning the crux of a man's life in a single paragraph, making seductive—not intrusive—philosophical announcements. In the final story, "Doors," the reader is surprised by the ease with which the surreal blends with the fearful textures of ordinary life.

If one reads *The Man Who Beat the Man* shortly after finishing Taylor's collection, one wonders whether there isn't something to Hegel's notion of the Zeitgeist after all: both books feature dealers in collectibles. It's closer to the mark to say that both writers use this plot device to explore the unsuspected intimacy between people. If desired objects can exist as commodities with an arbitrary market value, they can also participate in a symbolic exchange, when one person offers (or requests) an object as a gift. While Sonny Liston's boxing gloves take on great monetary value in the title story, they more importantly facilitate gradual understanding between the inarticulate boxer and his upper-class white female tutor. But in order to underscore the intense privacy of their friendship, André places their moment together within a series of narratives showcasing disparate characters whose motivations are utterly alien to the tutor and to the prize fighter. In advising that one should tell "the Truth but tell it slant—," Emily Dickinson could have been describing André's poetics. Not that his stories are overly circuitous; rather, he brings various sensibilities together in order to make space for encounters that are simple, haunting, and true. For instance, "Mr. Lu's Garden," a story that hovers over the trauma of Vietnam, moves here and there over different decades and geographic locations, and assembles strikingly dissimilar lives. André eventually allows them to coalesce in an ending that poignantly asks the essential ethical question: "What are my responsibilities to my brother?"

Over the length of a distinguished career, May has contributed more to the study of short fiction than any other person. *The Short Story: The Reality of the Artifice* draws upon his previous work, but also adds to the field by tracing a history of the genre from Boccaccio to the late twentieth century. Arguing that short fiction secularizes mythic perception, May provides both an account of generic change and incisive readings of canonical authors and specific stories. He wears his erudition lightly; he is equally at home discussing the implications of Anton Chekhov's poetics, Thomas Mann on Freud, or Susan Lohafer's recent work on the short story and cognitive psychology. One of the book's greatest merits is its concluding bibliographic essay, which will be indispensable to students new to the short story as well as scholars familiar with the field. The only shortcoming of the study is that it pays scant attention to Canadian short story writers, though I suspect that this is less May's fault than the publisher's interest in accommodating an American college audience. Whether one thinks of Mavis Gallant or Alice Munro, or the writers reviewed here, Canadians have had and continue to have an enormous influence on the short story as a form. Perhaps we'll be fortunate enough that when May writes his next book, he will turn his critical acumen to this writing.

Place, Space, Identity

Jaap Lintvelt and François Paré
Frontières flottantes. Lieu et espace dans les cultures francophones du Canada. Shifting Boundaries. Place and Space in the Francophone Cultures of Canada Rodopi. US $58.00

Reviewed by Ursula Mathis-Moser

Place and space as parameters of literary criticism have become increasingly visible in recent years. This can be seen in the work of authors such as Marc Augé, Erica Carter, and Rosemary Chapman amongst others. The aim of Lintvelt and Paré's impressive collection of essays is to show how the experience of place and space "can be influenced by social class, cultural identity . . . , as well as female and male conceptions of gendered identity." Consequently, they examine the representations of space in the novel, the theatre, the cinema, and in texts which deal with the past. Another objective is to explore the complexity of francophone cultures in Canada, hence the inclusion of articles about a variety of francophone authors from outside Quebec. Throughout these explorations the question is raised of how identities are constructed, be it with the help of mechanisms of exclusion, or with phenomena of contact and penetration.

More precisely, in the historical part of the book, topics such as the French perception of the Native Canadian as an incarnation of the ancient Gaul, the beginnings of travel literature as a necessary reaction to spatial conditions, and European influence on the shaping of attitudes towards urban space are examined. The section dedicated to the novel, subdivided into "espace identitaire," "espace migrant," and "espace sexué," opens with an analysis of novels depicting the cities of Quebec and Montreal. The authors insist both on significant boundaries, such as "la haute ville" and "la basse ville," and on the subsequent process of liberation from spatial limits which tends to go hand in hand with social and sexual liberation. Further, new aspects such as being American, bilingual writing, and the problematics of conflicting mental spaces are explored. Gérard Bessette, Louis Caron, Jacques Godbout, Louis Hamelin, André Langevin, and Francine Noël are all authors dealt with individually in this section.

"Migrant space" introduces authors like Ying Chen, while two other essays try to locate migrant space and its description within a historical perspective. Accordingly, migrant writing represents the final stage of a development towards literary "nomadism." It can also be seen within a series of waves of emigration and immigration, all of them shaping the Quebec "imaginaire." "Sexual space" is illustrated in texts by Jacques Poulin and Anne Hébert. André Paiement, the Franco-Ontarian dramatist, illustrates the theatrical space. A survey of space in the theatre of Quebec and the role of the Quebec cinema, as compared to that of the United States, rounds off the volume.

Missed Opportunities

Kevin Longfield
From Fire to Flood: A History of Theatre in Manitoba. Signature $19.95

Martin Bragg, Per Brask and Roy Surette, eds.
7 Cannons. Playwrights Canada $29.95

Reviewed by Malcolm Page

I was pleased when I learned that "A History of Theatre in Manitoba," to cite Longfield's subtitle, was being published. So far we have only the two-volume, multi-author history of Ontario theatre, and only when provincial histories are completed are we likely to have the necessary facts for the writing of a full history of Canadian theatre. E. Ross Stuart did publish *The History*

of Prairie Theatre in 1984, and I expected Longfield to expand and update Stuart's work, but my expectation was wrong.

My first grumble is that this history is in fact confined to Winnipeg: Brandon is mentioned twice and Portage la Prairie once. Second, some comment on what is known of First Nations' ceremonies and rituals is needed. Longfield has merely a page on storytelling traditions. Third, keeping to chronology in a study of this kind is difficult, but I was often jarred: for example, the heyday of touring a hundred years ago is reached on page 48 and three pages later the reader is jerked back to the Theatre Royal of 1870. Fourth, there are numerous spelling errors in titles and proper nouns.

Fifth, much of Longfield's study is of doubtful relevance. His chapter on great national theatres reads like notes for a very elementary lecture, with dates for the birth and death of Shakespeare. Longfield observes: "Medical and religious training do not seem to be a barrier to becoming a playwright." A joke? Similarly, why record that Canadian soldiers in World War I suffered because their Ross rifles were defective? Longfield likes to work in his politically correct opinions (objection to black-face minstrel shows; protest at internment of aliens in the world wars), so the long sympathetic account of the Winnipeg General Strike is predictable. Such comments attempt to contextualize theatre, but Longfield makes almost no connections. David Spector, in an article Longfield appears not to know, demonstrated how to put early Winnipeg theatre into context: "irrelevant in the extreme to daily 1880s existence, theatre was altered by evolving national, and local economic, social and political forces to a point where it emerged as a cultural appendage of a turn of the century business morality." (See "From Frivolity to Purposefulness," *Canadian Drama*, 4.1, Spring 1978.)

I can forgive Longfield for attributing Browning's "A man's reach should exceed his grasp" to Wordsworth, but my confidence slumped when I read: "When the John Holden Players folded in 1940, Canada had no professional theatre until the Stratford Festival opened in 1953," a sentence, incidentally, lifted without acknowledgement from Stuart's book. While the term "professional" in the 40s and 50s is tricky, forms of professional theatre existed in Vancouver, Toronto, Ottawa, Montreal, and St John's.

I hoped in vain for original research, particularly in the earlier period. I would like to know, for instance, if Robert G. Lawrence is correct in stating in the *Oxford Companion to Canadian Theatre* that Winnipeg was "always a profitable pause" for touring companies. More seriously, Longfield ignores existing published research. He appears unaware of Douglas Arrell's twenty-page report on Winnipeg theatre critics, 1898–1906, in *Establishing Our Boundaries.* It appears that Ramon Hathorn (*Our Lady of the Snows*, 1996, on Sarah Bernhardt in Canada) and Lawrence (essays on the Canadian tours of Marie Tempest, unnamed by Longfield, and Sir John Martin-Harvey) have laboured in vain. Jars Balan has reported forty productions in Ukrainian in Winnipeg between 1904 and 1912, but we don't find them in *From Fire to Flood.* Winnipeg Jewish theatre is mentioned, but not Myron Love's 1995 account of it in *Performing Arts.* French-language theatre is also merely mentioned. Yet Annette St. Pierre notes that seventeen francophone theatre groups were active in the 1920s and 1930s, and her *Le Rideau se lève au Manitoba* (1980) is not in the bibliography, nor is Kate Taylor's *Globe and Mail* update on Le Cercle Molière on 9 March 1996.

In the second half of the book Longfield usefully supplies some information and scraps of assessment on some groups, such as Primus and the Popular Theatre

Alliance, and chapters on "audiences vs. aesthetics" (the start of a worthwhile discussion), reviewers, and playwrights. This last, however, lists names, or play titles without authors' names, as though aimed at a coterie. The underlying theme seems to involve wondering why Manitoba has produced neither outstanding dramatists nor Great Theatre. He supplies a twenty-page list of productions since 1958 (the list for Le Cercle Moliere, founded in 1925, begins only in 1968): I hope this is accurate.

From Fire to Flood is breezy, chatty, colloquial—the Duke of Connaught as Governor General is described as "not much of a drama fan"—aiming at some local general reader. But we must still wait for a full and reliable account of theatre in Manitoba.

7 Cannons contains seven plays by women performed between 1989 and 1998: *Transit of Venus* by Maureen Hunter; *Sky* by Connie Gault; *Glace Bay Miner's Museum* by Wendy Lill; *The Darling Family* by Linda Griffiths; *The Hope Slide* by Joan MacLeod; *Lion in the Streets* by Judith Thompson; and *The Monument* by Colleen Wagner. Most have been previously reviewed in *Canadian Literature*, so I need not attempt capsule summary and evaluation. The dramas show variety in style and location: Nova Scotia from Lill and BC from MacLeod; Prairie Gothic from Gault; the hostile big city called up by Thompson; eighteenth-century France from Hunter; life in the present for Griffiths; and a No Person's Land for Wagner. The editors give no reasons for their choices, except to observe that the playwrights are "white, established, boomer"; so don't look here for Black or First Nations writers. Nor do the editors discuss trends in dramas by women. The title acknowledges that this is a premature canonization of some of the best living English-language women writers. *7 Cannons* does have a great virtue—seven play texts for the price of two.

Dialectical Laurence

David Lucking

Ancestors and Gods: Margaret Laurence and the Dialectics of Identity. Peter Lang US $49.95

Reviewed by Nathalie Cooke

The titular phrase "ancestors and gods" betrays much and, at the same time, very little about this book's real subject: Margaret Laurence's dialectics. Other sets of Laurentian binaries might have served just as well for a title—"order and disarray," for example, or "then and now." These phrases also appear frequently in Laurence's work, and the precise meaning of each term, and therefore the relationship between the terms in each pair, are constantly shifting. That these binaries *are* so interchangeable is precisely Lucking's point: the phrase "ancestors and gods" serves as a representative paradigm for "an ambivalence pervading the whole of Laurence's work," often expressed in terms of tension between two apparent opposites.

Laurence's dialectical method, as Lucking envisions it, consists of an articulation of two principles as seeming contraries—ancestors and gods, motion and stasis, repression and liberation, order and disarray, then and now—and a narrative that sets into play a process of symbolic mediation. His answer to the question posed by his opening chapter "What is Canadian about Canadian Literature?" is precisely its negotiation of the seemingly contradictory imperatives: from its ancestors (France, England and America to a nation situated, and I'm quoting from Lucking's introduction here, "betwixt and between," which feels its "authentic cultural roots lie elsewhere") and from its gods (still to be discovered by this nation in a world "dominated by the counterfeit cults of money and power, material success and eternal youth" and ever sought in the form of an authentic myth, a kind of "intellectual Grail quest").

Lucking's approach to the subject of Laurence's dialectics in *Ancestors and Gods* is itself dialectical. Without exception, Lucking opens each chapter-length discussion by exposing a central contradiction at the heart of the work in question. In *The Stone Angel* chapter, which looks to the tension between what he calls the "world of civilization" and the "world of nature," the dialectic is signaled even in the title: "The Double-Named Stone, Negotiating Contraries." Most effective is the one chapter that compares two books, the sister novels of the Manawaka cycle. Ironically, this is the one chapter in which Lucking's dialectic resolves rather than exposes contraries. Lucking argues that the two novels are complementary in their treatment of similar themes, though from a "radically different" point of view. By tracing the parallel timelines of these two novels, thereby linking the epiphanic statements of Rachel (from *A Jest of God)* and her niece (in *The Fire-Dwellers)* both chronologically and symbolically, and emphasizing the trajectory towards communion in both novels, Lucking effectively counters critical resistance to reading these two novels as closely paired.

Dialectical method motivates the book as well as its individual chapters. *Ancestors and Gods* is organized around two seemingly incompatible principles. On the one hand, it is structured as a chronological examination of all of Laurence's full-length fictional works. On the other hand, the argument is developed around the motivating principles of Laurence's work: its method (vacillation, ambivalence, contrariety); symbols of mediation (journey, river, bridge, and language itself); and central themes ("nature and foundation of identity, the constraints upon human communication, the true essence of freedom, the complex interplay between tradition and change"). Synthesis of these two organizational principles emerges more easily in the chapters devoted to the Manawaka series than in those devoted to Laurence's travel writing, perhaps because their self-conscious protagonists find themselves negotiating a similar dialectic, as their points of view shift and develop over time. I couldn't help but wonder whether mention of the censorship controversy surrounding *The Diviners*, as well as scrutiny of her unpublished subsequent novel, might have given Lucking additional perspectives on the deadening as well as enlivening effect of oppositional thinking.

Lucking's dialectical method gives his book the upper hand on a number of other commentaries of Laurence's work. Most obviously, it enables his close scrutiny of Laurence's two seemingly different bodies of work—her travel writing and the Manawaka fiction—and provides an analytical model through which to discuss both. (Earlier studies have tended to focus on one or the other, Laurence's African work only coming into the critical spotlight since Fiona Sparrow's 1992 book.) However, the imperative of a dialectical method of analysis in expository prose is ultimately to expose the processes of mediation. Consequently, although *Ancestors and Gods* acknowledges its own critical ancestry (the bibliography of secondary material is comprehensive, despite the rather glaring omission of reference to two published volumes of Laurence's correspondence with Al Purdy and Adele Wiseman), it is not particularly interested in its points of divergence from current critical reception. (By contrast, we are very interested in those points of divergence and, as Canadian readers, we are especially interested in hearing more about Lucking's own perceptions of them.) While this book participates actively in the critical dialogue surrounding Laurence's work in Canada, it does not signal the ways in which it extends that discussion. One obvious way, of course, is that with this publication (which contains material published in earlier versions in Italy and

Canada, as well as in Lucking's 1995 book *Myth and Identity*), Lucking, who is a professor of English at the University of Lecce in Italy, continues to participate in the conversation about Canadian literature on both sides of the Atlantic—itself a dialectical activity of sorts.

Diasporic Trajectories

Gordon Mathews and Tai-lok Lui
Consuming Hong Kong. Hong Kong UP n.p

Nyan Shah
Contagious Divides: Epidemics and Race in San Francisco's Chinatown. U of California P $19.95

Anthony W. Lee
Picturing Chinatown: Art and Orientalism in San Francisco. U of California P $45.00

Reviewed by Lily Cho

In the recent rise of diaspora studies, the locations of diasporic communities, including Chinatowns, have become increasingly important. As their designation suggests, Chinatowns are at once cities within cities and also miniaturized "Chinas" outside China. As both *Picturing Chinatown* and *Contagious Divides* establish, this view of Chinatown functions as an Orientalist fantasy of objectification and containment. Contributing to a growing body of scholarship on urban ethnic communities, Lee and Shah reveal Chinatown as a ghettoized space of negotiation and survival where Chinese inhabitants have struggled for representation.

Picturing Chinatown takes up the visual archive of San Francisco's Chinatown, including the work of well-known photographers such as Dorothy Lange, Arthur Genthe, and Isaiah West Taber, as well as the work of lesser known photographers and artists such as Louis Stellman, Yun Gee, and the performers of the Forbidden City nightclub. The early survey-style photographs of Chinatown were almost devoid of people and sought objectivity in the very flatness of their representation. The paintings of Edwin Deakin and Theodore Wores attempted to domesticate the social and cultural differences of Chinatown by representing it within the nineteenth-century tradition of the picturesque. The flânerie of the Bohemian Club captured Chinatown's inhabitants unaware in the passing of their daily lives. The photographs of Genthe and Lange feature an almost ethnographic quality. Lee identifies the currents of homoerotic exchange which the alternative space of Chinatown facilitated, and, particularly in his discussions of opium dens and their intimacy, Lee reveals Chinatown as a space of white desire.

Lee reads for the possibilities of subversion, and while these are largely speculation, the final chapters of *Picturing Chinatown* do offer an alternative visual archive in the artwork of Yun Gee and the Chinese Revolutionary Artists' Club and the record of performances at Charlie Low's Forbidden City nightclub with their turn to modernism and the work of Mexican revolutionary Diego Rivera. Rivera met the members of the Chinese Revolutionary Artists' Club during his visit to San Francisco in 1930. The performers of Charlie Low's nightclub may have been among the earliest performers of ethnic drag in San Francisco. In the performance posters and flyers of the club, and the photographs of some of its principal dancers, we can read challenges to the representations proposed by Genthe, Lange, and Wores.

In *Contagious Divides* Nyan Shah offers a historical account of another regime of representation—that of the policing of the healthy body. This is an excellent and informative historical account of San Francisco's Chinatown as a space of anxiety. If Chinatown was a portal to otherness for white communities such as the Bohemian Club, it also posed the risk of infection. By imposing a *cordon sanitaire,* San Francisco authorities attempted to define the border between Chinese and non-Chinese during

the outbreak of bubonic plague in 1900. The pandemic consolidated the power of public health officials and allowed for a racialized discourse of disease. The notion of "healthy citizenship" pervades the redevelopment of Chinatown after the earthquake and fire of 1906. The rebuilding of San Francisco's Chinatown was given over to principles of health which worked in conjunction with business interests to create a commercial tourist destination. Notions of public health are not innocent of ideology, and policy decisions made in the name of public health in reality target otherness and its alleged aberrancy.

Shah introduces the idea of a "subaltern public sphere." Men and women exchanged information about the invasive health examinations they were subjected to on Angel Island, and Shah suggests that the circulation of this knowledge functioned as a subaltern public sphere which exists in the poetry inscribed on the walls of the barracks at Angel Island, in the satirical editorials in the Chinese newspapers, in the coaching papers that "taught" potential immigrants how to answer the various questions of the health officials, and in a number of oral histories. Using these kinds of archives is not new to subaltern historiography and postcolonial theory, but situating this information against Habermas's notion of the public sphere suggests possibilities for further work.

Finally, while Lee and Shah write from the sites of migratory dispersion, *Consuming Hong Kong* deals with one of the many possible "centres" of Chinese diaspora culture. No work has yet been done on the idea of consumption in Hong Kong as an ethnographic particularity. Using sociological and anthropological approaches, the collection looks on consumption as a cultural phenomenon. However, taking the lead from its editors, the contributors to the volume generally reinforce the idea that the consumption of material goods can function as a form of identity construction. In the wake of Hong Kong's return to China, the collection suggests that identity through material consumption is preferable to identity as coerced by the state, that coercion by advertisement is preferable to coercion by bullets. I find this to be a troubling dichotomy. Is global capitalism innocent of the use of violence?

These books attest to the increasing interest in metropolitan Chinese diasporic populations. The narrative of metropolitan arrival dominates our understanding of Asian migration. Yet, the history of large-scale Chinese migration to the Americas occurs through the collusion of global capitalism and state violence, through the importation of Chinese indentured labour. Perhaps, in our search for a subaltern public sphere and alternative narratives, we might turn away from focusing so much on the sites of arrival and look instead to the experience of the passage.

Confronting the Past

Suzette Mayr
The Widows. NeWest P $16.95

Reviewed by Doris Wolf

It is at once difficult and not very difficult to sum up the content of Suzette Mayr's second novel, *The Widows.* On the one hand, the novel has a clear and memorable focus: three elderly German immigrant women, Hannelore, Clotilde, and Frau Schnadelhuber, take a trip over Niagara Falls in a bright orange space-age barrel with the help of Hannelore's granddaughter, Cleopatra Maria. All of its details and events touch on the motivations of these characters for their participation in this courageous and (many would claim) foolhardy act. Yet the novel explores so many pertinent issues of our contemporary moment that it becomes quite hard to recount its contents in any succinct way.

Not only does Mayr explore issues such as sexual desire (both lesbian and heterosexual), ageism, and racism, but she does so in a novel that successfully and provocatively crosses a number of generic boundaries, including the immigrant narrative, historical fiction, and the feminist road narrative.

Perhaps the central issue addressed in *The Widows* is one that Mayr began to explore with her first novel, *Moon Honey* (1995), also published by NeWest Press, as part of its Nunatak Fictions new author series. In *Moon Honey*, the author explores race relations in Alberta through her protagonist Carmen, a young white girl who magically transforms into a black girl part way through the book. In *The Widows*, race is examined through Cleopatra Maria, a young woman of uncertain ancestry who comes to internalize the overt racism of her white paternal grandmother, Hannelore Schmitt. Immigrating to Canada from Germany when she is in her sixties, Hannelore manages to drive a wedge between Cleopatra Maria and her mother, Rosario, whom Hannelore disparagingly describes at one point as "half mongrel." By the time Cleopatra Maria is a teenager, she rejects both her mother and her racial background due in part to her surroundings, the white suburbs of Edmonton, Alberta, but in larger part to her Oma's influence. Hannelore, we quickly learn, is a generally narrow-minded and bigoted person, with clear racist, to say nothing of homophobic, tendencies.

Through Hannelore and her relationship with her granddaughter, Mayr creates much of the comedy of her novel as well as an intensely complex and often uncomfortable portrayal of immigration to Canada and the reciprocal process of Old/New World influence. Growing up with German immigrant parents, I found it easy to recognize and laugh at many of Hannelore's stereotypically German mannerisms and attitudes—the ardent love of good hearty German food, poking fun at Bavarians, the obsession with order and cleanliness. Hannelore's preoccupation with her past in Germany also reminded me of the nostalgic longing for the homeland that was part of the immigrant experience of my parents and their community of German friends. Yet the past in which Hannelore is so deeply mired is one that evokes the racism and homophobia of Nazi Germany, and this past continues to intrude on the present in uneasy ways. Much of the novel's narrative impulse concerns Hannelore's attempts to let go of the propaganda of the Nazi era as she negotiates a new life in Canada. Cleopatra Maria, in turn, has to learn how to resist her Oma's teachings, reconnect with her mother, and embrace her mixed race background.

Mayr's novel, engagingly written, brings all its various strands together in an unforgettable and happy conclusion. The three elderly women survive their trip over Niagara Falls, but more than that, they begin to live new and more satisfying lives afterwards. With its postmodern and deconstructive tendencies and humour, Mayr's work fits within the tradition of prairie writing forged by writers such as Robert Kroetsch and Aritha van Herk. With its emphasis on race, it can also be located in the next generation of prairie writing which includes authors such as Hiromi Goto, Joan Crate, and Yasmin Ladha.

Short Fictions

JoAnn McCaig
Reading in Alice Munro's Archives. Wilfrid Laurier U P $24.95

Saros Cowasjee
The Oxford Anthology of Raj Stories. Oxford U P $30.85

Reviewed by Kathryn Ready

Reading in Alice Munro's Archives begins with a discouraging admission: "This is not

the book I wanted to publish."According to McCaig, she inadvertently upset Munro when her earlier research was cited by John Metcalf in a *National Post* essay claiming that for Canadian writers to be genuinely embraced in Canada they must first enjoy commercial success in the US. McCaig was attacked in the press and denied further permission to quote from Munro's unpublished letters and other materials sold to the University of Calgary archives.

In her opening preface, McCaig raises troubling questions about the extent to which authors should be allowed to decide how the material they sell to archives is used by scholars. The ambiguity of the Canadian Copyright Act's fair use clause seems to pose a genuine threat to academic freedom.

It is evident that nothing in this book warrants the refusal of copyright. Taking a feminist cultural studies approach, McCaig examines Munro's formative relationship with mentor Robert Weaver, her dealings with publishers during the 1970s, and her ultimate success as a serious literary writer in Canada and abroad. Central to her discussion is French theorist Pierre Bourdieu's analysis of the nineteenth-century French cultural industry. In particular, McCaig draws on Bourdieu's theory of the opposition between art and commerce. Bourdieu argues that commercially successful art is considered less culturally valuable than art that is not, and indeed, that artistic "disinterestedness" (that is, vis-à-vis the marketplace) is a precondition to generating economic capital from cultural capital. McCaig claims that this opposition between art and commerce informs Munro's attitudes towards authorship and her expected role as spokesperson for Canadian culture (complicated by anxieties over her class background and gender). Simultaneously, she suggests that succumbing to the pressure of the US market during the 1970s helped secure Munro's reputation as a serious literary artist.

Bourdieu has been accused of providing an account of the cultural industry that is both rigidly deterministic and overly pessimistic. The same might be said of McCaig's picture of Munro's career. She allows Munro some capacity to challenge the status quo on the issues of "gender, genre, and class." She notes especially the way that Munro effectively exploited her success to challenge the longstanding bias against the short story as a "minor genre." However, she associates Munro's literary success directly with the largely apolitical nature of her fiction. Other possible objections to McCaig's arguments concern the often straightforward transfer of Bourdieu's analysis to mid- to late-twentieth-century North America. There is also a notable lack of literary analysis (what does appear relies heavily on undefended generalizations) and a tendency to overuse quotations from Bourdieu.

McCaig denies any intention of charging Munro with "cynical calculation." She often mentions the pleasure that Munro's fiction has brought her, suggesting that an awareness of commercial motivations need not undermine the reading experience. Still, for her, such pleasure is ultimately secondary, and she cannot escape the implication that she is passing judgement on her subject.

The Oxford Anthology of Raj Stories is Saros Cowasjee's third collection of Raj stories. This latest anthology is largely a consolidation of *Stories from the Raj* (1982) and *More Stories from the Raj and After* (1986). Much of the latest introduction is taken almost word for word from the earlier two, and over half of the thirty-one stories are repeats from the other collections.

With the exception of Rudyard Kipling and George Orwell, most of Cowasjee's selected writers are virtually unknown. This is a shame. The collection presents both a far ranging and richly detailed vision of India's colonial past. Unfortunately, Cowasjee has not updated his introductory

material (some of it now two decades old) in the process of abridgement. Nor has he furnished notes to explain historical and geographical references.

Given the ongoing scholarly interest in canon formation, the editor might have more extensively addressed his criteria for selection, especially in light of certain omissions. A significant difference between this particular anthology and the previous two is the absence of any native writers. In the introduction to the first anthology, Cowasjee justifies the inclusion of native writers as a counterpoint to the British perspective on India. It is not clear why such a counterpoint is unwanted here.

Cowasjee offers a number of generalizations challenged even by the stories in this collection. In his view, the British were partial to Muslims over Hindus. By way of illustration he cites Flora Annie Steel's compassionate portrayal of a Muslim extremist in the story "Shub'rat." Yet he ignores her story "The Gift of Battle," which features two men, one Hindu and the other Muslim, forced to work together as judges. Steel remarks, "Of different race, different religion, something deeper in them than these surface variations coincided." The Anglo-Indian writers are less pro-British and less hostile to any form of Indian nationalism than Cowasjee suggests. Discussing Indian nationalism, he fails to mention the sympathetic Muslim nationalist in Otto Rothfield's "In the Twilight" and reads rather harshly Joseph Hitrec's account of the three student vandals in "The Fearless Will Always Have It." In claiming that British writers held a low view of interracial unions, the editor glosses over Alice Perrin's "Mary Jones," about a mixed marriage that has apparently survived and flourished for an entire lifetime, even when transposed back to England.

In *Ornamentalism: How the British Saw Their Empire* (2002), David Cannadine argues that past scholarly portrayals of colonial relations have been oversimplified by too narrow a focus on race. Cowasjee is certainly open to this accusation here. He largely ignores class and gender, although the stories have interesting things to say about both. Indeed, the number of women writers included in this anthology has not prevented Cowasjee from excising some of his best earlier comments about British women writers in India, including the fact that they have provided a more intimate picture of Indian life than Kipling did.

Nevertheless, many of Cowasjee's observations remain suggestive, and his anthology deserves to be read for years to come.

Fun Picture Books

Elaine McLeod Colleen Wood, illus. *Lessons from Mother Earth.* Douglas and McIntyre $15.95

Susan Vande Griek Pascal Milelli, illus. *The Art Room.* Douglas and McIntyre $15.95

Frieds Wishinsky Dean Griffiths, illus. *Give Maggie a Chance.* Fitzhenry and Whiteside $18.95

Reviewed by Lynn Wytenbroek

We live in serious times, and there are lots of things children need to know to get by, or should know to be more understanding and compassionate about others. These three picture books all have something worthwhile to say to children, while also being very entertaining . Yet they are very different indeed.

Lessons from Mother Earth is a story about a small child exploring her grandmother's garden. But the garden is the natural land around the grandmother's home, and, along with the child in the story, the child reader learns about the importance of harvesting what is available in each season, and taking only as much as one needs to keep the garden healthy and productive. The book also shows some edible wild plants, and what sequence they grow in.

The book offers some wisdom on caring for the land so that it may provide for all of us continuously. In these days of global warming and environmental degradation, this book has an important message for children and adults alike about stewardship.

Colleen Wood's art is most appropriate for the book. It is colourful and quite detailed in its depiction of grandma's large garden, and the plants and creatures that flourish there. The watercolour illustrations have great detail in the close-up pictures of the plants, making the plants quite identifiable as part of the message of the book. Clothing and implements, such as the hand-woven baskets the grandmother uses to harvest the plants and berries, reflect the cultural context of the story. The background tends to be depicted with less detail than the foreground, and Tess and her grandmother, while dynamic, tend to be less well illustrated than the plant life.

A book that has a real element of delight is *The Art Room.* Told from the child's perspective, it relates the adventures two children have when taking art classes from Emily Carr. It shows the joy of the children in Emily Carr's animal-filled studio and the trips to paint scenes in the city or in nature. It shows the importance of art in opening minds and souls to the world around. It is poetically written, and the text certainly matches the subject in its artistry. While the story is playful and full of delight, it also gives the reader a glimpse into the wonderfully dynamic and amazingly complex person that was Emily Carr. Thus the book will appeal as much to readers as to children.

The oil paintings for this book by Pascal Milelli are themselves works of art. They are full of detail and life, and depict the children's joy and awe at the spectacle of the animals roaming free in the studio, while showing the concentration on the young faces as they work on their art. He makes Emily Carr warmly human. My only criticism is that perhaps oil paintings were a little too heavy for the book, and although they are masterly, they miss out somewhat on the delight evoked by the joyous style and poetry of the writing.

Give Maggie a Chance is different again. A story about a child who freezes every time she goes up to the front of the class to read, the book shows the difficulty children often have in expressing themselves, even when they know how to do something. Of course, not all children have these problems, and the obnoxious Kimberly has no trouble reading to the class, and no trouble going out of her way to make Maggie feel stupid after she has succeeded where Maggie has failed. Kimberly is an intellectual bully, and with each passing day, Maggie becomes less and less capable and Kimberly becomes more and more obnoxious. That is, until the day when Kimberly sneers at Maggie's best friend Sam, who stutters. It is in defending Sam that Maggie's own confidence is restored, and she is finally able to read to the class.

This book shows a real understanding of how children function, but it is also beautifully written. *Give Maggie a Chance* is, in fact, as poetic in its own way as Vande Griek's book. Wishinsky has a tremendous sense of speech rhythms, and the story has a captivating rhythm that makes it a treat to read aloud.

Griffiths's art for the book is ideal. Although the story speaks of the children as ordinary children, Griffiths depicts them as anthropomorphized cats. Maggie is a marmalade cat, Sam a tabby, and irritating Kimberly is a Persian. Mrs. Brown is, most appropriately, a Siamese cat. The emotions are captured nicely in the illustrations, but making the characters cats rather than people softens the story, diffusing any potential didacticism. Wishinsky leaves the child readers with a sense of their own capabilities despite repeated failures and embar-

rassment, and despite the flagrant successes of the Kimberlys of the world. Overall the art and story work together beautifully to produce an encouraging and highly amusing book for young readers.

Editor's Choice

Helen Meilleur
A Pour of Rain: Stories from a West Coast Fort. Raincoast $14.95

Charles G.D. Roberts
Kindred of the Wild. Exile $22.95

Reviewed by Paul Stuewe

Stephen Hume's foreword to *A Pour of Rain* describes it as "a document of great importance to British Columbians" that offers "a unique portrait of the origins of this province." Helen Meilleur's narrative style intersperses discursive autobiographical reminiscence with evocations of the relevant historical contexts, and if *A Pour of Rain* is indeed "a unique portrait"—although the phrase probably reflects its editor's enthusiasm rather than a conclusion derived from comparison with the thousands of similar volumes—it is also a randomly organized and disturbingly colonialist text that would not be granted canonical status by many British Columbians.

The question of organization arises not so much because of the leaps and gaps between Meilleur's remembrances—this is, after all, *her* life, and she can choose to narrate it any way she likes—but because of the historical material that she brings in as background to her stories and anecdotes. Since this material is as jumbled and achronological as her reminiscences, and there are no reader-friendly accessories such as a timeline or other editorial apparatus, *A Pour of Rain* does not provide anything resembling a coherent account of British Columbia's "origins." Although readers who already possess the necessary historical framework will be able to place Meilleur's recollections within the larger context of the province's development, anyone lacking such a background will find it very difficult to organize the book's content into a coherent narrative.

A more problematic aspect of the author's treatment of origins is her attitude toward British Columbia's Native Peoples. The latter are represented as only marginally human savages whose culture consists of "the tyranny of the medicine man, the terrors of witchcraft, the inexorable class system, slavery and retaliatory killings." Meilleur cites these practices in justifying the removal of Native children from their homes in order to place them in residential schools where they will be assimilated into the white world. Noting the regimented behaviour and uniformly respectable dress of a group of such schoolchildren, Meilleur observes that "most of them appeared to be happy in their lives," a judgement that subsequent events have cruelly refuted. Her constant disparagement of Native cultures makes *A Pour of Rain* more of a denial than a celebration of British Columbia's origins. Although students of social history will find useful source material in this volume, its lack of organization and pervasive racist discourse make it inappropriate for other than specialist use.

Kindred of the Wild reprints a 1902 collection of Charles G.D. Roberts's animal tales minus "The King of the Mamozekel," and with the addition of "The Gauntlet of Fire" from *More Kindred of the Wild* (1911). Editor Sean Virgo justifies this on the grounds that the omitted story has been frequently anthologized, a true but irrelevant consideration for those of us who see some merit in preserving the circumstances of a text's original appearance. We are not so blessed with in-print editions of Roberts's work that we can afford to dismiss a mildly tainted one, however, especially since this is a representative offering

of the often melodramatic but nonetheless consistently engrossing narratives that captivated period readers.

Virgo's introduction deftly sets these tales in the context of the late-Victorian fascination with animal stories such as Kipling's *Jungle Books*, London's *White Fang*, and Seton's *Lives of the Hunted*, a phenomenon that in its frequent anthropomorphism seems to reflect deep anxiety regarding the unruly desires that might render the social as well as the natural order "red in tooth and claw." Although the attribution of human characteristics to animal characters has been an issue in the reception of Roberts's stories, his afterword to *Kindred of the Wild* makes a strong case for seeing human/animal as a continuum rather than a dichotomy: "The animal story at its highest point of development is a psychological romance constructed on a framework of natural science."

In addition to their convincing integration of observed behaviour and inferred psychology, Roberts's narratives also exhibit a characteristic progression from the evocation of nature's spiritual essence to the graphic depiction of how the fit survive by consuming the less fit. "The Homesickness of Kehonka," for example, opens with a resonant portrayal of an "illusive atmosphere . . . full of the ghosts of rain," where "tenuous spring clouds . . . shut out the stars" and "Space and mystery, mystery and space, lay abroad upon the vague levels of marsh and tide." The goose Kehonka enters this world flying freely through the skies, but a farmer's well-meant clipping of his wings leads to an inexorable death in the jaws of a wily fox. In lesser hands this transition from edenic setting to predator-prey conflict could easily be sentimentalized, but Roberts remains faithful to the logic of such situations by recording, rather than regretting, the means by which the stronger consume the weaker. By turns allusively poetic and harshly realistic, *Kindred of the Wild* offers far more mature and complex versions of the animal story than our Disney-dominated popular culture is capable of providing, and also deserves the serious attention of students of Canadian literature.

Ravissements et exils

Andrée A. Michaud
Le ravissement L'instant même 24.95 $

Maryse Rouy
Mary l'Irlandaise Québec Amérique 24.95 $

Comptes rendus par Marie Carrière

Étrange et troublant, *Le ravissement*, cinquième roman d'Andrée A. Michaud, met en jeu mémoire, réalité ainsi que certitude des genres littéraires. À la fois roman policier, récit psychologique et conte fantastique faisant maintes références au *baseball* et à la culture populaire américaine, cet ouvrage évoque la détresse de vivre que communiquent le ciel, le vent et les couleurs de l'été des Bois noirs, ainsi que ses images qui rappellent le jardin d'Éden, le monde de la sorcellerie, la nostalgie de l'enfance et le côté maléfique des contes de fée. La dualité y est thème récurrent : réel et irréel, rêve et cauchemar, lucidité et folie, mort et immortalité viennent s'affronter et se confondre.

L'histoire est divisée en deux parties et narrée premièrement par une jeune femme troublée qui cherche à se reposer aux Bois noirs, où l'enlèvement de la petite Talia Jacob (durent l'été 1988) se déroule alors qu'une folie déjà menaçante rattrape la narratrice. Le « ravissement » se manifeste donc aux sens multiples du terme, y compris l'effet « ravisseur » exaltant du lieu enchanteur des Bois noirs et de ses personnages qui ensorcellent la nouvelle arrivée, ainsi que le « ravissement », la perte de ses sens, de sa mémoire et de sa prise sur le réel suite au « ravissement », c'est-à-dire à l'enlèvement mystérieux de Talia. La trame

narrative, comme les événements liés à la disparition bouleversante de l'enfant, s'embrouille, et l'on demeure incertain de la fiabilité des propos racontés. Dix ans plus tard, un homme, deuxième narrateur du roman, enquête sur un événement identique, la disparition d'une autre petite fille nommée Alicia Duchamp. Bien qu'il réussisse à percer le mystère de cet endroit où les enfants ne grandissent pas et où les habitants ne vieillissent pas non plus, le fonctionnement surnaturel des Bois noirs continue à remplacer le cycle naturel de vie et de mort, et semble, au bout du compte, indestructible. Au fait, malgré ses efforts pour sauver la prochaine victime dont le destin est d'assurer « la survivance d'êtres que la mort aurait dû emporter depuis longtemps », l'homme sombre à son tour dans la déraison et offre un récit aussi lacunaire et contradictoire que celui de la jeune femme internée depuis dix ans. On se trouve alors dans un monde parallèle, aux prises de deux récits qui se rejoignent et dont les confessions douteuses et l'accumulation d'événements de plus en plus ambigus font écho.

Postmoderne, le roman de Michaud fait miroiter forme et thématique, d'où la masse de faits, de descriptions et d'évocations reflétant la confusion des souvenirs qui hantent les esprits tourmentés de nos deux narrateurs. Ce texte exigeant, sans doute inquiétant, fait preuve d'une somptuosité métaphorique et d'une atmosphère lugubre qui feront vouloir relire pour replonger dans son monde toujours aux abords du délire ou encore, d'en finir avec ce récit qui échappe constamment à toute interprétation. Quoiqu'il en soit, *Le ravissement* se mérite une place de choix parmi les romans québécois les plus intéressants des dernières années, comme le confirme, d'ailleurs, le Prix littéraire du Gouverneur général qu'il remporte en 2001.

Mary l'Irlandaise offre un récit d'un tout autre ordre, autant au niveau stylistique que diégétique et formel. Dans ce quatrième roman de Maryse Rouy, il s'agit d'une histoire basée sur des faits réels. Le roman profite des recherches minutieuses menées par son auteure qui dépeint les traits dominants des années 1830 au Québec : épidémies dévastatrices de choléra, adoption du nouveau pays, modes de vie menés par les bourgeois et les habitants de la colonie, tensions religieuses, événements politiques donnant suite aux rébellions des Patriotes, ainsi que relations entre maîtres et domestiques, y compris la condition périlleuse des domestiques féminins vulnérables au viol et à l'abandon.

Comme elle l'indique dans son prologue, Rouy s'inspire d'un court journal rédigé par le fils de Mary Hughes, une Irlandaise venue s'installer en Amérique et abandonnée sur un quai de Québec à l'âge de quatorze ans par sa tante et son oncle. Dans sa version fictive, certes aspergée d'eau de rose, Rouy raconte les aventures de Mary O'Connor qui doit, une fois abandonnée par sa parenté, survivre seule dans un nouvel environnement dont les mœurs, la langue et le climat lui sont tout à fait étrangers. Grâce au couple bourgeois irlandais qui l'embauche comme femme de chambre, Mary est hébergée chez eux dans la Vieille Ville. Elle les suivra à l'Ile d'Orléans pour ensuite retourner à Québec, où elle se lie d'amitié avec la jeune Francine ainsi que ses frères Charles et Jean-Denis, deux futurs soupirants. Suite au retour de ses maîtres en Irlande, Mary se rend à Berthier pour aller servir une famille française, où elle retrouve le beau Jean-Denis, à la fois coureur de bois, zélé politique et héros romantique par excellence. Au cours de ses va-et-vient, l'Irlandaise subit des agressions sexuelles commises par un domestique et un maître de maison, mais c'est surtout l'hostilité de femmes « méchantes », ces dénommées « mégères », « commères », « harpies » et « vieilles filles aigries » qui la fait souffrir.

Au fait, c'est la tante, et non l'oncle de Mary, qui est trouvée coupable de la situation précaire dans laquelle se trouve la jeune fille dès son arrivée en Amérique : « C'était Nora qui avait tout manigancé .... Dermot n'aurait pas fait une chose pareille. » Si Rouy se laisse leurrer par certains clichés féminins plutôt banals, elle se reprend quant aux rapports de classes qui logent au cœur du récit. Ainsi, Mary se lie d'amitié avec sa première maîtresse et attire la bienveillance de la fille de la maîtresse à Berthier.

Du côté formel, le récit linéaire de Rouy se démarque par son écriture simple et directe, assurant une lisibilité qui n'est pas, toutefois, sans vivacité. Bien que les traits du personnage principal rappellent peut-être trop facilement ceux de la pauvre héroïne romantique devant surmonter les obstacles qui entravent sa quête de bonheur, l'histoire de *Mary l'Irlandaise* retient notre intérêt, comme réussit à le faire la véracité des descriptions captivantes d'un Québec d'hier et de l'expérience de l'exil migratoire si pertinent au Québec d'aujourd'hui.

Earth Enough and Time

P. K. Page
Planet Earth: Poems Selected and New. Porcupine's Quill $19.95 paper.

Eric Ormsby
Facsimiles of Time: Essays on Poetry and Translation. Porcupine's Quill $22.95 paper.

Reviewed by Kevin McNeilly

Planet Earth, Eric Ormsby's selection of Page's poems nominated for the 2003 Griffin Poetry Prize, pays tribute to her restless and uneven genius, as it draws out a dominant formal and thematic tendency that has also shaped Ormsby's own writing for more than a decade now: the challenge of keeping time. "Page's gift," he enthuses in his brief foreword, "has always been too protean, too mercurial, for the coarse mesh of our categories." Her words will not let themselves be kept or contained, either by an editor's formal arrangement or, even as single poems, by the fictions of their own structural integrity. Perusing this selection, I found Page returning to the difficulty of being in time, as she describes the gently shocked recognitions of a mind unable to stabilize itself in neatly turned lines — a self always excessive, living on beyond the finite capacity of a cluster of subjects and verbs to say what they might mean.

Intentionality, the pull of a consciousness trying to come to terms with its sensed exterior, emerges as the key concern throughout Page's work, as she coaxes a voice toward reflexive side-stepping: "I think, I talk, I walk, I this, I that" ("Alphabetical"). The repetitive firmness of an end-stopped iambic pentameter such as this one is diffused by the slurry run-ons, by the pronominal vagueness ("this" or "that") gradually supplanting the Cartesian fixity of the first foot — as we move from thought to language to action to nothing in particular — and by the unstressed position of the subject trying to assert itself. Time draws her on, despite her efforts to hold fast with metrical pattern; her finest poems, like "Stories of Snow," often shift between clockwork time and a fluid inconstancy. This tensioned subject emerges in the final line of her "Address at Simon Fraser," as Page makes her valediction hover, while she reworks Rainer Maria Rilke, between affirmation and imperative: "Art and the planet tell us. Change your life." Her uncertain syntax is more than technical cuteness; the world and its representations, Page asserts, have the capacity to change your life, even as they also tell us to change. Perlocutions such as this push listeners and interlocutors beyond themselves, beyond what gets said, toward an active and lived relation with planet earth. Her poetry finds trajectory and rhythm, a

temporal relation, in this unrelenting gesture outward.

Ormsby arranges the poems neither chronologically nor thematically, but in seven sets that appear designed to produce resonances and cross-fertilizations. If Page understands her voice not as "single" but more "a crowded room," then the seven movements of this suite draw out pluralities in her work, but also show how intimately interlinked those diversities are; diversion, from a Latin root meaning to turn apart or to differ, is exactly what Page's poems delight in. There are a few failures, and Page occasionally lapses into a grating, overwrought prettiness, but this selection is the record of effort and process, and the failures ought to stand. These misfires are offset, anyway, by a preponderance of masterpieces, from "Arras" to "The Permanent Tourists," poems that never fail to astonish and nourish. Their gift to us, however, is not self-satisfaction but an unflinching eye and ear for the lovely dehiscence of language.

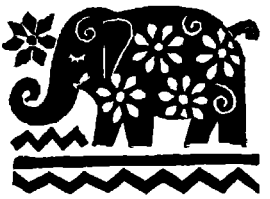
Ormsby frames his selection with two poems: Page's fine *glosa* on Neruda, "Planet Earth," and "Journey." The latter presents more of a non-conclusion, as it voices a surreal and lyrical exhortation never to "resist the going train of the dream"; what sounds like an oblique manifesto against rigidity, calling for a deliberate release of imagination into the improvised happenstance of dreams, turns into a set of modified Sapphics, affirming the stability of line and stanza even as, in subtle skews and shifts, it unknits the syllable-counted regularity of the ancient forms. Page's verse finds its moment by locking into tempo exactly in the flirtatious dismantling of time itself: "Oh, do not lag behind the syringe of whistle / douching your ears; on spongy fingers / number the revs. per min. / They are your tempo." The controlled fall in the cadence of this last line arrives by successive rhythmic trimming — signaled, for instance, in the gentle arrest of the incomplete abbreviations (shouldn't that be r.p.m.?), which briefly puzzle both eye and ear as to how to say them, whether to expand or contract, to unpack or to distill — as the stanza collapses downward. If Page can claim to refuse the verbal lag built into such dysfunctional particles as "oh" and to arrive at a stable "number" in her lines, her poetry still consists primarily in the fine sponginess, between lag and coincidence, a supple dissonance that gives her words their unmistakable push. Page's call to "[c]hange your life" echoes W. B. Yeats's late imperative to sustain the vital work of poetic revision, the fracturing and shaping of words as they butt against his unruly existence: "Myself I must remake." Her poems enact this recurrent catch-and-release of a mind searching out world enough and time.

The essays and autobiography gathered in Ormsby's *Facsimiles of Time* represent a specific preoccupation with temporality and form in literature, frequently signaled by terms like "discipline," "shape and order," and "formal dexterity." In extended reviews of David Solway, Geoffrey Hill, Pat Lowther, and Roo Borson, in reassessments of Hart Crane, Robert Musil, Franz Kafka, Jorge Luis Borges, and Eugenio Montale, and in a pair of essays on Arabic poetry, Ormsby pleads for a renewed formalism, worrying over the amorphousness of the confessional and the given. "Happenstance," he notes, deriding Borson's looseness, "does have its magic, but it is an incomplete enchantment"; "we wish the poet would resist her own impulses more, would oppose form and pattern to happenstance, would not merely succumb to the inconsequential pulses of her own indiscriminate inspiration." He complains about "the gassy pontifications of literary theorists which inevitably, and by design, distance us from the original texts themselves." While such backhanded polemics appear to sow dissent where none really

exists —pontificating is hardly limited to unnamed "literary theorists" — and to produce naive mystifications of "original texts," Ormsby's thought is really more acute than such careless claims initially suggest.

His readings evince the tensioning found in the best of Page; he discovers in Hill's *The Triumph of Love* a "wrangling" of "raw feeling" and "polished erudition," informing a voice that manages — with Page-like contrariety — "to falter so expertly." Offering a critical vocabulary of alterity, he notes in Robert Musil's diaries the "strange melange of vehement emotion coupled with dry scientific curiosity," while he claims that the "rhythm of Borges' language, even more in the prose than in the poetry, is — I do not know how else to put this — at once arid and incantatory." His self-deprecating aside is not fawning formality, but figures genuine scepticism over his preoccupation with discipline, as the collection's closing memoir makes overt, when he falls back on confession to describe how his domineering grandmother reared him on quotations from Shakespeare: "I disliked and mistrusted the way my grandmother reduced everything she saw to some sort of poetic form; disliked and mistrusted it, even while I myself possessed and nourished the same instincts as she." Such contradictions, often despite Ormsby himself, are not overcome in poetry, but instead constitute its essential value.

This emphasis on process pervades his most compelling essay, a review of the Cornell variorum edition of Yeats's *Last Poems*. Ormsby wants to "demonstrate with exactitude just what we can ascertain about the literal writing of poems," and to describe the "incipient music" of Yeats's best work, the poems' reflexive coming into being in the "weight and cadence" of language. Ormsby's fine ear picks up "raw impulse grappling with disciplined expression" in Yeats's lines, as "what was inchoate before slowly assumes shape." Such a reading points not to elegant geometries or to cognitive closure, but to the discovery of what Yeats called harmony in struggle, the resurgent wrangling between the lived and the made that gives poetry its heft. Sadly, Ormsby seems unwilling to pursue with "exactitude" the formal and ethical consequences of his reading, and retreats into a neatness that belies critical rigour: "To understand a poem means first and foremost to come as close as is possible to a grasp of its complete configuration as a physical pattern in which sound, sense and objective reality seamlessly coincide." Yeats's late poetry, if it accomplishes anything, undoes and reknits those seams; it consists in inconsistency and incompletion, as reshaping rather than shape, a stylistic fact that has profound implications for how one approaches the other and the worldly through language. It's too bad, really, that Ormsby drops the ball, because his work is so rich, I think; to have such focused attention paid to the "pulse beats" of words is for me a rare pleasure among critics. Ormsby claims not to be "a teacher of poetry," but poetry is inflected for him by an essential pedagogy, a crucial form of listening that can, as he says in his opening foray into "Poetry as Isotope: The Hidden Life of Words," "lay bare" an "affinity between things" as it discloses "a congruence between words." While such correspondences may become a bit lapidary as he works through his material, Ormsby's writing nevertheless points, sometimes despite itself, toward a vitality he calls the "shimmering motility" of poems.



Potboiling

Mordecai Richler

Dispatches from the Sporting Life. Knopf $34.95

On Snooker: The Game and the Characters Who Play It. Knopf $29.95

Reviewed by Kerry McSweeney

Mordecai Richler was as well known as a literary personality, journalist, and essayist as he was as a writer of prose fiction. *Dispatches from the Sporting Life* and *On Snooker*, both published in 2001, the year of his death, are his eighth and ninth collections of non-fiction. The former gathers pieces written over the years (and in some cases included in earlier collections) on a variety of subjects that include salmon fishing in Scotland; a Kenya safari; bodybuilding; the *Encyclopedia of Jews in Sports;* Gordie Howe; Wayne Gretzky; Hank Greenberg; Pete Rose; Eddie Quinn, a Montreal promoter of wrestling matches; baseball on Hampstead Heath (from *St. Urbain's Horseman*); and Maxie Berger, a Quebec boxer. As a recycler of his own material, Richler was without shame, and I was not surprised to find the piece on Maxie also included in *On Snooker.* When it stays on subject, this volume offers background information from printed sources, reportage on the British snooker tour, and generous helpings of Richler's journalistic persona.

Both books make for entertaining light reading, but there is nothing of serious literary interest in either of them. Nor will they satisfy those with an interest in sports per se. While Richler was an avid fan of hockey, baseball, and snooker, his writing on these subjects shows little interest in, and little knowledge of, their particular skills, tactics and strategies, and dynamics. What does satisfy are Richler's acute perceptions. Examples include the brooches "adorning front-porch cashmered bosoms" of the wives, "not so much dressed as upholstered," who accompany the executive level of British snooker to the big tournaments; the cartons that fill the garage of Gordie Howe's house in Hartford—"cosmetics, gardening materials. It looked like the backroom of a prairie general store . . . 'You can earn a lot of money with Amway, [Howe explains,] working out of your own home'"; and finally the Dublin cabdriver who explains to Richler that with the economic boom in Ireland it has become difficult to recruit locals for menial jobs in hotels and restaurants–"So we recently flew over a thousand people from Newfoundland, grateful for a chance to work at anything."

Love, Always and Again

Denis Saint-Jacques, Julia Bettinotti, Marie-José des Rivières, Paul Bleton and Chantal Savoie

Femmes de rêve au travail. Les femmes et le travail dans les productions écrites de grand consommation, au Québec, de 1945 à aujourd'hui. Nota Bene 20,00$

Claire Lévesque

Concerto rouge. Éditions des Plaines 14,95$

Reviewed by Susan Knutson

Femmes de rêve au travail synthesizes social history and literary analysis to explore the relations between the changing conditions of women's lives and best-sellers from 1945 to the mid-nineties in Quebec. In particular, the analyses focus on representations of women's work. Written by a team of researchers with a long list of previous publications, this is a succinct, intelligent and readable book.

The authors argue that over the last half-century, best-sellers have suggested a wide variety of roles to their female readers. These roles reflect the evolution of the collective imagination as it anticipates and responds to transformations of women's status. While researchers following Adorno and the Frankfurt School have tended to

condemn popular literature, claiming that it is socially alienating and merely an escape from the obligation to think critically, *Femmes de rêves au travail* traces a more complex rapport between popular fiction and the real struggles and conditions of women's lives.

Part I looks at the years from 1945 to 1960. Despite the conservatism of the period, women's lives were changing: Québécoises first exercised the right to vote in 1944; from 1941 to 1961 the proportion of women in the workforce rose from 22% to 27%; and in 1956 the federal government adopted the principle of equal pay for women in the public service. But as Saint-Jacques and his collaborators point out, "Au Québec, la periode se caractérise par l'inadéquation croissante du discours idéologique conservateur par rapport à la réalité." The sentimental fiction of the period tended to thematize this lack of congruence. During this period, there were numerous venues for popular fiction: magazines such as *La Revue moderne* (1919–1960) and *La Revue populaire* (1907–1963); *pulps*, or newsprint reviews devoted entirely to fiction; *livres de poche*, or softcover pocketbooks; and *fascicules*, or novels published in installments. Marie Petitjean de la Rosière, known by her pseudonym of Delly, was the most successful author, publishing ninety novels over a period of almost fifty years. Due to some misfortune beyond her control, the typical aristocratic Delly heroine may work for a time as a governess or a lady's companion, but assumes her proper role as wife and mother when her romantic difficulties are resolved. In the work of other authors of this period, women may work, but the contradictions between work outside the home and the desired destiny of wife and mother tend to be keenly felt. Of thirty stories published in *La Revue moderne* in the 1950s, for example, seven problematize work outside the home, fifteen allude to it in the background, and eight fail to mention it at all.

Part II looks at the period of the Quiet Revolution from 1960–1977, years marked by enormous changes in the social structures and cultural norms of Quebec. The adoption of the birth control pill, which came on the market in the beginning of the 1960s, marked the irreversible erosion of the power of the Catholic Church: "Malgré les condamnations répétées, le pouvoir religieux n'arrive pas à bloquer cette évolution chez les femmes réputées jusqu'alors des plus disciplinées des fidèles." In the political sphere, in 1961 Claire Kirkland-Casgrain became the first woman elected to the Legislative Assembly of Quebec. Popular fiction reflected these decisive social, legal, and cultural changes in the status of women.

During this period, the best-seller lists featured many works of serious literature: for example, Anne Hébert's *Kamouraska*, Marguerite Duras' *Hiroshima, mon amour*, Louky Bersianik's *L'Euguélionne*, Antonine Maillet's *La Sagouine*, Simone de Beauvoir's *La force de l'âge*, Germaine Greer's *La femme eunuque*. The best-sellers of the Quiet Revolution are thus unusual in their seriousness and radicality; during this period, frankly feminist works were widely read. The typical narrative scenario was also transformed: marriage lost its place as the ideal end to every story, and instead appeared often as a dead end for women, to which work outside the home was an attractive alternative.

However, as we know, more conservative values soon enough recovered their privileged place, and, of course, they were never absent. The authors devote a chapter to the novels of Barbara Cartland, the most widely read female author in the world, who wrote and published her romance novels before, after, and during the Quiet Revolution. Because the world represented in her novels is most often that of upper-

class British society during the Regency, it is realistic enough that her heroines do not work for a living. But of course, the choice of such a setting reflects the values the novels incarnate. The authors conclude: "essentialiste jusqu'au bout, Cartland croit fermement en une nature féminine qui fait de la femme un être né pour l'amour et qui doit avant tout plaire à un homme. L'amour reste le sentiment suprême et il se réalise dans le mariage auquel la femme doit parvenir tout à fait pure."

Part III takes us to the mid-nineties. A full and interesting chapter is devoted to the creation and marketing of the formulaic Harlequin romances, which, while reflecting societal change to a certain extent, also clearly maintain conservative values. For example, the Harlequin romance always avoids any positive portrayal of daycare. The modern Harlequin heroine often does work outside the home, but when she becomes a mother, she is able to set her career aside or somehow work it into her schedule so that she is able to stay at home with her children. She is, in this respect, more privileged than the majority of working mothers today.

In the 1990s, the values and models for femininity reflected in best-selling fiction remained predominantly conservative, and neither serious literature nor feminism regained the wide readership they enjoyed in the late 1970s. Rather, the public preferred a kind of sentimental fiction which still valued the search for love and marriage above all else. Mother-daughter relationships appeared as an important theme, and meaningful work outside the home was most often represented as a normal part of women's lives.

Claire Lévesque's *Concerto rouge* corresponds in many ways to the typical best-seller of the 1990s as described in *Femmes de rêve au travail.* The heroine, Mélissa Valières, is a music student, one of the female occupations favoured by Harlequin. She falls madly in love with an attractive but married man who unscrupulously takes advantage of her. For her part, she gives herself too soon, without waiting for marriage. Her tragedy thus features many of the classic motifs of the romance novel. Complexity is added in the form of a murder and subsequent investigation carried out by two attractive detectives, a man and a woman, who provide a more mature and more successful romance for the novel's ending. This conclusion may remind us that one of the innovations of 1990s sentimental fiction is the heroine who can manage her love life efficiently. While it features such potentially daring or disruptive scenes as a visit to the apartment of a gay male couple, and an abortion, *Concerto rouge's* treatment of such material is so conventional that the novel manages to be nothing more than a light and mildly pleasant read.

Nation and Identity

Winfried Siemerling and Katrin Schwenk, eds.
Cultural Difference and the Literary Text: Pluralism and the Limits of Authenticity in North American Literatures. U of Iowa P US $24.95

Smadar Lavie and Ted Swedenburg, eds.
Displacement, Diaspora, and Geographies of Identity. Duke UP US $16.95

Reviewed by Tracy J. Prince

Taking on organic concepts of identity that often crop up in academic discussions of multicultural studies, representation, and authenticity, *Cultural Differences and the Literary Text* grapples with the ideas explored by Werner Sollors in a 1986 essay titled "A Critique of Pure Pluralism." Sollors argues against a group-by-group categorizing of American literature (what he calls a cultural pluralism or a mosaic procedure) such as in courses divided by race or by gender. Pointing out the

arbitrariness of grouping people together who have nothing more in common than the colour of their skin or their gender, he asks, "Should the very same categories on which previous exclusivism was based really be used as organizing concepts?" He argues, instead, for an "openly transethnic procedure" which takes into account connections among cultures and groups. The contributors are purported to be addressing this issue as it is revealed in North American literature and literary studies, with a final response from Sollors. The editors conclude that the general consensus is

> the group-by-group approach may indeed be temporal. . . . Not being able to determine when [this] approach and with it the privileging of race, ethnic, and gender categories will fall into totalitarianism makes the concept sound dangerous, and it may seem theoretically sounder to dismiss the . . . approach as potentially essentialist. But as sexism and racism persist, so does the call for partiality and commitment, and the group-by-group approach appears to be a concept that, handled with care, will probably stay around for quite another while.

With a largely European group of critics, *Cultural Difference and the Literary Text* contains few of the buzzwords routinely thrown around in the American academy, but this strength is also its weakness. That critics from Europe, and some from Canada and America, are commenting on North American pluralism is useful as a step away from the typically America-centred discussions of North America. However, I would recommend that the reader note the biographical information for the location of the critics to engage more fully with the positions they occupy.

Most interesting is Wolfgang Holbruck's article addressing the arbitrary national borders placed on the study of First Nations cultures in America and Canada, while also warning against constructions of a pan-Indian metanarrative. Linda Hutcheon's discussion of the sometimes heated debates surrounding the anthology *Other Solitudes* she co-edited with Marion Richmond (1990) is a good introduction to multicultural debates in the Canadian context, but many artists, critics, and writers of colour in Canada may take issue with her assertion that what Jameson calls the "spirited defense of difference" (perhaps simply "liberal tolerance") is a problem existing mostly in the United States and not in Canada. Monica Kaup assesses Gloria Anzaldúa's important book *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, about life on the Mexican/American border, and Ernst Rudin explores the term *mestizo* in Spain and Latin America. Gerald Vizenor analyzes "authenticity" and the continued need for First Nations voices to be heard in the midst of the literatures of dominance. Gert Buelens explores Jewish American issues and analyzes Henry Roth's *Call It Sleep*, and African American authors are discussed in essays by Siemerling, Lindberg, and Lowe. These essays are a good starting point for evaluating issues that arise when designing courses around pluralism and authenticity. This is a superb read for those interested in seeing how postcolonial theories can be applied to a variety of global issues.

Between postcolonial theory and postmodern theory there exists an uneasy alliance. While critics like Stuart Hall play with such concepts as Derrida's *différance*, other postcolonial critics, the editors of *Displacement, Diaspora, and Geographies of Identity* included, question those elements of postmodernism that "privilege identity as constructed, hybrid, fragmented, conjectural, and . . . reject any notion of identity as essence, fixed, rooted." It is exactly these arbitrary and provisional geographies that this collection of essays explores. These critics discuss various efforts to resist what the editors call "the Eurocenter" that "con-

trols the marginal and subaltern through the global political economy." The book evaluates what occurs "when the center penetrates the margins, when the margins relocate into the center and force it to implode, and even when the margins stay put . . . resisting the center's violent attempts to assimilate or destroy."

The editors are to be lauded for working toward a more truly international collection, rather than focusing mostly on American ethnic issues, with contributors writing about such subjects as North Africa, rap, and Franco-Maghrebi identities; tourism in Bali; folk songs in the villages of Kangra in northwestern India; US/Mexican border issues; and some of the contentions surrounding Palestinians and Israelis.

Four of the ten essays do focus on issues pertaining only to America (Greg Sarris's excellent analysis of American Indian resistance and identity, Dorinne Kondo's evaluation of Asian American theater, Kristin Koptiuch's legal study of US Diaspora Asians and the use of a "cultural defense" in court cases, and Nahum Chandler's essay on W.E. B. DuBois). Yet the editors do not address the very current and hotly debated issue of whether studies of people of colour in America should be lumped in with postcolonial studies. (Many critics have been asking how well a "postcolonial" label fits, considering how far the US is from its status as a British colony and its current position as a colonizer.) Ruth Frankenberg and Lata Mani, however, raise these concerns in their essay, "Crosscurrents, Crosstalk: Race, 'Postcoloniality,' and the Politics of Location," where they propose the use of the term "post-civil rights" for discussing US issues. Nevertheless, in the tricky theoretical terrain of postcolonial and diasporic studies, these essays, with equal parts theory and application, are a helpful and welcome contribution.

Jamaican Lioness

Makeda Silvera

The Heart Does Not Bend. Random $32.95

Reviewed by Katja Lee

Makeda Silvera is probably best known as the author of two collections of short stories, *Remembering G* (1990) and *Her Head a Village* (1994), and as a cofounder of Sister Vision Press. As writer, editor, or publisher, Silvera has been instrumental in affirming and maintaining space for the voices of African Canadians and women, particularly lesbians, of colour. In 2002, she added "novelist" to her long list of accomplishments with the publication of her first novel, *The Heart Does Not Bend*, a work that draws on and develops the themes of "Black otherness" so characteristic of Silvera's oeuvre.

At the heart of this compelling saga is Mama Galloway, the matriarch and staunch, unbending moral arbiter of a large Jamaican Canadian family. Mama raises three generations of Galloways, a role she is unable to relinquish even when the children have grown and left home. Relationships grow strained under Mama's well-meaning but ill-executed interference, her double standards, and growing religious fervour. As each generation struggles to gain autonomy from the weighty burdens of obligation and Mama's overbearing character, they learn that freedom is only possible with physical distance; the family fractures and begins to move away from Mama's controlling centre.

For the women, however, the break is never clean or complete, particularly for Molly, Mama's granddaughter. As the story of Mama plays out through Molly's eyes, we witness Molly continually oscillating between appeasing Mama's demands and seeking the independence she craves. When Mama discovers that Molly's relationship with Rose has blossomed into a lesbian

partnership, Molly is torn by the competing needs of these two strong-willed women: Mama demands she give up the "sin," while Rose and, later, her daughter encourage Molly to live her own life. Although incapable of making a decision or confronting either woman, Molly understands, perhaps more than any other family member, that "we don't live our lives independent of others. It's all give and take, and when you take, you have to give back." This knowledge, however, exacts a high price: Molly loses Rose and alienates her daughter.

When Mama dies and her scandalous will bequeaths all to the wayward grandson Vittorio, Silvera asks us if recovery and healing is possible. Can a family overcome the fissures created by one woman? Perhaps the more pressing question is whether Molly is right in deciding that families are made of the kind of give and take that justifies losing a lover. Mama's will could be the catalyst for the convergence and rebuilding of the family, but where Molly is concerned, she has lost more than she has gained: Mama is gone, Rose has a new lover, and Molly's attempts to reunite with her daughter are rebuffed. Silvera writes a bleak ending to a spirited and soulful text, but it is a just ending and an inevitable conclusion to Molly's decisions.

In a novel that hinges upon the echoes of the past and where history repeats itself as generation after generation continue to walk down the same paths, *The Heart Does Not Bend* captures the spirit of family drama. Yet, while the text is sensuous and pleasurable, there is little complexity or substance to the flavours that Silvera asks us to sample. Were it not for the well-paced plot and dialogue richly laden with the cadences of a Jamaica accent, the beauty of this text would be marred by the incessant repetition of dominant/subordinate personas, the unending stream of teenage pregnancies, and the generally predicable behaviour of each character.

What is most worthy of our attention is Silvera's successful transition from the short story to the novel and her ability to redress some of the limitations of her writing that she has elsewhere identified. The narrator of her short story "Her Head a Village" struggles with the clamouring voices of various communities that demand representation in the narrator's writing. Through the multifarious characters of *The Heart Does Not Bend*, Silvera is able to represent the issues and voices of racism, immigration, homosexuality in Caribbean and Canadian cultures, inter-racial marriage, teenage moms and absentee fathers, alcoholism, crime, domestic abuse, and working-class poverty. Ultimately, *The Heart Does Not Bend* is a significant contribution to the small but growing body of African Canadian lesbian literature and marks an important turning point in Silvera's writing career.

Bedevilling Cities

Russell Smith
The Princess and the Whiskheads: A Fable. Doubleday Canada $19.95

Paul Vermeersch, ed.
The IV Lounge Reader. Insomniac P. $19.95

Mark MacDonald
Flat. Arsenal Pulp P. $14.95

Reviewed by Gregory Betts

Through his short fable, *The Princess and the Whiskheads*, Russell Smith invites readers to imagine a small country where, in gross defiance of the national norm, legislators draft legislation to "banish banality." As if that weren't enough to paralyze a Canadian reader with hope, Smith pushes further by daring us to imagine a country where political leaders describe street-urchins, punks, and drug-addicted artists as "[a] part of our *culture*, and as such important to *us*." When a throng of oddly dressed protestors arrive at the palatial seat

of government, chanting chants and brandishing torches, they are welcomed, and when incidents of violence and vandalism do break out, said protesters are easily calmed and politely escorted back to the national monuments they have defaced and currently occupy.

In writing this urban fairytale, Smith either got lost in a squatter's fantasy or he's attempting to resist the domination of bland industrial and suburban architecture, unenlightened politicians, and the dredges of corporate art that have spread out across our urban landscape. The contrast with our extra-literary reality is more than poignant: Smith attempts to remind us that idealism can offer an escape route from urban decay.

The prose is flat and translucent, following the "once upon a time" bard's tale closely but with the welcome addition of waist-up nudity, jugs of dirty wine, cyberpunk fashion, and socially respected weed smokers to update the genre. Smith's prose style, in fact, sits at the exact opposite end of the spectrum from the book's own plea for an art characterized by "sheer uselessness," valued for its "audacious design" rather than the narrative or political moralism that characterizes Smith's own production. To find such an art, designed "simply for marvel and discussion, pure form," a reader would do better to open Paul Vermeersch's *The IV Lounge Reader* and sample the new urban Canadian mode.

The IV Lounge Reader is a multi-genre anthology based on a long-standing Dundas Street reading series. Many of the works reflect this origin, gaining their impact through wry humour or a caustic line dropped flippantly—this kind of performative irony works much better delivered than written. One effect, though, is a conversational, whimsical gait that cruises the streets of Canadian cities as if following the rhythm of George Bowering's Breath Line. The book has other well-known and consistently impressive contributors – Dennis Lee, bill bissett, Andrew Pyper, Lynn Crosbie, David Donnell. More impressive, however, are the contributions by less famous and more caustic writers, such as Marnie Woodrow and Noah Leznoff, whose writing takes audacious design and performative irony to an exquisite and menacing extreme. The various cities that appear in the collection, if named at all, are nondescript and filled with a quietly disturbing perversity. Sherwin Tjia's gothic irony stands out in particular for contorting generic newspaper styles to horrifically humorous, anti-social effect. A similar playful menace emerges in Stephen Cain's disjunctive verbiage, Kristi-ly Green's dry humour, and Adam Sol's wrenchingly human scenarios. Despite some unfocused selections, the collection as a whole delivers audacious, dark urban humour.

Somewhere in between the stylistic polarities of these two books lies Mark MacDonald's novella *Flat*. He begins his narrative subtly, similar to Russell Smith's straightforward yarn-spinning, but gradually develops this into the kind of dark, manic irony that characterizes *The IV Lounge Reader*. MacDonald's unnamed protagonist awakens one morning to a phone call asking him to execute the will after a distant acquaintance named J. commits suicide. The suicide is less of a mystery than the protagonist imagines, but this doesn't stop our hero from being sucked into the same vacuum of insanity that broke J.'s will to live. Like Smith, MacDonald targets bland architecture (Vancouver's, in particular) as evidence of social neglect and instigator of anti-social tendencies. His characters desperately want the dull, grey, square architecture to possess more imagination and meaningfulness than mere functionality and cost effectiveness. They get lost in conspiratorial speculations in pursuit of the cultural and spiritual purpose behind the city's stark and alienating high-rise culture.

The maze that MacDonald constructs for his downtrodden characters is apocalyptic. The disturbing depiction of apartment buildings collapsing upon each other, of North America's typical urban blandness crushing under the weight of its own malaise, and of the final judgement against this society summed up by suicide may offer some catharsis for frustrated Canadian readers, but MacDonald affords his characters no such release: the threat of future self-sacrifice remains to be passed on from one spiritless vassal to the next, just as it passed from J. to the novella's protagonist.

A recent essay by Ron Keenburg, President of the Royal Architectural Society of Canada, argues that Canadian cities demystify the landscape and alienate their inhabitants ("Dare to Dream," *Canadian Issues* Feb. 2003). He argues that Canadians, despite being accustomed to such environments, have outgrown these functional but destructive dwellings and crave an architectural renaissance. The three books reviewed here each advance Keenburg's cause by dramatizing urban dis-ease. As MacDonald's J. concludes in his last notebook entry, "I curse the moment of return to this upright, aging world. I cannot commune with this place, it is not my own .... The devil's horns are not curved. They rise perfectly from his flat skull at ninety degrees from any angle of evenness." The devil's road-flat crown and his high-rise horns are but the deceptively bland architecture that hides an internal, psychological horror show.

Ontario Novels

Richard Teleky
Pack up the Moon. Thomas Allen $31.95

Alan Cumyn
Losing It. McClelland & Stewart $34.99

Reviewed by Ian Dennis

Pack up the Moon is narrated by a gay American man, Karl, who comes to Toronto in 1968 to dodge the draft and attend U of T. Although there are some subplots, the main focus is his friendship with a fey, conservative fellow student, Charlotte, a heterosexual and practicing Catholic, and much space is devoted to recollections of their conversations, their tastes in old movies, and their eventual estrangement. Karl returns to the United States to teach (he is an archivist, and there is some academic musing on the metaphoric possibilities of that discipline), but he returns in the 1990s for the funeral of his ex-lover, Jay. This is when he learns that Charlotte has been murdered many years earlier. The novel involves his quest both to remember their connection, and to learn about and understand her death.

Karl seems to suffer from a flattened affect, although perhaps this is as much an unintended result of Teleky's spare prose style as it is a designed feature of the character's predicament. Charlotte is the most interesting character in the novel, but this is not saying too much. Most of its people are not very engaging, especially when they talk, and their dilemmas do not generate much heat. There are some hinted possibilities of deeper currents. For example, Karl admits that his third-wheel identity as confidant is modeled on old film roles, where the character does in some instances end up murdering his woman friend. However, these dimensions never clearly emerge, or seem worth worrying about too much. If Karl envies and resents Charlotte, if he has constructed the role of put-upon victim of her marriage to a still-closeted gay rival, if he feels in any way implicated in her murder, he never brings such recognitions to the surface. So, nearly as we can tell, despite a few words of self-accusation that praise with faint damning, Charlotte was his best friend, it was someone else's fault that she stopped seeing Karl, and her murder—a result of sexual jealousy—was senseless, even if it involved her distressingly passion-

ate relationship with a man she met on a Florida beach. When all is said and discovered, Karl's reaction is to retreat into mildly pleasurable, self-sufficient solitude, musing vaguely about how he wishes he could find God the way Charlotte and Jay did. If this is tragic, or to be deplored, the signs are very subtle indeed.

Some of the evocations of Toronto in the sixties and seventies have charm, and considerable care has been taken with details, restaurants and streets and so forth. But the writing is rarely memorable and is often blurry, lacking in focus or precision:

"Two hours north of Toronto by car, in the first outcroppings of the rocky Canadian Shield, a cluster of deep, still green lakes—now polluted by acid rain—make up cottage country, known also as Muskoka. Its few remaining turn-of-the-century hotels still draw city types who find cottage life too rustic, or can't afford it, but Charlotte's grandfather had owned his own place on Lake Rosseau since the thirties."

Stumbling sentence rhythms, near-clichés, jumbled subject matter, odd little irrelevancies . . . and what contrast *does* that "but" in the second sentence introduce? Oh, yes, I see it now, after several re-readings, I think. There's a lot of this kind of thing: not awful, but not distinguished.

Losing It is livelier, and carries the reader along rather more easily. Set in Ottawa, its narrative of a middle-aged cross-dressing professor, his ex-student wife, and her demented mother is full enough of farcical incident to keep pages turning, and to produce the occasional laugh. And, in this reviewer, it also produced a sigh of relief, when it becomes clear that the institutional setting for this unlovely mid-life crisis must be Carleton, rather than my own, at the University of Ottawa. Suffice it to say, however, we are not in the territory of documentary realism here, and there is little in the novel to suggest an intimate familiarity with the things we actually do in our profession.

The real difficulty with this intermittently engaging book is its inconsistency of tone and topic. This novel veers uneasily from the "darkly comic," to the flatly descriptive, to the merely odd, to the weakly sentimental (especially in its very unsatisfactory conclusion). Its moral positions are utterly unclear. The professor is set up for a come-uppance which never truly arrives, and his obviously improper marriage to a former student is bizarrely sustained at the end, even provided with an unearned reconciliation scene which we are apparently supposed to find touching.

Never mind. Cumyn does not strive for the same sorts of things Teleky strives for. *Losing It* can be read for a few good scenes and a few memorable characters, the best of which is perhaps not Bob the professor, but his most recent undergraduate infatuation, Sienna Chu, a bisexual, half-Chinese, half-Irish "poetic anthropologist." In her curious manoeuverings, as sly as they are naive, one catches a hint of eccentrically genuine young life.

Marshall as I Knew Him

Donald F. Theall

The Virtual Marshall McLuhan. McGill-Queen's UP $24.95

Reviewed by David Thomson

Donald Theall's most recent consideration of McLuhan's legacy is impressive in scope but ultimately his ambitions are unsustainable. He engages with such a range of issues that he has to forego sustained argument in favour of brief considerations on a number of disparate topics. One general drift of the book aims at a recognition of McLuhan's artistic or poetic concerns; Theall finds in McLuhan's close affinity with Joyce a poetic sensibility that undermines the efforts of those who would see in his work any form of systematic agenda. From another perspective, the book aims to confirm

McLuhan's legacy as a foundational figure for postmodernist theory and as a crucial figure in the evolution of cyberculture. There is also a thread of cultural biography and autobiography as Theall intersperses his academic analysis with recollections of his personal relationship with "Marshall" at the University of Toronto during the 1950s and 1960s.

Given the tasks Theall sets himself, one might expect a work of considerable heft. Instead, the book is only 300 pages long, and even this modest length is deceptive; almost 40% of its content is given over to supplementary materials—a preface, a lengthy introduction to McLuhan's main ideas, two extended appendices, and so forth—leaving Theall with around 175 pages to accommodate 12 chapters. As a consequence, the reader skims over the surface rather than delving into any of the objects of inquiry. Chapter 7, "McLuhan as Prepostmodernist," is perhaps the most egregious example of the hurried pace. In the space of 12 pages no less than 7 prominent French theorists—Derrida, Barthes, Baudrillard, Lyotard, Virilio, Deleuze and Guattari—are held up to McLuhan's image to determine which one deserves the mantle of "the French McLuhan." Whether such an identification might be interesting or useful is open to question, but it is clear that a couple of paragraphs discussing, for example, the relationship of Derrida's thought to McLuhan's will not prove much.

The purpose of the book as a whole is hard to fathom, especially in the wake of Theall's many other contributions to McLuhan scholarship. The title is provocative, yet its significance is never brought up directly. Perhaps the point is to expose McLuhan's public image as a careful construct and cast some light on the "real" McLuhan. Some chapters do indeed make this point, but others head off in other directions. Topics are brought up and dropped so swiftly it is hard to get a sense of a developing argument.

Oddly, even as a lot of ground is covered a few key details show up again and again. It becomes something of a game to track the number of times certain items are mentioned. Take, for example, references to the fact that Theall was McLuhan's first graduate student (7); references to McLuhan's iconic status as the "patron saint" of the cyberculture magazine *Wired* (5); McLuhan's comment about *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake* being Joyce's "intellectual Black Mass" (6); and Theall's assertion that McLuhan did not read Saussure until the mid-1970s (5). These and other repetitions are puzzling because on each occasion the point is made as if for the first time, and as a result the chapters appear unrelated to one another, more like separate units than parts of a sustained argument.

If it is arguable that the book fails to offer much critical insight, there is no denying that Theall's many first-hand descriptions of McLuhan have human interest. As McLuhan's first doctoral student and close collaborator until 1964, Theall is prone to interleaving his criticism with first-person observations. This tendency highlights his unique perspective on his subject, even if the sudden shifts from "McLuhan" to "Marshall" seem odd.

Indeed, it might have been for the best if Theall had let his previous work on McLuhan make his case and instead provided more anecdote and reminiscence. Such an approach motivates the appendix contributed by Edmund Carpenter, also one of McLuhan's associates and collaborators. Entitled "That Not-So-Silent Sea," Carpenter's account of McLuhan and the cultural milieu at the University of Toronto in the late 1950s and early 1960s is disjointed, impressionistic, and entirely subjective. It is also consistently entertaining and insightful. If Theall had followed Carpenter's example and limited himself to

a loosely biographical and autobiographical account of his relationship with "Marshall," the resulting book would have been more interesting for cultural historians and McLuhan scholars alike.

Waging Aboriginal War

Denis Vaugeois. Kate Roth, trans. *The Last French and Indian War: An Inquiry into a Safe-Conduct Issued in 1760 that Acquired the Value of a Treaty in 1990.* McGill-Queen's / Septentrion $39.95

Bernard Assiniwi. Wayne Grady, trans. *The Beothuk Saga.* McClelland & Stewart $34.99

Reviewed by Constance Cartmill

The title of the English translation of Vaugeois's *La fin des alliances franco-indiennes*, first published in French in 1995, seems misleading, until we are told that the Conquest or the Seven Years War (1756–1763) was actually dubbed the last "French and Indian War" by American historians. The English title is nonetheless an eloquent reminder of the extent to which relations have deteriorated in recent years between the Québécois and Aboriginal peoples. In fact, one may view this book as a response to what Vaugeois considers a prolonged attack against Quebecers by Canada's First Nations (who have received more than a little help from the Federal authorities). Vaugeois concentrates on two specific years—1760 and 1990—which he ties together by juxtaposing past and present. In the late summer of 1760, as British forces were about to invade Montreal, a British officer named James Murray signed a safe-conduct certifying that members of the Huron tribe of Lorette located near Quebec City were not to be molested by British soldiers while returning to their settlement. The significance and status of this "scrap of paper" would be vehemently contested over two hundred years later in a court case argued before the Supreme Court. The case was triggered by the arrest in 1982 of four brothers belonging to the Wendat (Huron) Nation by forest-conservation agents who discovered them "mutilating" trees. The implications of the Supreme Court decision to treat the document as a treaty have been far-reaching: "Among the customs that Murray and the Hurons considered, could they have dreamed of a trade in contraband cigarettes, giant bingo games, and fishing without a permit?"

According to Vaugeois, this and other court rulings in favour of Aboriginals amount to "judicial guerrilla warfare" because they are wreaking havoc on Quebec's laws. Vaugeois makes a causal link between Quebec's recent territorial difficulties and the province's more "humane" treatment of Aboriginals, going back to the French Regime, at which time a concerted attempt was made to assimilate Native peoples through cohabitation. The English, on the other hand, simply confiscated Aboriginal lands: "As a consequence, Ontario has no problems, while Quebec has nothing but problems." At times Vaugeois's exhaustive analysis of the Murray document and his obsessive attention to detail seem little more than a pretext for venting a number of grievances, which may explain why he keeps coming back to 1990. The year was marked by several major setbacks for Quebec, including the Supreme Court rulings "in favour of the Indians," the derailment of the Meech Lake Accord "thanks mainly to an Indian, Elijah Harper," and last but not least, the Oka crisis which created "a hellish situation" for Quebecers. Vaugeois tries to end his book on a more uplifting note by pointing to the creation of the Aboriginal and Quebec Peoples' Equality Forum, apparently giving expression to the hope that these two solitudes will one day learn to coexist within a strong and unified Quebec.

This is an engaging and noteworthy book, in spite of the author's obvious partiality

and occasional lapses into simplistic generalization. In order to discount the work of recent historians considered sympathetic to Aboriginals, Vaugeois claims that they have abandoned traditional research methods in favour of the "trends or themes of the day, such as modernity and identity." At one point he makes this rather astonishing proposal: "Perhaps we should stop thinking of the encounter between Europeans and Amerindians as one between civilization and savagery"—indeed!

La Saga des Béothuks tackles a subject of epic proportions—the history of the Beothuk, who were the first people to inhabit Newfoundland and whose tragic fate has lent them a mythical aura. The novel begins around A.D. 1000 at the time the Vikings were believed to have visited the island; here Assiniwi offers a plausible scenario for an early encounter between Europeans and Aboriginals. The first two sections of the novel highlight the ability of the Beothuk to assimilate foreigners in order to strengthen their race. One of Anin's wives, a Scottish slave brought to Newfoundland by the Vikings, introduces same-sex relationships among the women, a practice which proves beneficial to the cohesiveness of this polygamous society in which the women usually outnumber the men. The second section moves forward several centuries, when a Frenchman accompanying Jacques Cartier's expedition decides to leave his compatriots to become a member of the Beothuk Nation.

Things begin to go awry in the second section, however, as Beothuk society becomes a paradise lost and the British gradually take control of Newfoundland. The tone of impending doom is set in place by the downfall of Iwish, "the devourer of guardians" and the first woman to become chief. The third and last section of the novel, aptly titled "Genocide," is a grim and rather plodding account of the merciless slaughter by the British of an entire race of people whose only crime was a failure to embrace servitude and obsequiousness as a means of survival. Near the end of the novel, the last remaining Beothuk people, a mother and her two daughters, are paraded through the streets of St. John's in the early nineteenth century.

The novel employs a sequence of narrators known as "Living Memories," that is, individuals specially chosen to act as human repositories of Beothuk history. These narrators are omniscient and almost completely devoid of identity until the last section when they become the central characters, which is only fitting, since by this point time is running out for the Beothuk. Both the future and the present are quickly evaporating, leaving nothing but Living Memory, and soon, even that will be gone. There is a definite narrative shift between the first two sections of the novel, intended for the Beothuk people, and the third section, which constitutes a bitter incrimination of the white man: here the reader blends in with the accused. After reading *The Beothuk Saga*, one may never think of Newfoundland in quite the same way.

Literary Socializations

Voix et images. La sociabilité littéraire 80 (2002). UQÀM $13.00

Reviewed by Ursula Mathis-Moser

Among this special issue's headings, the sections *Dossier* and *Études* deserve particular attention. With Pierre Bourdieu's theory of the literary field as a background, Pierre Rajotte's *Dossier* presents six studies on neglected aspects of intellectual and literary socialization in Quebec, from the Conquest to the Quiet Revolution. The roughly chronological progression overlaps with analysis of fundamentally different forms of social, educational, and literary contact. The opening article by Rajotte describes the emergence of a "champ intellectuel" in the

decades following the Conquest, in reaction to and interaction with the British mode of life in clubs and associations. Results of this reaction are seen in the change of public opinion and in the creation of institutions and associations by Quebec intellectuals in the second half of the nineteenth century. The second contribution (by Manon Brunet) develops a method of analyzing literary networks. Brunet's case study focuses on Abbé Casgrain, whom she considers to be the centre of the Quebec literary network from 1850 to 1900. Chantal Savoie, in the next article, examines the possibilities for educated women in turn-of-the-century Quebec, with Montreal emerging as the birthplace of female journalism. Quebec women had to fight their way to public recognition, at first in cooperation with their anglophone Protestant sisters and later on in more specifically French Canadian and Catholic surroundings. Josée Vincent traces the history of a renowned professional association, the Canadian Authors' Association (1936–1960), and Christine Tellier examines the influence of small print media (*Le routier*) on the founders of Hexagone, principally Gaston Miron. This exemplary history of Quebec literary socializations is complemented by an article by James de Finney, Jean Morency, and Denis Bourque which takes into account parallels and differences between Quebec and Acadian associative practices from the mid-nineteenth century to 1908. The approximately one hundred pages that constitute Rajotte's *Dossier* shed new light on Quebec's "champ littéraire" and add an important dimension to literary history.

Part II—*Études*—is equally interesting. While Daniel Marcheix inquires into Anne Hébert's novels, Daniel Chartier investigates the literary phenomenon of so-called "migrant writing." Although Hébert's characters—female characters in particular—try to constitute themselves by linguistic means such as letters, they are at the same time fundamentally alienated from symbolic language; hence the importance of cries and pre-verbal utterances, of the body and of art. Unlike Marcheix, Chartier's article examines a wide range of "migrant writing." One of its merits is the clarification of terminological tangles that have come to obscure a relatively new field of research. According to the author, "migrant writing"—unlike ethnic literature, immigration literature or immigrant literature—can be defined thematically by hybridity and formally by its frequent use of autobiography. Also valuable is the fact that beyond enumerating and regrouping individual authors, Chartier places migrant writing within a historical perspective and underlines the relativity of what is often claimed to be a new literary and social phenomenon. This volume of *Voix et images* adds new dimensions to the interpretation of Quebec's literary "imaginaire."

Transnational America Today

Roger Waldinger, ed.
Strangers at the Gates: New Immigrants in Urban America. U of California P US $19.95

Rubén G. Rumbaut and Alejandro Portes, eds.
Ethnicities: Children of Immigrants in America. U of California P US $18.95

John L. Jackson, Jr.
Harlemworld: Doing Race and Class in Contemporary Black America. U of Chicago P US $30.00

Reviewed by Michael Nowlin

"As America enters the twenty-first century," asserts Roger Waldinger at the outset of *Strangers at the Gates*, "it is clear that the twentieth was the century of immigration." His statement from hindsight is surely meant to recall the more prophetic statement

made at the dawn of the last century by another eminent American sociologist, W.E.B. Du Bois, who in *The Souls of Black Folk* declared the problem of the twentieth century to be "the problem of the color line." American attitudes towards immigration throughout the twentieth century have been intimately entangled with this deeper facet of America's social and cultural history, and so it is not surprising to find Du Bois's words cited early in both the Waldinger-led study, and the collection of essays *Ethnicities: Children of Immigrants in America*, compiled and introduced by Rubén G. Rumbaut and Alejandro Portes.

Today, we need reminding of the extent to which European immigrants were once classified as less-than-white: the success of the European immigrants from the 1880–1920 period is largely responsible for modern understandings of the American dream, and their experience testifies in the popular imagination to the virtues of the American melting pot. But the numerically vaster (if proportionally smaller) wave of immigrants that have come since the relaxation of restrictive immigration policies in 1965 returns the colour line to the forefront of the national consciousness, for most of the immigrants are from Mexico, Cuba, and various Asian, Central American, and Caribbean nations. And despite the gains made by African-Americans as a result of what is sometimes referred to as the Second Reconstruction of the 1960s, the spectre of an African-American urban "underclass" still serves as a negative yardstick by which to measure the prospects of the new Americans.

Strangers at the Gates and *Ethnicities* study the successes, failures, and prospects of the new immigrant groups and the effects these groups are having on the urban centres they tend to gather in. The former derives its general claims from intensive study of the social and economic structures of the five major urban immigrant destinations: Los Angeles, New York, San Francisco, Miami, and Chicago. The latter elaborates upon longitudinal studies of two pools of children of immigrants conducted in the 1990s in San Diego and Miami, in essays discretely focused on the different immigrant groups (e.g., Cubans, Mexicans, Vietnamese, Haitians, Filipinos, Nicaraguans, West Indians). For students of contemporary ethnic literatures of the United States, both essay collections provide indispensable contextual information highlighting the significantly different experiences undergone by these groups, experiences contingent upon the social capital and job skills they bring to America, the historical and ideological context of their reception, and the particular urban centres they gravitate to. But readers looking for intensive discussions of the cultural-identity issues that inform so much multicultural fiction and poetry might be disappointed. The contributors are social scientists rigorously using predominantly (but not exclusively) quantifiable data to gauge the pragmatic issue of relative degrees of socio-economic success in the new land, which, of course, is what most immigrants to America are seeking. Still, issues of acculturation and ethnicity inevitably surface, and research findings reveal quite conclusively the role that biculturalism plays in facilitating such success, particularly a second-generation member's dexterity at moving between adopted American ways and the nurturing environment of the home culture and language.

Both studies are responding to concerns that the second great immigrant tide of the twentieth century will not duplicate the success of the first. Neither supports overly pessimistic prognoses, since upward mobility and a certain degree of assimilation over generations still seem to be the rule, but they also foreground some of the historically unique problems facing many of these immigrants in the new century, such as the increasingly bifurcated economic structure

of the major cities in the wake of de-industrialization, which leaves fewer opportunities for low-skilled workers to find a job ladder they can climb and thus makes for widening economic inequality in the cities. And all the contributors stress that the recent immigrants are coming in different streams, for different reasons, and with different responses from the host nation. Some groups are coming with a high concentration of highly skilled workers—indeed, immigrants from some countries (India, China, Korea) are on average better educated than American-born workers, while others are predominantly low skilled and poorly educated, such as the large Mexican-American population whose situation seems to cause the most concern.

If the late twentieth-century immigration tide inevitably invites comparisons with the earlier wave that helped transform the United States into a modern, cosmopolitan nation, so any study of America's most famous urban "ghetto," Harlem, must confront the now-mythologized past glories of the black city within the white of the 1910s and 20s and the extent to which it has come to stand as a kind of black variation on the American dream. It certainly reveals something about the persistence of the colour line that Harlem has remained pretty much the black urban enclave it had become by the 1920s. For all the poverty afflicting its residents, it retains its powerful hold on the national and international imagination, black and non-black, as a special, racialized site: hence John L. Jackson, Jr.'s title *Harlemworld*, a neologism borrowed from hip-hop music to signify Harlem's hyperreal and intertextual existence beyond the borders of the physical place. Jackson seeks to interrogate this larger-than-life symbolic realm by returning as a properly self-reflexive anthropologist to the field of contemporary Harlem itself.

Jackson seeks to reveal that the heterogeneity of Harlem belies any simplistic attribution of a black essence to this world-famous "black" community. The colour-line permeates Harlem largely through class distinctions, created by the proximity of middle-class and impoverished blacks. Race and class are grounded in performances that become very real to the people for whom they are crucial constructions of a meaningful social identity. And for most of Jackson's subjects, drawn from both the middle class and so-called underclass, "blackness" is a virtue. As he concedes, his theoretical claim has already been succinctly summed up in a rap song: "You not a nigga because you black. You a nigga 'cause of how you act." The citation is not mere whimsy, but reflects Jackson's serious regard for African-American "folk" culture. His genuine respect for ordinary black American voices also informs the many interviews that make up the most valuable and engaging component of his book. The fragmented portraits that emerge from these are the stuff of first-rate documentary realism.

A Constrained Canon

Gene Walz, ed.
Canada's Best Features: Critical Essays on 15 Canadian Films. Rodopi US $50.00

Reviewed by Mark Harris

To the extent that English Canadian cinema has a political agenda, its primary impetus is to express the ideals we are all, in theory, supposed to share: belief in multiculturalism and gender equity; enlightened social policies; a greater degree of grass-roots humanism than may be found in the United States; cooperation between the rest of Canada and Québec.

One should not be too surprised, therefore, to discover that all fifteen of the narratives included in *Canada's Best Features: Critical Essays on 15 Canadian Films* are in some way beholden to the aforesaid con-

sensus. The Anglo-guignol tradition is represented by Maddin's *Careful*, Egoyan's *Exotica*, and Cronenberg's *Videodrome*; the well-made Québec films include Claude Jutra's *Mon oncle Antoine*, Michel Brault's *Les Ordres*, Jean-Claude Lauzon's *Léolo*, Francis Mankiewicz's *Les Bons débarras*, and Denys Arcand's *Le Déclin de l'empire américain*; regionalism gets its due in Don Shebib's *Goin' Down the Road* (Maritime diaspora) and *The Grey Fox* (a BC Western); women directors make their mark in Cynthia Scott's *The Company of Strangers* (anti-ageist as well as feminist) and Patricia Rozema's *I've Heard the Mermaids Singing* (a modest arthouse success); multiculturalism appears in the form of Srinivias Krishna's *Masala*, and middlebrow proficiency explains the inclusion of François Girard's *The Red Violin* and Ted Kotcheff's *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz* (Kotcheff being a typical example of the deracinated Canadian filmmaker who rarely shoots at home).

If the book's release date had been held back a year, Zacharias Kunuk's *Atanarjuat* would probably have waved the First Nations flag as well, and with considerable justice: the film was cited twice as one of the ten best films of all time in a massive poll recently conducted by *Sight and Sound*.

As for the essays themselves, at no point did I feel my eyes were being opened to a previously hidden universe, although Suzie Sau-Fong Young's dissection of *Videodrome* came pretty close. By the same token, I only spotted one minor error of fact—when Bart Testa seemed to confuse Montréal's rue Ste-Catherine with rue St-Laurent—and experienced only one moment of minor outrage—again courtesy of Testa, when that Toronto-based critic declared that Denys Arcand's pre-*déclin* features were "not held in high regard by anyone." In fact, when it was first released, *Réjeanne Padovani* was widely regarded as a great leap forward for Québécois cinema, while *Gina* still stands as North America's premier Marxist drive-in movie.

Because this book emphasizes films rather than filmmakers, some notable names are left out, the most important of which are Jean-Pierre Lefebvre and Léa Pool. In the first instance, an inability to decide on which Lefebvre film to include—virtually all of them have their champions—was probably the stumbling block, while Pool's exclusion is more mysterious (could it be because she was born in Switzerland?).

Of course, the result of all this orthodoxy means that *Canada's Best Features* will serve as an ideal university primer, the perfect undergraduate introduction to homegrown cinema. What it is not, however, is heterodox and exciting, the kind of text that would defend such non-canonical oddities as Gilles Carle's *La Guêpe*, André Forcier 's *Au clair de la lune*, and Bruno Carrière's *Lucien Brouillard*.

Various Saskatchewans

Larry Warwaruk, ed.
Sundog Highway: Writing from Saskatchewan. Coteau $19.95

Sharon Butala
Real Life. HarperFlamingo $28.00

Warren Cariou
Lake of the Prairies: A Story of Belonging. Doubleday $32.95

Dianne Warren
A Reckless Moon. Raincoast $19.95

Reviewed by Lawrence Mathews

Sundog Highway: Writing from Saskatchewan seems to present itself (on the back cover, in the very brief introduction, and in the accompanying "media release") as a straightforward literary anthology, but don't be deceived. It's a high school textbook, "produced with the financial assistance of Saskatchewan Education," complete with an "English Language Arts A30 Thematic Index" at the back.

So the roughly fifty poems, essays, stories, and scenes from plays have been chosen to promote Saskatchewan Education's view of the world, which can be summarized in a few propositions. Racism is bad. The family farm is good. Domestic violence is bad. Cultural diversity is good. Saskatchewan winters are cold, but the inhabitants have learned to cope. Culture heroes from the past include Louis Riel, Tommy Douglas, and Norman Bethune. (Bethune?–well, a Saskatchewan writer wrote a play about him.) Inevitably, then: capitalism is bad.

So much would be fairly predictable. I was quite surprised, however, to learn that, on the basis of the evidence presented here, there are no cities in Saskatchewan. Everything happens on the home place or the reserve, or in small towns. Further, no one in Saskatchewan ever cracks a smile or writes anything that might cause a reader to crack one.

Then there's the one pernicious, threatening idea that Saskatchewan students must be protected from at all cost–the notion that human experience is complex, ambiguous, multifaceted, perennially open to interpretation, and that an imaginative response to it requires more than browbeaten assent to the propositions cited above.

Fortunately, at least one contribution manages to slip through the editorial detection system: Brenda Zeman's piece on Freddie Saskamoose, the First Nations hockey star who played briefly for the Chicago Black Hawks in the early 50s. Zeman allows Saskamoose and half a dozen people who knew him (both white and aboriginal) to tell his story in short monologues. It's fascinating stuff, mostly because it shows how the personal and the political are entwined in the quirky, complicated, untextbookish ways that one associates with real life, as opposed to bureaucratically sanctioned reality.

Real Life is—convenient segue—the title of Sharon Butala's collection of short fiction. She's a contributor to *Sundog Highway* (an essay on the family farm), and her book, alas, has some of the moral earnestness of the anthology.

Her ten nearly interchangeable protagonists encounter problems (or "issues"), one big one per story, usually personified by another character: an ex-husband (twice), a daughter whose marriage is breaking up, a battered wife, a sister dying of cancer, a famous writer. There appears to be no interest in deploying language imaginatively, in rendering the complexities of the texture of daily experience, in developing more than a single theme, narrative strand, or point of view. It's all about the protagonist's exploration of The Issue.

It's an odd book, written as though Butala had decided to deprive herself of the use of many of the resources that have become staples for contemporary writers. After reading it, I believe that I know what she wants me to think about such topics as the family farm, rape, literary politics, fundamentalist religion, and so forth. But I don't know why she has chosen fiction as the vehicle to deliver these ideas.

Warren Cariou's memoir, *Lake of the Prairies*, is a bit of a puzzler, too. Why does a guy in his early thirties who's neither professional athlete nor rock star need to write a memoir, anyway? There's an obvious answer: this book isn't just about him–it's about the place he comes from.

But still. Reading it is like reading three hundred pages of those personal essays that the *Globe and Mail* publishes on the last page of its first section. (This morning's happens to be about borrowing tools from neighbours.) Why would such a skilled and intelligent writer spend a page and a half describing his childhood experience of eating peas from the garden? "Other times I would store most of them in my cheek and hold one single pea on my tongue, sensing its oblong shape, the scar on it where the stem had been attached." Nicely rendered, but so what? After several hundred words,

my heart sank when I saw that the next paragraph begins "We loved carrots, too . . . ."

To be fair, it's not all vegetables. Cariou writes out of a genuine-seeming love for his home town of Meadow Lake and its environs, and for the members of his own family. And the book's major brush with serious issues has to do with white-aboriginal relations, focused on two specific facts: in his youth, his casual interaction with Clayton Matchee, the Native soldier alleged to be the principal torturer and murderer of Shidane Arone; and much later, Cariou's discovery that he himself has aboriginal blood.

His theory about Matchee is both credible and depressing: that Matchee, growing up, learned "that whiteness is power, and that the way to become white is to be a racist." Cariou's response to the revelation of his own Native ancestry seems balanced and sane: " . . . it doesn't seem right to claim that I am one. I am instead a little of this and a little of that; a child of the heterogeneous multitudes." Precisely the sort of conclusion you'd expect in one of those *Globe and Mail* pieces.

My impatience here flows from my sense that Cariou could have done so much more with this material if he'd chosen to write it as fiction. How powerful and compelling might *Lake of the Prairies* have been if there were a section—or story—in which a Matchee-like protagonist were allowed to tell his own story in his own voice—and for that matter, if a Cariou-like protagonist were allowed to speak in tones other than those of the suave genteel blandness that dominates here.

No doubt one day Cariou will write such fiction, and I look forward to it. In the meantime, it's safe to predict that if there's ever a second edition of *Sundog Highway*, it will include a ten-page chunk of *Lake of the Prairies*.

In stark and blessed contrast to all of the foregoing, Dianne Warren's *A Reckless Moon* is a strong and original story collection retailing no bromides about the meaning of life in Saskatchewan but simply delighting and impressing the reader with its artistry. The stories are Munro-length, averaging about forty pages. Warren uses the space efficiently, often employing multiple points of view and always focusing on nuance and detail, creating story-worlds of credible complexity, each one distinctive. In so doing, she comes far closer to conveying a felt sense of "real life" than anything else under review here. The only major repetitive element is the tendency for the protagonists to be single or lonely or both, but this feature never becomes obtrusive.

A Reckless Moon deserves more space than I can give it. For purposes of neatly tying things together, I'll concentrate on "Bone Garden," two of whose three focalizing characters are Saskatchewan teenagers. There's Carmen, with her sardonic view of the adult world and her disturbingly antisocial behaviour (causing a scene in a hotel tearoom, jumping fully clothed into the pool); she'd zero in on the propagandistic dimension of *Sundog Highway* in a heartbeat. There's her stolidly single-minded not-quite-boyfriend, Moe, who "has this longing [to see Carmen] that he doesn't understand." They embody different versions of the insanity that is adolescence, and Warren presents them in such a way that we empathize even as we are repelled.

The adult is Dixie, a social worker whose story-long headache suggests that growing up has its downside, too. There is a plot: Moe steals Dixie's car to visit Carmen, who's with her family in a Saskatoon hotel; Dixie tracks them down. But that hardly matters. And there's no moralizing and little psychologizing. What does matter is the writer's ability to make us perceive the world as her characters do, and to appreciate the ironies that stem from the juxtaposition of Dixie's bleakly sensible perspective with the impulsiveness and unpredicability of the teenagers.

At the end, in the depths of the bizarre hotel that may symbolize the weirdness of the adult world waiting to swallow up Carmen and Moe, the three characters converge, the youngsters in an ersatz Garden of Eden, with a closing scene featuring an understatedly hilarious reprise of the opening of *2001: A Space Odyssey*.

I suspect that students of English Language Arts A30 would enjoy this story, but it's not the stuff of which high achool anthologies are made. No problems have been solved, or solutions suggested.

But we know and care about the characters. And this is the real common denominator of the stories in *A Reckless Moon*. Warren writes with a compassion and generosity of spirit that complements the lean, clear prose. This is a book worth celebrating.

Transcending Boundaries

Paul Yee

Dead Man's Gold and Other Stories. Douglas & McIntyre $16.95

The Jade Necklace. Tradewind Books $22.95

Reviewed by Yaying Zhang

In *Dead Man's Gold and Other Stories*, Yee has again drawn inspiration from the early history of Chinese immigrants in North America to produce evocative tales about a people who were until recently silenced in official history books. As with his award-winning books *Tales from the Gold Mountain* and *Ghost Train*, this new collection of tales explores the pain, betrayal, and hope experienced by Chinese immigrants who were driven by poverty to sail to North America for a better life.

Written in the genre of ghost stories, a popular narrative form in Chinese literature, this collection of ten stories conveys a sense of myth and legend about the history of Chinese North Americans. Short but poignant, these stories dramatize a century of Chinese immigration to North America—from the nineteenth-century migration from Chinese villages to Gold Mountain in the Pacific Northwest, to the arrival of new immigrants from Hong Kong in the 1950s. In the title story, "Dead Man's Gold," a miner robs his best friend, but the stolen gold only brings curses to his life. In "Sky-High," a young logger who loves Chinese poetry sacrifices his life to save a giant tree from being cut by his fellow loggers. In "The Peddler," a vegetable seller is taunted and tortured by his white customers to a lonely and miserable death. In "Seawall Sightings," two young lovers, separated by racist immigration laws, have a tragic reunion. In the stories in this collection, those who die with regret and grievances come back to haunt the living, refusing to "rest at peace." An eerie full-page illustration by Harvey Chan at the start of each story creates visual images of the unsettled world of those who leave home to die in a foreign land.

Although Yee's treatment of more recent immigrants adds dimension to his perspectives on Chinese immigrant life, he is at his best in dealing with the earlier history of Chinese immigration. Deeply etched in the reader's mind are images of Chinese immigrants who toil in the gold mines, on the railroads, in the forests, laundries, and kitchens of the New World, while suffering from the anguish of leaving home and enduring the harsh realities of physical deprivation and racial discrimination.

While the subtle complexity of *Dead Man's Gold* may appeal to a wider readership, *The Jade Necklace* is a picture book for children between the ages of four and eight. Inspired by the Yip Sang collection at the Vancouver Museum, Paul Yee narrates a touching story of loss, bravery, forgiveness, and friendship. The story begins at the turn of the nineteenth century in South China where a young girl named Yenyee and her family live. One night, Yenyee's fisherman father vanishes in a ferocious storm at sea.

She feels betrayed by the ocean, a friend she has trusted all her life. In desperation and anger, she throws into the ocean the jade necklace of a fish her father gave her, hoping the ocean will return her Ba to her. Months later, in the New World, where Yenyee works as a maidservant, she miraculously finds the jade necklace in the same ocean that has taken her father's life. Relationships—between generations, between humans, between cultures, and between humans and the natural world—are pivotal to this story, and shifts in these relationships mark turning points in Yenyee's life.

The beautiful illustrations by Grace Lin capture the loneliness, fear, and hopefulness that accompany the events in Yenyee's life. The pictures and the text work together to form a magic tale, opening up the imagination of children. Young readers will not only marvel at how ordinary lives can be touched by the extraordinary, but also gain insights into how young immigrant children deal with change, relationships, and cultural differences.

No Dust Gathers Here

Jack Zipes, ed.
The Oxford Companion to Fairy Tales. Oxford UP
$42.95

Reviewed by Judy Brown

Reference books have a certain reputation for gathering dust. Shelved among dictionaries and handbooks, consulted every so often in preparation for a lecture or in the early stages of a writing project, such books are not so much consumed by readers as they are selectively sampled by them. *The Oxford Companion to Fairy Tales,* however, is no dust-gathering reference work for occaisonal perusal; it is a book calculated both to stimulate and sustain a reader's appetite for ever more information about the fairy tale—a genre simple in form but complex in effect and influence, a genre with staying power.

The Companion is as close to being a page turner as a reference work can be. Certainly it features standard entries on the collectors, writers, and illustrators whose names are synonymous with the European fairy tales of centuries past. And certainly it features background on and plot summaries of canonical European and North American fairy tales. But there is more. Editor Jack Zipes's introduction is a crisp, clear tribute to these stories that "vie with the Bible as the most widely read literature in the world" for readers "curious about their magic." Celebrating the changing nature of the genre—in its authorship, intended readership, content, and purpose—Zipes reminds his curious reader women were the first to name the form and that stories were rarely intended strictly (if at all) for children. He acknowledges the conservative history of fairy tales in socializing their readers and comments on the just-as-impressive subversive power of tales past and present that question the ways of the world. A principal aim of *The Companion,* he declares, is to demonstrate the migration of the fairy tale into "cultural forms" such as ballet, opera, theatre, and film, and the contribution these forms make in turn to keeping the fairy tale alive into the 21st century.

Under Zipes's editorial leadership, scholars from many nations and disciplines have contributed short entries and longer pieces to *The Companion.* Of particular interest are essay-length surveys of fairy tale traditions in nations and regions of Europe and North America. Cristina Bacchilega's essay, "North American and Canadian Fairy Tales, 1900 to Present," is notable for its considerable focus on the fairy tale on film, while the essays on European nations focus much more on the genre in print form. Of the twenty-six paragraphs in Bacchilega's piece, three are devoted to Canada, with particular reference to Cyrus Macmillan's

Canadian Wonder Tales, L.M. Montgomery's *Anne of Green Gables*, and Margaret Atwood's critical observations on "the Rapunzel Syndrome." Bacchilega describes Canada as "keeping different kinds of magic alive" because of the "patchwork Canadian approach to immigrant cultures as distinctive from the American melting pot." This difference, she argues, makes the hold of Disney fairytale films on Canada less powerful than it is in the United States.

The most intriguing entries emphasize the traffic between fairy tales and other cultural forms. Readers will find any number of detailed pieces on fairy tales in opera, ballet, poetry, and film. Short, witty entries remind us of fairy tales in advertising and cartoons and even of fairy tales on postcards and postage stamps. In many cultures, it seems, this genre is anywhere one might care to look.

The best of the many mid-length entries in *The Companion* belongs to Maria Nikolajeva, whose extended comparison of fairy tale and fantasy is a model of clear, rich definition and analysis. Naomi Wood's entry on the giant shadow cast by Walt Disney's work is an admirable examination of what she sees as "the single most influential figure in American children's literature of the 20th century." Terry Staples's entry on Jim Henson's critique of Disney and his extended description of Henson's collaboration with Anthony Minghella on *The Storyteller* series leaves a reader wondering about what might have been had Henson not died so young.

Zipes does not overstate when he describes *The Oxford Companion to Fairy Tales* as "a first." It is a remarkable, ambitious, rich resource with much to recommend it. The apparatus alone—whether the dozens of full-page illustrations taken from scores of classic and contemporary fairy tale collections, the bibliographical items following most individual entries, or the comprehensive thirty-seven page bibliography that closes the book—is worth the price of purchase.

In the next edition, one might hope for consistently sharp illustrations, more than passing reference to the impact of new technologies on the shape of the genre, and full entries on the influences of Asian, African, and South American tales on the European and North American canons. Zipes acknowledges that he sees more to be done in future projects of this kind. For now, however, readers should attend to, learn from, and enjoy this book. To let it gather dust would be a shame.

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*.

Genetics according to *Oryx and Crake*

Anthony Griffiths

In *Oryx and Crake*, Margaret Atwood flexes her literary muscles to take a swing at the science of genetics. Her message is that genetics dabbles in things that are unnatural and creepy and will surely get us into a lot of trouble. In this view she sides with other writers in the popular media.

The plot, simply put, is that in a not-too-distant future, misguided geneticists led by a modern Dr Frankenstein, Crake, use the latest technology to create some pretty weird animals and some even weirder people, and eventually bring an end to the world as we know it by making a new virus to which there is no resistance. Crake begins his meddling ways as a student at the prestigious Watson-Crick Institute, named after the real men who received the Nobel Prize for deducing the structure of DNA in 1953. At WCI, the students spend their time tinkering with life forms to come up with marketable new ideas. Crake's devilry culminates later in his career during his tenure at RejoovenEsence Corporation. Peripheral to this plot are two other main characters, the enigmatic love interest Oryx, and the shallow sidekick Jimmy (alias Snowman). Unfortunately, despite the satellite status of these two people, their histories are explained in lengthy and sometimes irritating detail. We hear that Oryx, for example, was sold into slavery and suffered abuse by pedophiles; her story forms a long and irrelevant subplot.

To me this book seems to have a strong message about science (specifically genetics) and is not to be treated as pure fantasy. This impression is shared by Susan M. Squier, reviewer of *Oryx and Crake* for *Science* (November 14, 2003), who entitled her piece "A tale meant to inform, not to amuse." If *Oryx and Crake* is to be taken as serious commentary, then it should stand up to some reality checks about its science. But first, a criticism of the overall approach of the book. It uses genetic engineering as a lightning rod for wrath aimed at the negative outcomes of science in general. However, picking on genetics is inappropriate and misleading. Negative outcomes are possible from any technology, including genetics, and there is no doubt that science and society must be vigilant in trying to anticipate these. However, to date, genetics has provided remarkably few cases that would warrant alarm. Atwood seems to have taken the hype in the media as truth. Of all branches of science, genetics (to date) is among the most benign, and there are few cases of death or ill health arising from its applications. This stands in stark contrast to the negative outcomes of other sciences, as a result of which many thousands of people have died or suffered ill health. For example, chemistry has given us widespread toxic pollution, physics has invented nuclear and other types of superbombs, and engineering has given us the

internal combustion engine with its associated air pollution and global climate change. On the unmentioned positive side of genetics, there can be few people in the world who do not benefit from its research, which has produced better food plants and animals, better clothing, new medicines, and new approaches to human disease therapy.

Atwood seems to have formed her views of genetics only from her reading of the popular media. The examples she uses are all based on cases that have been given high profile by the press in recent years. This suspicion is supported by the acknowledgement section of *Oryx and Crake*, in which a "box of clippings" is credited. Regrettably, no practising geneticist or genetics journal seems to be acknowledged as a source. Not consulting expert sources is an unreliable way of doing research, and it has, predictably, resulted in problems.

The futuristic setting of the book cannot be too far hence because our current technologies of e-mail, the internet, and DVDs all feature in the book and define its imaginary society's state of advancement. Such technologies are notoriously ephemeral, and probably all will be replaced by new devices well within fifty years. So the genetic examples in the book must be presumed to be possible with technology not much more advanced than that which we have at present. In other words, there are no fantastic futuristic technologies such as morphing, teleporting, or hyperdrive. That being the case, how believable are Atwood's examples?

The world of *Oryx and Crake* is populated by several types of hybrid animals created by its geneticists and now running rampant through the environment. Remember the children's jokes of the type "What do you get when you cross an elephant with a kangaroo?"? (Big holes all over Australia.) Such comical hybrids, melds of the properties of two animal types, figure prominently in Atwood's novel. One example is the rakunk, a combination of raccoon and skunk. Others are the snat (snake plus rat, a hard-to-imagine furry quadruped with a snake's long body and tail) and the wolvog (wolf plus dog). Although wolf-dog hybrids can (and do) arise because wolves and dogs are genetically similar, fusion hybrids like the rakunk and snat simply cannot be made with present technology. Furthermore, the genetic programmes of such disparate species are so different and so individually fine-tuned that it is unlikely that they could ever be induced to interact additively to produce a viable hybrid. Hence they are probably impossible.

Where did Atwood get the idea that such forms are a realistic possibility? Her misconception can be inferred from her reference to the hybrids as "splices." In genetics, what Atwood refers to as splices are called transgenics. Transgenesis is the process of adding to the total set of DNA (the genome) of an organism a single gene (or a few genes) from an unrelated one. Indeed, Atwood makes reference to a transgenic that has actually been made, a goat genome into which spider silk genes have been inserted in such a way that the silk is secreted into the goat's milk. The goat becomes an unwitting (yet unsuffering) factory for making and conveniently secreting a useful commercial product. However, this animal, dubbed a "spoat" or "gider," is referred to in *Oryx and Crake* both as a splice and as a product of a cross of goat and spider. It certainly did not come from a cross, whether a cross is viewed as a mating or as some type of forced fusion of complete goat and spider genomes. The transgenic origin of the real-life spoat is quite different from the supposed origin of the impossible hybrids such as rakunks and snats.

The green fluorescent rabbits that hop in and out of the bushes in some scenes of the novel are based on a widely reported news release concerning fluorescent mice. These are transgenic rodents that express a gene for green fluorescent protein (GFP), obtained from a jellyfish. GFP technology

was invented to be used in research as a genetic "reporter" system. When attached to any gene of interest to the experimenter, the glowing green protein reports the cellular or organismal location of the activity of the gene of interest. In this way, the genetic programs that underly the development of plants, animals, and humans can be understood. This powerful and adaptable GFP technology has been welcomed and widely applied in all areas of biology. Hence, rather than a gratuitous messing about with animals to produce glow-in-the-dark models (as Atwood implies), GFP technology is producing dividends in understanding all types of biological development. One of the biggest rewards will be in its contribution to understanding human development and the ways in which it can go awry in the numerous developmental disorders that afflict us.

Much ink in *Oryx and Crake* is devoted to the pigoon, a menacing free-ranging type of giant pig. Our media have accurately reported that pigs are being developed to act as organ donors for people. Such animals must be genetically modified so that their tissues will not invoke the organ rejection response in humans. With their wonky immune systems, such animals would certainly die if released into the wild. However, in *Oryx and Crake* the accidentally released pigoons not only survive, thanks to some magical tinkering with the immune system carried out by Jimmy's Mom, but are able to think and communicate to such a degree that they chase Snowman and threaten his life on one of his walkabouts. It turns out that the intelligence of the pigoons is due to human brain genes that some genius just happened to drop into their genome. "In your dreams," as they say.

Accidentally released invasive species of animals and plants are currently a very real threat, having wide-ranging impacts on their invaded ecosystems. However, these are natural species introduced from exotic sources, not dangerous hybrids created by geneticists. Doubtless the invasive species loose in the real world would not make such snappy plot characters as the pigoons. Here is another instance where the imaginary problems expressed in *Oryx and Crake* distract our attention from the real ones that assail us.

Crake's genetic reprogramming of a population of humans called Crakers draws us into the controversial area of eugenics. For most of the hundred years of the history of genetics, its practitioners have argued about the rights and wrongs of eugenics, which is the application of genetic principles to "improve" mankind itself. During the first part of the twentieth century eugenics was attempted seriously in several countries, including Canada and the US. Most of it was misguided, with its low point occurring in the attempts of the Nazis to build a "master race" by selective breeding of "Aryans" and selective eradication of specific groups such as Jews and gypsies. Quite apart from the atrocity of such violations of human rights, these eugenic attempts were ill-advised on scientific grounds: they could not have succeeded because not enough was known about the genetic basis of human behaviour. This is still true today, and that is why Crake's fictional tinkering with human behaviour is laughable from the scientific perspective. We know next to nothing about any complex human trait, and even if we did, we lack the technology to make wide-ranging modifications of the human genome. In any case, recent history has shown that humans do not need fancy genetic engineering to pursue their eugenic notions. Eugenics in the form of ethnic cleansing has been brutally applied in eastern Europe and in central Africa.

From the literary standpoint it is unfortunate that Crake's eugenic product, rather than a flock of goose-stepping super-Aryans bent on world domination, is a population of boring Pillsbury doughboys.

Having had all yearning erased from their genetic blueprints, the Crakers are left with little of interest, with the possible exception of the bizarre mating dance performed by their men. It is a true (although not a new) notion that having it too easy can be dehumanizing, but the Crakers do not make for compelling reading.

In focusing on these unlikely products of genetic research, Atwood ignores what is actually going on in the field. Through legitimate research on human genes, many hereditary diseases can now be effectively diagnosed prenatally, prospective parents can be counselled, and therapies can be applied to sufferers. In addition, great strides have been made in the understanding of the genetic basis of cancer.

Crake's last act is to destroy the human species using an unstoppable genetically engineered virus. Crake is portrayed so obliquely that it is never really clear why he should want to do this. In any case, as a fiendish scheme, it is not particularly original. In recent years we have had more than our fair share of speculation about biological weapons of mass destruction. Indeed, it has been correctly pointed out that a very good reason for not using human pathogens as biological WMDs is that they will kill anyone, friend or foe. It might be surmised that through appropriate genetic modification, such a weapon could be targeted to a specific race of choice. However, recent research in genetics has given us the truly enlightening principle that at the gene level the very concept of race is meaningless. Hence it is unlikely that a race-specific genetically engineered virus could ever be devised. In any case we do not need crazed genetic engineers to produce disease epidemics. Nature does this without our help, giving us the Black Death, killer influenzas, SARS, and AIDS. (And waiting in the wings is a possible pandemic of antibiotic-resistant bacterial disease.) Surely readers used to learning about these real horrors on the TV news will not find Crake's hypothetical virus particularly chilling.

A danger of the lightning rod approach to polemics is that whereas the high-profile structure takes the hits, other, more menacing structures currently enjoying lower profiles escape the lightning bolts entirely. Right now, large numbers of people and whole species of organisms are dying from the negative aspects of science mentioned earlier. The misapplication of science is killing our planet. These real crises need our attention, not purely hypothetical disasters arising from genetics. The inherent mistake is in accepting uncritically the profiles of science presented in the popular media. This is what Margaret Atwood has done in *Oryx and Crake.* It is an unfortunate mistake, for it not only harms the perception of the respectable science of genetics, but also distracts readers from other, far more pressing and important scientific issues.

Profession de naïveté tenace

Réjean Beaudoin

«Comme il est beau de savoir quelque chose!» répétait béatement Monsieur Jourdain.

On en rit, mais c'est peut-être parce qu'on exagère la distance des trois siècles et demi qui nous protègent, croit-on, de toute ressemblance avec l'impérissable héros de Molière. Dans sa pièce au titre emphatiquement ironique, *Le Bourgeois gentilhomme* était celui, on s'en souvient, qui s'étonnait si plaisamment de parler en prose sans le savoir. Il m'arrive, quant à moi, de rire jaune en me rappelant les tirades de petits maîtres qui impressionnaient si fort le brave homme entiché des grands de ce monde, dont il voulait à tout prix imiter les manières élégantes et emprunter le savoir supposé.

Les sous-fifres pontifiants n'ont pas disparu avec l'Ancien Régime. Ils se portent encore assez bien autour de nous. Je suis tenté de faire un aveu qui coûte à mon amour propre. Il y a longtemps que je rêve, moi aussi, de savoir quelque chose. Je soupçonne même ce rêve ancien d'être la source véritable de tous mes appétits de lecture. Je crois parfois que c'est à cette ambition de savoir que je dois le plus fort de mon intérêt pour la littérature. Et voici que je me surprends à me demander sérieusement: «Qu'aurai-je appris, en somme, de la littérature dont j'ai voulu faire l'occupation première de ma vie? A-t-elle répondu à mon rêve d'apprendre quoi que ce soit?»

Il est assez malaisé de constater qu'on a perdu la partie. Je m'en rends mieux compte avec le temps: je sais toujours bien moins que ce que j'espérais apprendre. La fréquentation des livres m'aura enseigné justement que mon premier désir de connaître partait d'une ignorance plus précieuse en elle-même que je ne l'avais escompté, puisque c'est cette lacune insondable que je ne cesse de découvrir à travers ce que j'ai lu. Ce qui en moi appelait le savoir livresque rencontre constamment sa mise en garde dans la littérature. Celle-ci me dévoile, au contraire, les ressources d'une candeur sans laquelle ni émerveillement, ni fiction, ni poésie, ni aucun savoir même n'auraient pu se faire jour dans ma pensée, puisque toutes ces choses tirent leur valeur et leur existence du grand fond d'«inconnaissance» auquel elles tâchent de m'arracher.

Ce paradoxe n'est pas un sophisme de mon invention. Je le tiens plutôt pour la terre ferme de mon cheminement intellectuel. Si je me souviens de la distance parcourue, j'admettrai qu'il n'en a pas toujours été ainsi. Il fut un temps où je ne cherchais qu'à percer le secret de la langue des érudits. C'était au temps où le discours savant s'attaquait à la tâche redoutable de démystifier—le mot était à la mode—l'art des écrivains. C'était l'époque où les études littéraires affirmaient haut et fort la prétention d'atteindre à la certitude des disciplines scientifiques. Il fallait donc en adopter toutes les procédures et en emprunter intégralement la démarche logico-déductive. Concepts, théorèmes et paradigmes envahirent rapidement la prose sèche des chercheurs, pendant que les

œuvres étaient prudemment mises à distance, quand elles n'étaient pas radicalement déconstruites, disqualifiées sous prétexte de mystification pure et simple. Quand il fut bien établi que les chefs-d'œuvres admirés depuis toujours n'étaient que des impostures glorifiées par la tradition scolaire, on décréta qu'une nouvelle ère venait de commencer sous le signe de la mort de l'Auteur, ce qui eut aussitôt pour effet de déclencher le signal du retour du texte, mais non sans redéfinir complètement la notion de celui-ci.

Il n'était plus question de texte littéraire; celui-ci était frappé d'anémie depuis la mort de l'Auteur. On parla de textualité générale. On publia des usuels dans lequels étaient recensés et définis les centaines de mots dérivés du substantif «texte». Et la page du quotidien du matin put enfin rivaliser légitimement avec l'ode, la tragédie, l'épopée et le sonnet dans les salles de cours où cette révolution attira les foules assoiffées du nouveau savoir. Après l'abattage de la littérature, on passa à des soucis plus sérieux que les ruses de la rhétorique. Monsieur Jourdain était réhabilité dans toute la dignité de sa suffisance, que la science nouvelle préférait appeler la suffisance de sa dignité; ce renversement sémiotique était très apprécié des nouveaux savants. Car le cortège solennel et complet des sciences humaines défilait au pas de charge dans le moindre articulet sur le rond de jambes des laquais.

C'est dans ce contexte que j'entrepris mes études universitaires en littérature. C'est également dans ce climat survolté que la littérature québécoise se vit dotée de ses premières lettres de noblesse. L'époque était exaltante. Rien de trop ardu ni de trop lourd pour rebuter la fraîche ambition de déboucher sur des connaissances solides et durables après des siècles de fumisterie impressionniste, comme on le disait de la vieille critique littéraire, chère à nos aînés. Congédiée pour cause d'historicisme, de dilettantisme et de rêverie prétentieuse, la critique. Barthes fut couronné et Picard jeté aux rebuts. L'histoire de la littérature fut rangée au grenier, parmi les vieilleries. Aucune terminologie n'était assez rébarbative pour dégoûter les apprentis-sorciers. Le jargon se portait garant de la rigueur épistémologique. La production savante se gavait de concepts en proportion inverse de ce qu'elle démolissait de valeurs consacrées. Il s'agissait d'édifier la Cité du savoir sur ses vrais fondements. Je m'en souviens, non sans malaise.

Tout cela devrait se laisser remémorer avec un certain sourire, le recul du temps aidant. Cette fièvre juvénile, cette acné d'apprentissage, je m'en moquerais sans férocité, si j'avais l'assurance qu'elle a pris fin et que la chaleur de l'organisme s'est un peu tempérée. Rien n'est moins sûr. Ai-je mordu très fort à toute cette logomachie? À vrai dire, ce n'était que le commencement de la débâcle. Depuis trois décennies, le courant a tout emporté. Il n'est plus question d'endiguer le flot furieux qui s'y est engouffré avec fracas. En isolant les forces qui se rencontrent dans cette pression torrentielle, chacun risque de reconnaître ses maîtres, ses pairs ou ses disciples, tous plus ou moins démembrés par la turbulence des eaux troubles.

Se prendre pour Dieu ou se faire romancier, est-ce bien la même chose? Quelle ironie du sort, juste au moment où l'Un et l'autre étaient voués au même limogeage! Le Créateur du monde et l'auteur de fables étaient accusés du même crime: divertir pour mieux tromper. Cela ne serait plus permis désormais. Le point de non retour était franchi, mais je n'ai pas cessé, quant à moi, de fréquenter les textes littéraires, de préférence aux ouvrages dogmatiques qui les pulvérisaient en cendres; réviser le canon devenait un brevet de compétence, presque un permis de pratiquer. C'est mon instinct de rébellion, en somme, qui m'a éloigné des langues de bois iconoclastes qui

se substituaient ainsi aux essais critiques. Ma résistance fut à mes propres dépens.

Les civilisations vieillissantes retombent-elles en enfance comme les vieillards? Il est possible que l'humanité avance en âge, mais en matière grise, c'est douteux. Où mène le mouvement de l'Histoire? Je tiens le fil longuement déroulé de ma candeur «jourdanesque». Qu'il serait beau de savoir quelque chose! La réponse que me souffle la littérature, c'est que le monde reste fragile et mal assuré, tant en lui-même que dans la connaissance que nous croyons en avoir. Et cette leçon vaut son prix parce que c'est la seule qui puisse nuancer la morgue des vendeurs de certitudes données pour vérifiables. Il existe une bêtise propre aux gens intelligents et c'est un aveuglement différent de la sottise ordinaire. Il existe aussi une ignorance consciente de son propre fonds et par là distincte du savoir lacunaire. Une certaine ignorance que je dirais autoréflexive et informée par sa propre précarité me paraît infiniment plus valable et plus précieuse que les démonstrations les plus ingénieuses. Ce n'est pas l'ignorance pure que je vénère, mais l'ignorance qui procède d'un savoir relativisé par sa mise en question, ignorance peu pressée de se précipiter vers l'assurance blindée et de se garantir contre toute faillibilité, ignorance qui savoure et qui contemple le caractère incomplet de tout savoir. Cette ignorance-là est guérie de la tentation de conclure et de la démangeaison de généraliser. Telle est en outre la leçon que je retiens de la littérature et d'elle seule. Je dirais presque qu'elle me suffit, mais rien n'est jamais suffisant. En tout cas, il y a des insuffisances plus profitables que d'autres à méditer.

Il y a eu bifurcation dans le parcours que j'essaie d'ébaucher. Formé aux techniques de la nouvelle critique, je n'en ai retenu qu'une méfiance aguerrie à l'endroit des approches qui se réclament du caractère scientifique de leurs méthodes. Mon humble tâche de praticien dans le champ de la critique littéraire, je n'en revendique pas d'autre attribut que le témoignage du chroniqueur, lecteur parmi d'autres qui s'efforce de donner une forme écrite à ses bonheurs de lecture et à ses déceptions d'occasion. Ma véritable et ma seule formation, c'est la chronique. Ce fut une école d'écriture, puisqu'il faut donner forme écrite à ses émotions. Au-delà des périodiques qui ont bien voulu publier ma prose éphémère—les revues ne s'adressent pas à la postérité—, mon rapport à la littérature est une affaire plutôt confidentielle qui se joue entre les livres lus et mon humeur matinale, pas toujours massacrante, mais plus variable que celle que je promène en ville ou dans la salle de cours.

Ce que la littérature m'aura finalement appris, ce sont les vertus de l'ignorance. Elles me sont toutes plus chères que les usages prescrits du savoir; ceux-ci se sont confondus aux pratiques courantes et déjà très anciennes du pouvoir. Quelles sont-elles ces vertus que j'estime tant, au point qu'elles rachètent amplement les culs-de-sac de tout apprentissage? C'est ce que je vais m'efforcer de dire.

Je n'ai pas encore parlé de mes projets de chercheur et de mes travaux savants, expression qui me gêne autant que la fameuse caution scientifique. Vivre à l'abri des contradictions, ce serait renoncer à respirer sans doute. Je poursuis depuis dix ans, avec André Lamontagne et Annette Hayward, la réalisation d'un projet de recherche subventionné par le CRSH (Conseil de recherches en sciences humaines du Canada) sur la réception critique anglo- canadienne de la littérature québécoise de 1867 à 1989. Il en est résulté des communications et des articles dont le dernier a paru dans le numéro 176 de *Canadian Literature/Littérature canadienne:* «Un demi-siècle de réception critique de la littérature québécoise au Canada anglais: 1939–1989»; une partie importante de notre

bibliographie est sous presse; elle rassemble près de trois mille entrées qui composent la section contemporaine de notre corpus. Nous préparons des études métacritiques qui devraient nous occuper assez longtemps.

Je travaille par ailleurs à un livre sur la France vue par les écrivains québécois depuis le milieu du XIXe siècle. L'idée s'inscrit dans la suite de mon essai sur le messianisme (*Naissance d'une littérature. Essai sur le messianisme et les débuts de la littérature canadienne-française* [1989]), mais elle excède aussi ce sujet, notamment par le cadre chronologique qui embrasse cette fois la production littéraire québécoise contemporaine. Il s'agit d'évaluer la portée et l'importance de la référence française dans les composantes culturelle, idéologique, et identitaire de l'imaginaire québécois. Le corpus est étendu et diversifié, traversant plusieurs genres et embrassant des époques séparées par de profondes mutations de moeurs et de mentalité. Enfin je collabore, à titre occasionnel, mais avec intérêt, au groupe de recherches que dirige Guy Poirier, de l'Université de Waterloo, sur la culture des francophones de l'Ouest canadien. J'ai contribué deux textes à ce collectif du Centre d'études francophones Québec-Pacifique; l'un de ces textes est à paraître dans un recueil actuellement sous presse. Je tente d'y mesurer la distance (géographique, mais aussi intérieure) qui me tient éloigné du Québec depuis vingt-et-un ans.

Me voici donc en train de tâcher de résoudre mes contradictions avec moi-même, celle du Québécois égaré dans les lointains de la diversité canadienne. Si j'ai revendiqué plus haut la vertu d'ignorance qui guide le commentateur littéraire que je suis, je ne renonce pas non plus à prendre ma part au jeu de la recherche subventionnée, la seule mesure qui compte quant à l'évaluation des carrières universitaires. S'il y a du Monsieur Jourdain sous mon bonnet, j'hésite à décider de quel côté de cette double posture il opine en inclinant du chef. Le vieux gredin a-t-il appris quelque chose? Je n'en jurerais de rien.

S'il n'est pas honteux de vouloir limiter en soi l'empire de l'ignorance, il est par contre beaucoup moins clair de succomber à la tentation d'abuser d'une connaissance neuve et probablement partielle pour en tirer le prestige d'un pouvoir indiscuté. Cette exploitation éhontée, Monsieur Jourdain en était plutôt la victime que l'opérateur, et c'est pourquoi sa candeur garde après tout quelque chose de presque touchant et de moins abject en somme que ses petits maîtres chez qui la fatuité n'a d'égale que la rapacité.

La science fumeuse a la couleur suspecte de l'argent blanchi: c'est le butin d'un voleur qui a changé d'habit pour se faire honnête homme. Le subterfuge est celui de l'imposteur. Ce trafic d'influence en guise de règle du jeu professionnel hante encore les milieux parascientifiques. Comment tracer la limite nette entre le savoir et l'ignorance, me demandera-t-on? Je ne prétends pas avoir trouvé la réponse ni pouvoir trancher à coup sûr, mais il me semble que «l'ère du soupçon» a maintenant l'allure de l'aire du fripon. Le discrédit s'étend à une dimension quasi universelle. Il y a crise de crédibilité à tous les niveaux de la société néolibérale, en tous lieux. L'entreprise critique se perd de toutes parts. Elle s'émousse. Elle a perdu ses dents. Le consensus mou est à la remorque d'une correction politique qui ne gêne ni les filous ni les profiteurs. Et ce commun dénominateur de l'indifférence générale, c'est le degré zéro du libre arbitre et l'agonie de la liberté de penser.

Les questions auxquelles la recherche tente de répondre et celles qui découlent du libre examen d'un lecteur isolé, ces deux perspectives appartiennent à des démarches différentes et fort éloignées par leur nature et leur procédure propre. La distinction ne va pas toujours jusqu'à la contradiction,

sauf dans les cas-limites: il y a des lecteurs ignares et il y a des érudits incultes. Je les regarde comme de monstrueuses exceptions. Dans la sphère institutionnelle, le courant paraît s'établir à partir des cas aberrants, plus rarement sur la base solide des valeurs de fond ou sur celle des quantités significatives.

Pour finir, je me dois de tâcher de dire comment je veux tenir ensemble les deux bouts de mon activité critique qui se divise essentiellement entre la recherche et le commentaire plus personnel, que je pratique en des lieux séparés. La diversité, je le répète, ne se présente pas toujours sous l'angle de la contradiction et je suis incapable d'envisager l'éventualité de renoncer à l'une de ces deux activités au profit de l'autre. Et qui d'ailleurs me demande de choisir? N'empêche que la nécessité de les distinguer s'impose. Comment vois-je la différence? Telle est la question. Il y a donc deux ordres de considérations qui passent par la recherche et par la chronique. Les deux me tiennent à coeur, mais pour des raisons qui n'ont que peu de rapport entre elles. La chronique, je m'y investis comme dans une sorte de formation continue, une discipline qui ressemble à celle grâce à laquelle l'instrumentiste fait ses gammes et cette discipline n'est jamais achevée une fois pour toutes, elle est sans cesse à parfaire dans un assouplissement progressif de ses moyens d'expression accordés à la maîtrise de la voix de son instrument. En un seul mot comme en mille, la critique est un art. Les chercheurs pratiquent, eux, une autre tâche. Elle n'exige sans doute pas moins de travail ni de dispositions spéciales, les unes fort étroites et pointues, les autres plus généralement reliées à l'aspect rationnel des qualités de l'intelligence à la fois pratique et théorique. La recherche n'exclut pas non plus la notion de la beauté des résultats, mais celle-ci y dépend peut-être moins de la touche subjective du chercheur que de la méthodologie de ses travaux.

Mon engagement envers la recherche est tardif par rapport à la critique que je pratique depuis plus longtemps. Les instances du milieu local, c'est-à-dire les arbitres de mon avancement, n'ont pas négligé de me le faire remarquer avec toute la sévérité de qui exerce une parcelle d'autorité. En d'autres lieux cependant, il n'est pas nécessairement jugé contradictoire pour un universitaire de se faire poète ou romancier. Le profil de plusieurs chercheurs respectables qui ont acquis une réputation d'écrivain n'en est pas diminué pour autant. J'ai beaucoup de mal à comprendre pourquoi il en va autrement à l'Ouest des grands lacs. Je n'admets pas davantage de voir l'espace professionnel livré à l'espèce d'indifférenciation qui règne en certains cénacles où la médiocrité des uns prétend inscrire ses droits de négocier d'égale à égale contre les critères qui gouvernent le progrès des carrières. Telle est bien, je le redis une fois de plus, l'une des vertus cardinales que je reconnais à la littérature telle que je la conçois. La littérature contient et prescrit en elle-même des normes qualitatives à ceux et celles qui s'y mesurent. C'est pourquoi il est particulièrement inadmissible de voir des individus s'y tailler un fief personnel avec des moyens qui tiennent plus du brigandage que du service de la connaissance.

Brandir ma profession de naïveté dévoile un sous-texte que la lecture peut choisir d'ignorer dans une intervention comme celle-ci, qui ne se veut pas polémique. Je n'entends qu'alerter la nécessaire vigilance qui peut seule rappeler à l'ordre les abuseurs. C'est le règne des petits maîtres qu'aucune révolution n'a inquiétés. Molière a vu loin. Les arbitres du goût de Monsieur Jourdain sont aussi répandus de nos jours que de son temps. J'aurais pu en être moi aussi et j'ai tenté de dire comment j'ai raté de justesse le train de la médiocrité triomphante. Je ne l'ai jamais regretté bien amèrement. Il n'en est que plus doux de confesser la faute.