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Articles of approximately 6500 words (including Notes and Works Cited), double spaced, in 12-point font size, should be submitted in triplicate, with the author's name deleted from 2 copies, and addressed to The Editor, *Canadian Literature*, The University of British Columbia, Buchanan E158, 1866 Main Mall, Vancouver, B.C., Canada V6T 1Z1. Submissions should include a brief biographical note and a self-addressed return envelope, either with Canadian stamps or accompanied by International Postal Reply Coupons. Submissions without SASE cannot be returned.

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

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Call for Papers

Canadian Literature Theme Issue: *Atlantic Canada*

Guest Editors: Marta Dvorak & Coral Ann Howells

Deadline: May 1, 2005

Atlantic Canada with its unique geography and history has both a regional definition and an imaginative definition which far exceeds its geographical location. Nova Scotia holds a position of chronological primacy in the intellectual development of the country, already producing books and magazines in the mid-eighteenth century when the rest of what is now Canada was largely unsettled by Europeans. Halifax was notably the site of Canada's first newspaper (1751), and held the first performance of a play by a Canadian author as early as 1774. The first Canadian university, the Anglican King's College (1802), preceded the founding of Montreal's McGill, Toronto's King's College, and Kingston's Queen's College. Atlantic writers have generated an extraordinary literary output from the nineteenth century on, with pathbreakers such as Thomas Haliburton and Thomas McCulloch, who blazed the trail for such satirists as Mark Twain and Stephen Leacock. The region produced the first distinctive Canadian landscape poets: Archibald Lampman, Duncan Campbell Scott, Charles G.D. Roberts, Bliss Carman, and E.J. Pratt. The remarkable production never flagged throughout the twentieth-century, with strong writing by Charles Bruce, Ralph Connor, Thomas Raddall, Frank Parker Day, Hugh MacLennan, Nellie McClung, L.M. Montgomery, Alden Nowlan, and Ernest Buckler. More recently, Atlantic Canada has provided compelling prose, drama, and poetry by writers such as David Adams Richards, Joan Clark, Alistair MacLeod, Wayne Johnston, Bernice Morgan, Helen Porter, Maxine Tynes, George Elliott Clarke, Rita Joe, and David Woods, with their heterogeneous yet distinctive textures and flavours. Yet, interestingly, the literature has had to struggle against the dynamics of marginalization. If, as Herb Wyile and Jeanette Lynes have argued, regions are simultaneously

distinctive and "traditionally subordinate", can the ex-centred position be transformed from a weakness into a strength?

This special issue of *Canadian Literature* will focus on the literature which not only "recreates the opulence that is the contemporary vocabulary and syntax of Atlantic Canada" (to quote Lesley Choyce), but also explodes regional specificity. Atlantic Canada is a place of paradox: the stark beauty of rocks and sea, but also the oldest intellectual pursuits and a long literary tradition. Poverty, economic depression, disaster, out-migration, yet a strong sense of independent identity and fierce local loyalties, long memories, and dedication to storytelling, legends and myth, as well as a distinctive gallows humour. In the long tradition of Atlantic writing (in both English and French) how have its paradoxical realities been represented? The guest editors invite contributions on novels, short fiction, poetry, and drama which may investigate, amongst sundry other concerns: the configurations and reconfigurations of place; the fascination with regional and social history and New World mythmaking, with landscape and legends, home and exile; the imaginative transformation of history and biography into fiction; mimetic traditions but also realism subverted by topography of fantasy, dream, or the carnivalesque. They may explore the multiplicity of voices from Atlantic Canada: strong Gaelic voices, multicultural and multiracial voices, voices of Maritimers who have moved 'away', or polyphonic voices conflating the oral and the written within reconfigurations of story, tale, and yarn. How does writing for Atlantic Canada suggest distinctive Canadian paradigms? Could we say, in a playful allusion to Ray Smith, that 'Cape Breton Is the Thought Control Centre of Canada'?

De quoi l'on cause / Talking Point

Réjean Beaudoin and Laurie Ricou

Il m'est arrivé souvent de m'étonner du divorce à peu près complet qui subsiste entre la langue écrite et la langue parlée dans la littérature française. Bien sûr il y a eu Céline, Queneau et Pennac. Mais ne font-ils pas figure d'empêcheurs de tourner en rond? On les lit, on les admire, on les consacre, puis on continue à faire comme si Boileau n'avait jamais cessé d'exercer sa magistrature sur les codes de la langue écrite.

Pourtant, quand on remonte à la naissance de la littérature canadienne d'expression française, on ne saurait éviter de noter l'importance de la tradition orale qui la précède et qui l'inspire à plusieurs égards dans les oeuvres fondatrices des Philippe Aubert de Gaspé, Joseph-Charles Taché, Henri-Raymond Casgrain et Louis-Honoré Fréchette, pour ne nommer que les ténors du XIXe siècle canadien-français. Il faut tout de suite ajouter que l'oralité n'a jamais perdu tout à fait de son actualité dans la littérature québécoise contemporaine. Il suffit de nommer Roch Carrier, Victor-Lévy Beaulieu, Réjean Ducharme, Antonine Maillet ou Hélène Monette pour constater la vivacité et la fécondité d'une certaine gouaille populaire qui continue de pénétrer la prose narrative de nos meilleurs auteurs. Au début du XXe siècle, Jean Aubert Loranger, Claude-Henri Grignon et Ringuet, avant Germaine Guèvremont, avaient su intégrer la parole vive des paysans dans des stratégies d'écriture neuves et soucieuses de traduire l'intonation et le rythme des locuteurs fictifs, de respecter leur lexique et leur idiosyncrasie. Ce qu'il faut dire, c'est que les parlars régionaux ont, depuis plus d'un demi-siècle, circulé abondamment et en toute fluidité dans le roman surtout, mais aussi dans la poésie (Jean Narrache, Gaston Miron, Paul Chamberland, Gérald Godin).

Les écrivains réunis autour de la revue *Parti pris*, dans la décennie 1960, ont franchi un pas tout de suite jugé problématique avec l'emploi du joul dans les oeuvres littéraires. Ce choix controversé allait soulever des discussions acrimonieuses. Tout cela appartient désormais à l'histoire d'une idéologie. Même si personne aujourd'hui ne soutiendrait sérieusement le recours au joul, il n'en reste pas moins que les André Major, Laurent Girouard, Jacques Renaud et Claude Jasmin ont joué un rôle capital, il y a quelque quarante ans, en cherchant l'articulation d'un nouveau rapport entre la langue verte et les codes littéraires. Jacques Ferron et Michel Tremblay cherchaient-ils autre chose?

I began my "Introduction to Canadian Literature" class this Fall term by *talking* Al Purdy's poem "Say the Names." In forty-five minutes of wait-time over the Labour Day weekend I memorized the poem, so that I could *say* it, urgently and yet still a little awkwardly, as I imagine Purdy doing. And so I began without preface or introduction—no "good morning," no announcing the course number and title, no distributing of course outlines:

Say the names say the names
 Illecillewaet and Whachamacallit
 Lillooet and Kluane
 Head-Smashed-In Buffalo Jump
 and the whole sky falling
 when the buffalo went down.

And, at our second meeting, again, I opened with a saying of this poem, this time, by turns, voice-by-voice, line-at-a-time, around the room, with the whole group joining in chorically at "say the names," and again together on the poem's most insistently echoing place name "Tulameen Tulameen."

For years I used to meet one of my colleagues before our office building had been unlocked, and we would regularly exchange our plans for making an impact on the early-morning class we were about to meet. And very soon we developed our own choric response. "It won't work," we intoned together. And went off to try.

However unsure of the impact of classroom chanting, I did have a few objectives in introducing Canadian literature by talking Purdy's poem. I wanted us to listen to the ways in which we have found, by whatever series of yearnings and misunderstandings, to relate to our community and its shared places. I also looked to introduce Canadian literature, at the University of British Columbia, through a poem that tilts westward,

through Purdy's trying, as so often in his poems, to talk himself into another space in Canada. It was also crucial, I thought, to anticipate the rest of the course by straining to hear at the outset a multiplicity of voices, and to hear a little of those voices—whole languages—that were falling when the buffalo went down. And hope to find them again rejoicing.

But above all, or before all, I wanted my students to listen to *their own* voices, to catch themselves overhearing, and so, to come to trust their own voices, their own many languages, and their own Englishes.

So, after Gallant and Roberts and Lampman and course outlines and assignments, I announced that at the beginning of the fourth week we would take most of one classroom hour to listen to their stories. Think of a place that's important to you, for whatever reason (sad or joyful): it can be a town or a river or a café or a street name—propose that a place is always an event and tell us, without notes, a wee two-minute story about your place. The place doesn't have to be in Canada, but because it's *your* place and told in your voice, it's then going to become part of Canadian literature. It may be the most memorable part of Canadian literature that you'll encounter this term.

It didn't work. They stayed away. Twenty of forty-five, given the chance to hear and the responsibility to tell their stories, declined. Despite talk shows and reality TV and cell phones, utility won out. Student stories weren't going to be on the exam, so why bother. Forget the temper of other voices. My students—many of them—simply didn't believe that the places they would encounter that sun-foggy morning might have an extension and capacity they would never encounter in their anthology.

Or maybe I didn't introduce the idea well enough or maybe I should have detoured around asking them to prepare. Preparing for spontaneity won't work.

La littérature québécoise, au cours de son évolution, a reflété très intensément cette influence constante de la parole des couches populaires. Observons maintenant la situation d'un autre angle: dans la presse journalistique et électronique, la pratique de l'interview qui met l'écrivain en présence du commentateur critique constitue un prénomène d'une ampleur considérable. Les pages culturelles des journaux en témoignent chaque fin de semaine. La radio et la télévision ne se privent certes pas de s'entretenir avec des personnalités "médiatiques", et les nouveaux média électroniques multiplient les forums de discussion "en ligne" sur tous les sujets. Quant à la pédagogie qui se pratique à l'école, inutile de rappeler à quel point la participation des étudiants et leur implication active dans les

matières à l'étude se sont imposées d'une manière quasi normative: il n'y a pas de jugement plus négatif sur un cours quelconque que de dire que le professeur n'a pas su stimuler la discussion du groupe.

La conversation est-elle en train de redevenir l'art fondamental de nos sociétés? Si oui, doit-on s'en réjouir pour la santé de la démocratie ou y a-t-il lieu de craindre, au contraire, les effets délétères d'un bavardage qui dilue tous les enjeux au seul profit de la démagogie? Il faut débattre de tout et toujours élargir le nombre des intervenants. D'une part, on voit s'élever le prestige des experts afin d'assurer les bases de l'information requise à la discussion; d'autre part, le plus ignare a le droit de proférer des insanités sur une ligne ouverte. Le pire est peut-être que ce pseudo-dialogue creuse des abîmes entre les masses au lieu de les rapprocher. Et il n'est pas sûr que notre pédagogie actuelle, axée sur la participation, ne soit pas la racine de ce navrant résultat.

Mais il y a d'autres lois de l'échange réglé que constitue la conversation lorsqu'elle met en présence deux ou plusieurs interlocuteurs de bonne foi et de savoir mutuellement respecté. Dans toute arène de discussion président des conventions de courtoisie, sinon des principes d'équité, voire des règles de procédure strictes. Rien de tout cela, convenons-en, n'exclut absolument le dérapage, comme le montrent éloquemment les délibérations parlementaires, pourtant soumises à un dispositif protocolaire plutôt rigide. Le problème du droit d'expression ressemble à celui de la présomption d'innocence du système judiciaire: c'est qu'il faut l'accorder à tous sans qualification préalable. L'abus n'est sanctionné qu'après le fait, c'est-à-dire trop tard, quand on a toutefois le courage d'appliquer des sanctions. La plupart du temps, on préférera s'abstenir et vivre avec les moindres maux d'une confusion banalisée. Tout cela parce que certains mots ont acquis une sorte de valeur sacrée, au-delà du sens commun.

Good talk in literature goes back a long way. It's compelling in Plato, ribald (often) in Chaucer, irrepressible in Falstaff. Wordsworth's enduring program was to write "a language really used by men." None of these, however, captures that element of the unplotted, the unintended, the overheard, the unprepared.

Since Molly Bloom, at least, we've been amused and awed by such talk—the talk I should have waited on, maybe, in my class. We've been impressed by the apparent spontaneity that may, of course have been carefully plotted and meticulously crafted. The paradox of hearing talk overheard is a continuing pleasure in the work of Jack Hodgins. In this tangent and that

conversational detour spliced together with commas, a poetics of gossip is often shadowed: its zest and hyperbole, and covert intimacy.

From one angle, Robert Kroetsch's *Seed Catalogue* develops a poetics of reticence. *Seed Catalogue* announces the literary value of a non-literary book. But I suggest it's a valid talking point that no poem quite so persuasively allows that *your* talk, the talk in your town, at your family table, with your friends, has poetic value. You could grow cabbages in those ears. Just a moment, I think *my mother* might have been a poet.

And while we're celebrating talk in literature, take a moment for the talkiest novel in all of Canadian writing—Antonine Maillet's *Pélagie-la-charette*. What a cartload of voices there. And, what an allowance is provided for confusion. A lot of the time, in reading *Pélagie*, you can't keep track of who is speaking. Different voices in different places are telling the same story. Several voices in the same place at the same time are telling different stories. It's exhausting. It's exhilarating—because you can hear a people, in several languages even, talking themselves home.

Sometimes, cliché has it that Canada is no talking society. Despite the zest of *Green Grass Running Water* and the centrality of Michel Tremblay to literature in both official languages (however *unofficial* his French), such examples as the Winnipeg growl of Peter Gzowski, the unsinging of Leonard Cohen and Stompin' Tom, the constant "yunno's" of our hockey players (at least in front of a microphone) might demonstrate a hesitant and taciturn community. But this issue of *Canadian Literature* takes a different line. It says Canadian literature is a hubbub. Charles G.D. Roberts' listening to the "winnowing soft grey wings . . . wander[ing] and wander[ing]" could hear the pulse of breath expelled. Vive la tintamarre.

On comprend qu'une foule de questions brûlantes, explosives, à la fois difficiles et cruciales, s'attachent à la conversation. Ce qu'on discerne beaucoup moins aisément, c'est que la parole vive et librement échangée est moins le contraire des pratiques d'écriture que leur complément nécessaire et vital, et surtout, leur présupposé inconditionnel: personne n'écrirait s'il n'avait d'abord reçu l'usage de la parole, mais le contraire n'est pas moins vrai dans un environnement alphabétisé: parler en feignant que l'écriture n'a pas de pertinence quant à ce que l'on dit n'est guère plus soutenable. C'est pourquoi nous espérons que le présent numéro, consacré aux conversations d'écrivains, saura nourrir la réflexion et la discussion des lecteurs.

Of Flowers

Around doubt,
respect.

Around love,
roses,

debt.
Much industrial
share-sweat
has brought them

to you. Frothed
Persian light.

The salesman's
semen-sweet fête.

Let down, then,
your beautiful

tabernacle
said I (& Blake).

God?
Profit

margin?
This hint

of mould
your undoing.

Love?
Spare me.

There's
so little

time
left.

The Theatre of the Body

Extreme States in Elisabeth Harvor's Poetry

The interview took place in May 2001 on the south shore of the Kennebecasis River, three miles, as the crow flies, from Harvor's childhood home.

Anne Compton (AC): Your books of poetry, *Fortress of Chairs* (1992), *The Long Cold Green Evenings of Spring* (1997), use free verse in variable length paragraphs. What does this form enable you to do?

Elisabeth Harvor (EH): It wouldn't occur to me to write in any other way. I don't care to be confined. Although in my experience as a teacher, I've found that if I give students restrictions, they will often respond with free writing that will surprise even them with its vitality or hilarity. Or terror. I remember writing "Afterbirth" (9–21), the first poem in *Fortress*. I had been reading a poem by Sharon Thesen in which she talks about tall blue glasses and music. It reminded me of the tall blue glasses from Mexico that my parents had. I started with that. And then it just became a series of free-wheeling memories from childhood. I was writing with a deliberate deadline in mind because at the last minute I had decided that I was going to send the poem to the *Malahat Review* long poem contest. I stayed up all one night working on it and sent off what I knew was a flawed version by express post the following morning, but I kept on working on it. The next afternoon I rushed down to Britnell's bookshop and got Sharon Olds' *The Gold Cell*. Her poetry triggers something powerful in me because she is so unambiguous. She is so much of a force. I thought, "I have to read Sharon Olds. I have to move close to that clinical fire to make sure that I pull everything that I can out of me for this poem." I wrote all that next night in a very strange fugue state.

- AC You are describing the way in which other people's writing, in this case Olds', can be a stimulus for your own.
- EH As a writer, I am drawn to her kind of staccato authority. I had a feeling that I could get something from this. I could inhale something, and it wouldn't be *like* hers, but it would be triggered by her. Having said that, though, I should also say that she is a writer I'm not entirely drawn to. She doesn't have enough ambiguity for me. Her work doesn't have enough of an afterlife. She's all there on the first take. You don't need to go back. She's too grandstanding, boastful, harsh, and has too microscopic an eye. At the same time, I'm very grateful to her, and find her powerful and stunningly refreshing. She affects me very differently from Plath, say, a poet I can go back to time and again. Plath is an absolutely primal force too, of course, but there's more invention in her work. There's greater metaphorical dazzle. There are greater leaps, but, at the same time, there's somehow more room in the poem for the reader to do some of the work with her.
- AC Your flexible free verse form allows for unpredictable developments, for surprise, and for lyrical associations between discrete moments. Do you think of yourself as a lyric poet or a narrative poet?
- EH Somewhere in between, I would say. Sometimes people say, "your work is prosy," but I can think of any number of poets who are much more prosy than I am, whose language is not lyrical.
- AC There is a strong formalist tradition in the Maritimes. You are unique in that your poetry is such a pure form of free verse. I've never seen a sestina or sonnet by you. Or a villanelle.
- EH I've never tried to write one although I know it could be intriguing to see how I would fight my way around that limitation. But for me, form—being hemmed in that way—is not a liberation. Poets whose work I admire greatly have all done these things. I've never done any of that. I've never counted syllables. I just want the poem to be however it is, and I'll just take a look at it and sound it out. The same goes for haiku. I like reading it, but I haven't been drawn to writing it.
- AC It seems to me sound matters in your poetry as much as sense does, even if you are somebody who doesn't count syllables. Do you read a poem aloud to yourself when you are writing it?
- EH Actually, I don't sound it out, but I do hear it somehow in my head. If it felt wrong, I would hear that.
- AC This is a poetry that takes its time, and in one poem the speaker says,

“You need time for that, that kind of linkage / memory begetting memory / as water begets water” (28). Do these lines describe the writing process for you?

EH Those lines would certainly describe the leisurely but eerie “Afterbirth,” but there are many shorter poems that feel much more condensed, at least to me: poems in *Long Cold Green Evenings* like “Leaving Home,” “Snow and the End of Childhood,” “Her Children or God,” and “Snazzy Night.” Or even “Letter to a Younger Man in Another Country” in *Fortress*.

AC “We” is the pronoun of frequency in *Fortress*. Sometimes the “we” is specified as “my sister and I” (“Afterbirth” 9); at other times, the “we” is a group, as in the nurse poems of Part 2 of *Fortress*. Sometimes, however, the impersonal pronoun “you” is used. Are you trying to put a distance between these speakers and yourself?

EH In the poem “Four O’Clock, New Year’s Morning, New River Beach” (45–46), a speaker is addressing a young mother who is referred to as “you.” That “you” is clearly the narrator herself. The “you” is the “I” in the past. In “Night Terror” (51–53), it is the same.

AC You haven’t lived in New Brunswick since you were twenty-one, yet the Kingston Peninsula and the city of Saint John generate some of your most powerful poems. What hold does this landscape exert over you?

EH The landscape of the Kingston Peninsula has a great hold over me because we were so very isolated there in the winters. We were isolated both physically and psychically from our neighbours. In summer, when there was a lot of foliage, we couldn’t even see any of our neighbours. We were the only immigrant family in a settlement of Scots and Irish descendants. There was all that immigrant pressure: our mother was forever giving us the impression that we must do better than everyone, that we must out-Canadian the Canadians, be more amazing at school, more amazing at everything. And although I can’t remember any of these things being specifically said, we felt them. The feminine quality of the landscape, though, its rolling hills, must have had some maternal reassurance for me. I was really in love with that landscape. I haven’t been able to go back. I lived in Fredericton in 1994–95 and had many chances to go down to the Peninsula, but I’d heard that it had changed a great deal, and I couldn’t go back. I think I want not to go back. I think, too, my feeling for the landscape is tied up with a certain feeling of abandonment. I can remember standing on the beach, as a very small

child, and watching my parents go out in the canoe, going around Black Rock so that they disappeared. I must have believed that they would be gone forever. In the winters, they would sometimes walk to Saint John by crossing the frozen river. Once, when I was still small, my brother followed our parents across the ice and got lost. The farm girl who looked after us organized a search party to go out on the ice to look for him. His tracks went as far as the crack in the ice that widened where the Bay of Fundy sent its salty tides up the river. It was assumed at first that he had drowned. But he was found alive. I remember my mother telling me all of this years later, and I cried so violently that she had to keep saying “But you see, it’s all right. We found him,” but I couldn’t be consoled by this. Any indication that we hadn’t been properly looked after got me very upset.

- AC If you felt that you weren’t being properly taken care of and were worried for your safety, was the landscape the safe place?
- EH I think the safety of the landscape was maternal, but it also had to do with my father, who was a very kind person, a stable person. The landscape and my father were the couple. My mother was the cyclone or the volatile lizard.
- AC In the poems, memory seems to blow a wintry chill on the present.
- EH When I was living in Fredericton and was driving around looking at the miles and miles of dark spruce trees, I just wanted to cry. Something about New Brunswick makes me want to cry.
- AC Is it the look of the place?
- EH It’s the history of the place. There’s a lot of open country on the Kingston Peninsula, and we owned a huge tract of land, but most of it was wooded. The feelings also relate to the time of my being writer-in-residence at the University of New Brunswick, and so they have some emotional connection to the area around Fredericton, the sad tracts of trees, fir and spruce, the endless miles of dark trees. There was also a great bluff behind our house on the Peninsula, with a small cedar forest leading into it, and I associate those cedar trees with a definite melancholy. But I think it was the more public history of the place too, and this is especially true of Fredericton: the massacres on both the Indian and settler sides, the terrible winters and the famines.
- AC Is it fair to say that this area—the Kingston Peninsula and the Kennebecasis River—is the psychological underground of your writing?
- EH Because I am no longer a child or an adolescent, no landscape, in the

present or future, will ever affect me in the same way. A lot of the adolescent feelings about sexuality, or safety, might have been landscape-connected. Romantic ideas about the future occurred while I was walking in the country. I remember coming home, so tired, as a student nurse, dragging a mattress out into the orchard, falling asleep there with apple blossoms falling all around me. I often dream now of living in the country, yet I don't think I would like it day-to-day. I don't even think of the country as a safe place any more. It's become a sinister place since Truman Capote's *In Cold Blood*. Movies like *Easy Rider*, and its descendants, have certainly also helped to demystify the romance and safety of the country.

AC The Maritime landscape obtains to a greater degree in your poetry than in your fiction. Why is that?

EH Partly because poetry—even my poetry—doesn't require characters. Although there are many poems about women and landscape, or women in the landscape, come to think of it. And then the ability of landscape to offer up images is so much more useful to a poem, and can even be the life of the poem whereas imagery and scenery can sometimes get in the way of the narrative in a story.

AC Does memory stand to experience as the afterbirth does to birth? Is memory the afterbirth?

EH That's wonderfully put. And, yes, I would say so.

AC "Memories. . . might point the way to this childhood, that childhood." Does that mean that there are any number of versions of the past?

EH Not really. I think I know about the past. I'm arrogant about what I remember, just as I suppose most people are, thinking that they remember everything exactly as it was. That line might be an instance where I am acknowledging the current thinking that there are many moods, many memories—that we might look at something one way one day and then differently another day, or look at it through a politically conscious lens and see it in another way. And yet I haven't revised my memories. You know how they say that when a parent dies, you revise your thinking about that parent. I haven't found that to be true. I didn't think differently about my father after he died. And if I survive my mother, I don't suppose I will think differently about her either.

AC Your writing comes out of a body of memories that you have about your personal past?

EH Often. Although more often out of the marriage between the invented

and the real. If I need to invent, I invent. Although, as most writers know, invention has a habit of becoming prescient in quite spooky ways. There's always a danger it can make you feel too much like God. But then life also has its habits, above all its notorious habit of upstaging art.

- AC Poems in *Fortress* include subjects such as menstrual periods, the placenta and giving birth. Are you insisting upon the connection between women's bodies and women's sensibility?
- EH Certainly not consciously, but I suppose I must always have been fascinated by the body, by illness, by life experiences that involve the body, like the woman giving birth out on the Kennebecasis River. Living out in what would now be called back country, one was just more exposed to the theatre of the body.
- AC Not just the marvellous women of "Afterbirth," but many of the women—the women going down to the river to bathe in the poem "The Damp Hips of the Women"—seem to have mythic stature. For you, is there in ordinary women a mythic quality?
- EH My mother was a great one for women friends. She made much of them, and they made much of her. While my father would be home working, or putting us to bed, or cooking supper, my mother would be down on the beach with her friends, or going off on little jaunts, or playing a trick with her friends on some other group of women. She was quite girlish with her friends. So, in a way, I saw them as girls together, but, at the same time, as goddesses. They were the ones who called the shots, and my father was just there as background. That was not my view of him, of course. But it was their view.
- AC The word "decay" recurs in *Long Cold Green Evenings* ("the air smelling of decay") and in your novel, *Excessive Joy* ("decayed sexual heat"). In a *New Brunswick Reader* article, you speak of the "East Coast's fog and decay." Did that attunement to decay begin back here?
- EH In a sense, that is my past and my childhood although I hadn't realized that I was so fond of the word. I wonder if it has to do with the house that we lived in on the Kingston Peninsula before we moved down to the pottery. It was a very old farm house, very mouldy, very dark. There was a curious smell in that basement. And as children we were always afraid to go down there. There was sand on the floor and a little stream bubbled up through it. It was like a landscape down there because of that stream. And there was an icehouse where a truck would come,

every two weeks, with a huge block of ice wrapped in canvas. The ice-block on the sawdust floor smelled of decay. In the orchard, the apples would fall and decay; so there was a lovely smell of apple decay.

AC You make poetry out of the intimate details of a life—the loves and hates between parents and children, the delight and terror of motherhood, the coming apart of marriage, and the terror of old age. Does the human heart in its entanglements accurately describe your material?

EH I would say so.

AC Few people write poems about children. The emotion so easily goes sentimental. The third section of *Fortress* contains poems on early motherhood and babies. Were these difficult to write?

EH Slipping into sentimentality was a worry. When I sold “At the Horse Pavilion” to the *Malahat Review*, the editors wanted to cut the last line, “Until this moment I never knew what love is” (66). They wanted the poem to end earlier. I agreed but then whenever I read the poem at readings, I would find myself putting the line back in. Their argument against the line was that it was already implied in the poem. But when I was putting the book together, I put the line back in.

AC For me your short stories are not as thematic—tyranny of mothers, internecine family warfare—as reviewers have suggested. Rather, they are glimpses into how the mind works: registering the present, remembering the past, sifting information. Would you say that the mind and how it works is your real subject?

EH Yes. And the heart, too, and how it’s connected to the mind. Or disconnected from the mind, as the case may be. A writer named Heidi Greco got this right when she reviewed *Let Me Be the One* for *Paragraph* and described the style of the book as “akin to synapses firing in the brain” and talked about the way the stories were “jolts of energy linking cliff to cliff, idea to idea.” As a writer who’s a constant reader, I would have to say that the mind is what I look for when I’m a reader, the mind and the heart, much more than I look for the architecture of plot. I read to meet the mind and the soul of the writer. But as a fiction writer, I have to try to remember that plot is the bait, the device that I have to use to get the reader, or at least some readers, to even *want* to encounter the heart and mind of the writer.

AC There is a lifetime in *Fortress* from the childhood of “Afterbirth” to the questions of “Bloom, Rain”—“How do we do it? / Learn how to be old?” Did you set out to chronicle a lifetime in this first collection?

- EH No. I didn't. I wasn't thinking of that trajectory. When Michael Harris and I finally put the poems together, we did think, however, of that order. That particular poem, "Bloom, Rain," has a very intriguing history in relation to two other poems. I'd read Don Coles' poem "Self-Portrait of the Artist at 3 a.m." in his book about Edvard Munch. Munch is looking in a mirror and thinking about how old he is. The lines "How do we do it? / Learn to be old?" then came to me. That's what I began with. My poem then becomes very involved with rain. Barb Carey, another poet friend, then read my poem and wrote a poem called "Wire Kiss" about a teenage girl. There's something incredibly rain-saturated in her poem, which was affected by "Bloom, Rain." So through that cross-pollination of poems, we went from a very old man looking in the mirror, to a middle-aged woman thinking about getting old and being afraid of it, to a very young girl thinking about a boy from her school while she looks out at the rain.
- AC There are four kinds of light in *Fortress*: the natural light of childhood, the overly bright light of the hospital poems (part 2), the watery light of the motherhood poems (part 3), and the rainy darkness of age and the single life in the final section. Is light for you the register of emotional or mental states?
- EH Often. And some of the women-living-alone poems are filled with a kind of surreal or even cruel light. I'm thinking of poems like "In the Cold Sunlight" and "Love After a Long Absence (of Love)" in *Long Cold Green Evenings*.
- AC In *Long Cold Green Evenings*, in one poem alone, there is a "light-pricked twilight" and "light-flocked dimness."
- EH Light can symbolize so many emotions. Not only for poets and painters, but also for story-writers: loss, hope, melancholy, regret, the understanding that we are going to die. But the tiny bits of light, the light-on-the-move in "light-pricked twilight" and "light-flocked dimness" seem more philosophically energetic and buoyant, at least to me, and perhaps take a happier view of mortality.
- AC Your fiction favours the sensation of smell; light is favoured in the poetry. Is that so?
- EH I think smells do belong much more in prose. They don't seem as connected with clarity as light does. They seem more ordinary, more connected with the body.
- AC In your novel, *Excessive Joy*, Claire thinks, "there was some boundary of

risk or tenderness you crossed if you were a lover . . .” As a writer, are you interested in extreme emotional states?

EH Yes, I am. But also in the subtleties and complexities of ambivalent states. Ambivalence in all its forms, really.

AC You said in an interview, “An obsessive is an aristocrat of feelings” (Ross D20). I would have said “the drudge.”

EH It’s only in her, or his, own delirious world view that the obsessive is an aristocrat of feelings. She sees the love object as unique, absolutely irreplaceable. She sees him not only as the only one, but also as the only one for all time. And so she inevitably sees herself as bathed in his shine. Whereas the much more objective outsider sees her as being *embalmed* in his shine, sees her as being dulled by it, sees her being made less than she is. Sees her as having such extreme tunnel vision that she’s turned into, as you put it, a drudge.

AC Although *Long Cold Green Evenings* continues the variable free verse paragraph of *Fortress*, it favours a shorter, terser line. Would you say that the second collection is more cryptic?

EH When the second book came out, one of my students asked, “Where are your long lines? I think of you as a long-lined poet.” But I didn’t want them. It was actually a technical decision. Some of those poems in *Long Cold Green Evenings* pre-date the *Fortress* poems.

AC I could see that. In fact, I wanted to ask you if *Long Cold Green Evenings* was the underlay of *Fortress*?

EH About half of this book co-existed with *Fortress*. *Long Cold Green Evenings* was about to be published by Coach House Press when Coach House collapsed. It was about a month away from being published. Then I took it to Signal Editions. This accounts for the very strange acknowledgement at the beginning of the book in which I thank Michael Harris “who (along with Simon Dardick) generously made room on the Signal Editions list for this book.” Originally that sentence continued, “after the fall of Coach House Press,” showing why it was generous of them to take the book at the last minute. Simon Dardick wanted me to take that phrase out, because by that time Coach House had re-invented itself. Now it sounds very strange. It sounds as if I went pleadingly to them to make room. I regret that I allowed the wording to stay that way because it sounds like the poor little writer had no self-esteem and they generously made room. I’d love to get that misconception corrected.

- AC “Snow and the End of Childhood” is a poem that moves away from the usual narrative technique for enigmatic suggestiveness? Would you say that is a shift that characterizes this second collection as a whole?
- EH That’s an apt description for some of the poems in the second book. That particular poem ends with a metaphor. On the whole, I would say the poems in the second book are more suggestive and metaphorical. The second book might be a little higher and cleaner and colder than the first. Perhaps there are more ideas in it.
- AC “Snow and Moon River” opens with an image of snow falling on a glassed-in swimming pool; the pool and its swimmers are seen from nine storeys above. Is there increased attention in this second collection to bizarre perceptual experiences?
- EH Yes. I have a fondness for bizarre perceptual experiences, for the dream-like or nightmare-like way that seeing something from a shocking or disrupting angle jolts you into thinking in new ways.
- AC In *Long Cold Green Evenings*, the river landscape seems ominous in a way that it wasn’t in *Fortress*: “smaller [islands] / frightened groves / of trees // riding / the darkening water.” Is there more threat in *Long Cold Green Evenings*?
- EH The landscape is standing in for time and life. I definitely think that *Fortress* is a younger book. It’s probably a more hopeful, buoyant book. *Long Cold Green Evenings* is a more darkly realistic book.
- AC Snow, which was benign or indifferent in *Fortress*, is quite sinister in *Long Cold Green Evenings*.
- EH I wouldn’t say sinister: “Snow falls on snow / snow falls on the swimmers . . . / like a thoughtless promise from God / that can never be broken.” I think I see snow as very beautiful even though I don’t like it. But I think you are partly right. In “Snow and the End of Childhood,” its appeal weakens: “We sink up to our knees / in its cold fluff // and deeper // until we’re stopped short by it // and there’s nothing to do / but fall face-down on it with a // sapped joy that feels sexual.” Snow has the power to slow you down, to stop you, to still you. It makes you feel tired. There’s that brilliant line in Sylvia Plath’s “Tulips”: “Look how white everything is, how quiet, how snowed-in.” That part of the Plath poem makes me feel very tired. This is what I remember about growing up and being so isolated at the pottery in the winter. Just the five of us, these five unhappy people, with our mother reproaching our father about so many things. Not having any real friends in the community.

Not having any grandparents or cousins. Not having anyone on this continent who would intercede for us. That feeling of being snowed-in is so claustrophobic for me.

AC Snow creates an asylum, which can be either refuge or prison.

EH Yes. And for us it was a prison.

AC Would you say that the potential for violence is also present in the second book?

EH I think the second book is less tender. I think there is no question: violence could happen or has already happened to the narrator in this book.

AC “The Damp Hips of the Women” seems to me to be a love poem to the women of the 1940s. For all the gains that women have made, have certain womanly qualities been lost?

EH To me, it doesn’t really seem that way. It’s *plus ça change*. That scene could happen again another time in the future. After all, women in the 1930s—with their fedoras and their trousers, and their jobs, their smoking and their very free sex lives and so on—were quite mannish in a lot of ways. The war was very sexual, I think, in the way women felt about themselves with all those men around. And then after that, we came into a period of such prim abstinence. The 1960s was a blossoming out again in a rather pagan way. Certainly people now can talk about everything more freely, but in losing the innocence of sex, we’ve also lost some of the private excitement of sex. We’ve lost so much of the mystery of it.

AC “We Have Four Husbands” is the poem in this collection most like a short story. When material presents itself, do you always know whether it will be a short story or a poem?

EH I do, but I don’t know how I know. I have a poem that I’ve written recently that begins “Pure liquid and twist of birdsong at one a.m.” I can’t imagine these lines being the lines of a story. A poem begins for me with a line or a few lines, and they are not lines that I would use in a story.

AC Is the key language?

EH Language, not ideas. When I’m thinking about a story, I’m thinking of all sorts of character-based things, which you really couldn’t do in a poem. Occasionally—for example, in the story “Through the Field of Tall Grasses” (*Let Me Be the One*)—the ending is made from a plundered poem. The poem called “I Don’t Ask For Real Happiness” was about a teen-aged girl trying on the evening dresses of an older girl while she lives in a doctor’s house. When my editor at HarperCollins

wanted me to extend the ending of the story, I went back to the poem, which had been published in *Pottersfield Portfolio*, but had not been collected in a book.

- AC It is language, then, that determines the genre because the material could be either story or poem?
- EH Yes, almost always. And in fact the reason I could get away with an intensely poetic ending in that story is because the epiphany of that particular story allows for a more lyrical, staccato, forceful, dramatic use of language.
- AC Are you suggesting that a short story comes round to poetry in its ending.
- EH I think so. The final few lines or final few scenes can have that metaphorical intensity.
- AC Occasionally there is a honky-tonk feeling to this language as in, for example, “You could fill a stadium / with the hearts you’ve broken . . .”
- EH I can see that it has a real twang to it now that you’ve pointed it out. And I am a country and western fan of the best country songs, partly because the best country songs—and also the worst country songs—are willing to go all the way into emotion. But I also like the more ironical and witty songs, the ones that are on the point of crossing over from country to folk. There’s also a honky-tonk feel to “How Long Will It Last,” a poem where the narrator is in love with a younger man. The narrator, after trying not to hear the “honky-tonk of the car horns” at his imagined wedding, also tries not to hear him stamping the snow off his boots “outside the door / of someone younger.”
- AC In “Cold Day in August,” the speaker, while taking a drive with her sister, recalls how her mother used to sunbathe on the roof of the house. She says, “there were no / scraps of leftover light / for her two daughters” (37). This is redolent of folk or fairy tale with light substituted for food. Were you consciously working with fairytale in this poem?
- EH On some level, I think that I was because there is something in that poem about the dark knitting: “all around us the bay’s / broken bracelet of islands // their steep walls / of trees // knitted into / a sketched darkness / by someone who must have / kept whispering, You will / learn nothing here, there isn’t / even the relief of a meadow . . .” (37).
- AC There’s something else that’s fairytale or folk story in that poem. The woman is on the roof sunning while the men, with their horses and sleighs, are coming down over the snow-coated hills. The sleigh-bells are jingling.

- EH And yet it is absolutely based on reality. It is also intriguing in terms of the seasons: the fact that it could be so hot on the roof while at the same time the men are travelling on snow. My father made my mother a little pen for sunning up on the roof. She was an exhibitionist about her body, but I still don't know if she was aware that those men coming down over the bluff could see her down there, totally naked in that little pen.
- AC In "Cold Day in August," the "broken bracelet of islands" seems to say to the speaker who is crossing the Kennebecasis River, "You will / learn nothing here. . . ." Has the landscape become inarticulate to the returning Maritimer of this poem?
- EH I don't think there was anything as conscious as that. I think the poem refers more to questions about the mother and her superficial sexuality, which was not experienced as a deep womanly sexuality, but as a teasing—a jingling, high jostling, flirty, kind of teasing. The two daughters, in the present, seem to be in a state of paralysed resentment. There is something dead in them, some anguish relating back to the mother.
- AC They seem to find talking about the past erotic.
- EH It's an opening out. It's a release.
- AC Is there less effort in *Long Cold Green Evenings* to distance the speaker from the author?
- EH No. I don't think so. I mean, I don't think there was ever much of an effort to distance the speaker from the author.
- AC Do you expect your readers to identify the speaker with the author.
- EH I think that they probably will most of the time anyway.
- AC Was "Snazzy Night" originally a part of the longer poem "Afterbirth"? Or, is it just that the child's perception of adults in social interaction is a perspective of persistent interest to you?
- EH Yes, it is of persistent interest. That poem's from the time of *Fortress* although I don't think it was ever actually a part of "Afterbirth."
- AC Why is the mother here so closely associated with light? Around her there are "no / scraps of leftover light" and her laughter "scatters light."
- EH When you're a child and even if you have a very bad relationship with a parent, you can't stand to see that parent humiliated. These children want to run to her and tell her the bad news—she's being mocked by the women at the party—to protect her, and they are stopped because they see her turn to laugh and the light scatters. It's a scattering of energy and they can't move toward her.
- AC Is there power in that scattering of the light?

- EH Yes, it backs them up into a corner.
- AC The mother is a taker of light?
- EH Yes, and the scattering of light means that she doesn't have to be warned. Adulthood isn't as dangerous as the children thought even though her friends are being catty about her.
- AC In "The Dark Clouds Between the Ribs," the child-speaker says, "there isn't a word // in the world it isn't too late for." Is the child's dilemma, thus expressed, also the poet's?
- EH God, I hope not.
- AC For the child-speaker returning home, after a stay in the doctor's house ("The Dark Clouds Between the Ribs"), home is "beloved, terrible." Would that accurately describe your own adult return to your Maritime home?
- EH It accurately describes my adolescent returns to my home. We [my brother and I] were away for two years living with a doctor and his wife, though not all the time. In the fall and the spring, we were home because then we biked to the ferry and sailed across the river, but in the winters we were in Saint John. And it applies to other times when I was away—at summer camp or when I was away living with the doctor's family when I was much smaller. Home always seemed both beloved and terrible to me. The "beloved" is my father. The "terrible" is my mother. The house itself, and the charming way it was arranged, and the landscape around it, all of these things were also beloved. At the same time, so many terrible things happened in the house—so many accusations, door-slamming, temper tantrums—though these were set in a matrix of so many sing-songs and picnics and skinny-dips on starry nights.
- AC *Long Cold Green Evenings* follows the childhood physical illness poems with poems about being "lovesick." Is anything being suggested by this proximity?
- EH I don't think so. "One of the Lovesick Women of History" is a fairly playful poem, followed by a more resentful poem, "In the Cold Sunlight." "A Breast, Our Hearts" is about mass infatuation. I wouldn't say that any of those poems are really anguished. "In the Dark," which is in another section of the book, seems to me a much more anguished poem than those playful ones.
- AC Lovers and male doctors seem interchangeable in "A Breast, Our Hearts." Your novel, *Excessive Joy*, is about a woman's obsession with her therapist. Why is the medical erotic?
- EH It's the power and mystery of it all. These men know something that

could help you or save you and therefore they must be protective lovers. We meet them in a place that is supposed to be perfectly safe. So that if something is transgressed, there is the excitement of that. There are all those possibilities for transgression.

AC Art gives “instruction through seduction,” you say in the introduction to *A Room at the Heart of Things*. What instruction does your poetry give?

EH It might give instruction on how to cope with disappointment in love. If there is instruction, it is very deeply embedded in the poems. I would hate to think that I was writing poetry prescriptively. My poetry is not meant to be instruction to anyone, but if someone reads it and feels it emotionally and takes direction from it, I have no quarrel with that.

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—, ed. *A Room at the Heart of Things: The Work That Came To Me, An Anthology of New Writing*. Montreal: Véhicule P, 1998.

Ross, Cecily. “Interview: Recovering Obsessive.” *Globe and Mail*. 14 October, 2000.

D20–D21.

Bedford Social

Firewood's sixty-five dollars a cord:
but, these woods and I work for ourselves
and each other, though it's hard to see
what good I do it, aside from letting it be.

In rippling water a tube of grey mesh flexes:
a cast-off snake skin: the jaws open and close.
High on young wings, a raven yawps,
maybe the one we rescued, cooped in a crevice,

too stooped to fly, the rock stained with days of droppings,
weakening, starving, stuck. How *real* it felt,
rowing him to safe haven, perched on a paddle blade,
his smart, bright eye: "A rich, full life. . . ."

You, reader, must be wondering,
"How do the woods work for him?" Think of the raven
transported farther from hell, by what might kill him
but acts like love. Trust? I'm safe so far.

La pensée de la langue entretien de Lise Gauvin

Suite à la publication, au printemps 2004, de son dernier livre, *La Fabrique de la langue De François Rabelais à Réjean Ducharme* (Paris, Éditions du Seuil, Collection POINTS), Lise Gauvin a accepté de répondre aux questions de Réjean Beaudoin dans cette entrevue conduite par écrit pour les lecteurs de *Littérature canadienne*.

Réjean Beaudoin (RB): J'ai souvent songé, au cours de ma lecture de votre essai, à l'artificialité des styles écrits, qui sont pourtant des sortes de conquêtes du caractère vivant et direct des échanges parlés. Et je me suis demandé comment la langue littéraire parvenait à imiter précisément les langages « naturels », ou du moins à en créer l'impression chez le lecteur. C'est l'art (ou le génie) de qui tient la plume, mais n'est-ce pas également affaire de prospection théorique des possibilités de l'écriture? Vous traitez cette question en profondeur et dans toute sa complexité dans votre essai. Y a-t-il une réponse concise et (relativement) simple à la question de la fameuse « clarté » (de la langue) française?

Lise Gauvin (LG): Il me semble qu'il y a une double orientation dans votre question. D'une part, celle de l'artificialité des styles écrits, et d'autre part, celle de la clarté de la langue française.

En ce qui concerne le premier point, je crois en effet que le défi de tout écrivain est de trouver les procédés adéquats pour rendre compte des langages sociaux. C'est là toute l'histoire de la littérature depuis cinq siècles, ou du moins l'histoire de la prose. Car la poésie bénéficie d'une

autonomie plus grande de ce point de vue et s'appuie, jusqu'à un certain point, sur un mode de fonctionnement qui lui est propre. Mais rien n'est plus difficile, pour celui qui écrit, que de ne pas trahir le naturel de la langue parlée, d'en rendre toute la souplesse et la capacité inventive. Alors interviennent les poétiques. On ne peut parler en effet de langue d'écriture sans faire intervenir la forme globale de l'œuvre dans laquelle s'inscrivent les choix lexicaux. Ainsi chaque esthétique renvoie-t-elle à un « procès » littéraire plus important que les procédés mis en jeu, procès qui met en cause la position de classe de l'écrivain et son intégration /transgression d'une certaine norme du français écrit. On a beaucoup insisté, depuis Barthes, sur l'artificialité de l'esthétique dite réaliste qui procédait par citations et collages du langage parlé et ne donnait ainsi le réel qu'entre guillemets. La « prospection théorique » dont vous parlez s'est poursuivie depuis lors de différentes manières. L'un des auteurs les plus célèbres pour avoir inventé une nouvelle façon de rendre l'émotion du français parlé, Louis-Ferdinand Céline, n'a cessé de répéter qu'il fallait utiliser tous les moyens de l'art et ruser avec eux. « Il faut imprimer aux phrases, aux périodes une certaine déformation, un artifice tel que lorsque vous lisez le livre, il semble que l'on vous parle à l'oreille. Cela s'obtient par une transposition de chaque mot qui n'est jamais tout à fait celui qu'on attend ». Toute oralité écrite est donc un « effet d'oralité ».

Quant à la deuxième partie de la question, qui concerne la fameuse « clarté » de la langue française, elle nous renvoie plus directement à l'esthétique mise de l'avant par les théoriciens du dix-septième siècle, puis ensuite résumée par le discours de Rivarol. Le dix-septième siècle institue une pratique normative de la langue, pratique inaugurée par Malherbe et Vaugelas, puis sanctionnée par l'Académie et à laquelle se plient les auteurs qui en sont également les premiers dépositaires. Leurs œuvres, non seulement enregistrent et établissent le « bon usage » mais elles contribuent ainsi à former l'esthétique de la langue classique, le « bel usage » fondé sur un idéal de pureté, de clarté, de transparence et de justesse. « L'existence du langage à l'âge classique, écrit Michel Foucault, est à la fois souveraine et discrète. Souveraine, puisque les mots ont reçu la tâche et le pouvoir de représenter la pensée. [...] Et, par là, [le langage] se fait invisible ou presque. Il est en tout cas devenu si transparent à la représentation que son être cesse de faire problème. » C'est ce qui amène Rivarol à conclure son *Discours sur l'universalité de la langue française* par ces mots: « Ce qui n'est pas clair n'est pas français. »

Ainsi se trouve réaffirmé le précepte de Boileau et de ses contemporains concernant la clarté, mais celle-ci est devenue cette fois une propriété intrinsèque de la langue française.

- RB On apprend beaucoup de choses à la lecture de votre livre. Je ne savais pas, par exemple, que le premier emploi du mot francophonie est attribué au géographe français Onésime Reclus (dont je me suis souvenu du nom rencontré dans mes recherches sur le dix-neuvième siècle québécois). Je trouve intéressant que le concept de francophonie soit sorti de la pensée d'un géographe. Les limites d'une définition actuelle de ce concept, en ce qui concerne les études littéraires, restent assez perméables. Votre enquête contribue à en resserrer les contours en montrant la cohésion des procédés et des réflexions qui ont présidé, au cours des siècles, à la mise au point du français comme langue d'expression écrite. Ma lecture de votre livre tend à retenir moins la rupture que la continuité en passant des six chapitres consacrés à la littérature française aux deux derniers, que vous avez réservés aux littératures francophones. Il me semble que le travail des écrivains provenant de la francophonie européenne (Belgique, Suisse), du Québec ou de l'Acadie renoue, pour ainsi dire, avec la tradition d'écriture rabelaisienne (comme vous le montrez à propos d'Antonine Maillet) ou encore avec la théorisation tentée par Du Bellay (comme vous le constatez à propos de Michèle Lalonde). Le même constat ne serait pas déplacé, je crois, lorsqu'il s'agit des littératures antillaise et africaine. Croyez-vous qu'il soit possible d'opérationnaliser l'idée de francophonie dans la recherche littéraire? Quelles en seraient les conséquences? Ou faut-il plutôt concevoir un amalgame de concepts à réajuster ensemble, comme celui de littératures mineures que vous suggérez de reprendre pour approcher les littératures francophones? Autrement dit, l'imaginaire des langues qui s'est imposé dans les cultures contemporaines favoriserait moins la formation de nouvelles littératures nationales que la négociation d'un nouveau virage de l'universalité du français dans le contexte encore problématique d'une francophonie plutôt divisée. En somme, peut-on compter sur la possibilité d'une éventuelle articulation mondiale de la diversité francographique? Quel en pourrait être le moteur ou la cheville ouvrière?
- LG La francophonie reste un concept assez flou, hésitant entre le géographique, le culturel et le politique. La disparité qui affecte le statut du français dans les diverses zones francophones se double de disparités tout aussi évidentes de situations socioculturelles qui touchent l'usage

quotidien de la langue et son utilisation littéraire. Cela étant dit, les littératures francophones ont en commun d'être de jeunes littératures et leurs écrivains de se situer à la croisée des langues. Ce qui porte ces derniers à développer ce que je désigne sous le nom de « surconscience linguistique », soit une conscience de la langue comme lieu de réflexion privilégié, comme territoire imaginaire à la fois ouvert et contraint. Ce qui les incite donc à *penser* la langue, à la renouveler de l'intérieur en la resémantisant ou à l'enrichir par le contact avec d'autres langues, attitudes qui nous rappellent celles des écrivains du seizième siècle obligés de créer, à partir de matériaux composites, ce qui deviendra la langue française. L'hypothèse que j'ai voulu mettre de l'avant dans mon bouquin en consacrant deux chapitres sur huit aux littératures francophones est précisément celle-là, à savoir que le contexte de mondialisation dans laquelle nous sommes entrés ne permet plus de départager en deux mondes séparés la littérature française et les littératures francophones. Il s'agit désormais, pour les écrivains, d'écrire « les langues françaises ». Le mouvement amorcé déjà en 1985 à l'occasion du Salon du livre de Paris, dont c'était le titre, n'a cessé de proliférer. Les écrivains francographes d'aujourd'hui, en bousculant certains usages de la langue, accomplissent la mission que Barthes décrit comme celle de tout écrivain : au « tricher la langue » de Barthes répond le « casser la langue » de Kourouma. Je ne peux dire s'il s'agit là d'un nouveau virage de l'universalité du français, car le concept même d'universalité est un concept piégé, qui sous-entend encore une forme de partage entre le centre et la périphérie. Il s'agirait plutôt, à mon avis, d'un vaste arc de cercle tendu entre des esthétiques plus anciennes, celles du carnavalesque et du baroque, et celles des romanciers contemporains qui traduisent en avancées textuelles les réflexions linguistiques de leurs auteurs. Leurs textes renvoient à une langue en mouvement, nourrie par les impertinences, assauts et dérives de ceux qui ont su transformer leur tourment de langage en imaginaire des langues. Quoi qu'il en soit de l'évolution future de ces littératures, la situation de l'écrivain francophone—le concept de littératures mineures mis de l'avant par Deleuze et Guattari, d'après une interprétation fort libre du *Journal* de Kafka est là pour en témoigner, ainsi que l'ouvrage de Derrida portant sur *Le Monolinguisme de l'autre*—est emblématique de celle de tout écrivain.

RB J'ai été tout d'abord frappé par la place centrale qu'occupe la question de l'oralité dans cette longue histoire de l'élaboration d'une langue

d'écriture. Les codes littéraires du français écrit, peut-être l'une des langues les plus sévèrement normatives (sans rien nier de sa mobilité et de sa souplesse d'expression), se sont formés par un étrange concours d'épuration linguistique et de discussion mondaine. Ce qui est étonnant—du moins pour un profane, et c'est mon cas—, c'est ce relais paradoxal de grammairiens et de courtisans dans la mise au point de cet outil de précision et de finesse qu'est une langue d'écriture. Il est tout à fait passionnant de pouvoir prendre conscience, grâce à la synthèse qui en est faite dans votre livre, de ce processus à long terme. Autre sujet d'étonnement, c'est de se rendre compte que le modèle classique de la perfection de l'écriture reste celui d'une langue parlée. L'autorité des grammairiens sur un Racine, par exemple, se met modestement à l'écoute des salons (tout en n'hésitant pas à se faire l'arbitre du bon usage), et l'Académie qui définit les entrées du dictionnaire, en fondant ses exemples sur les meilleurs auteurs, n'enlève rien à cet idéal de clarté de la diction française (Montaigne, Scudéry, Sévigné: 63; 84-85; 93.). La gigantesque entreprise de codification de la langue littéraire que vous décrivez semble s'inspirer en même temps d'un respect absolu de la parole publique. Ce n'est qu'entre les dix-huitième et vingtième siècles que la langue littéraire pourra paraître de plus en plus isolée de ses sources vives, du côté des pratiques de la parole collective. Puis de Hugo (Sand, Sue, etc.) à Céline et Queneau, c'est vers les parlers populaires que se tournent les écrivains pour renouveler la langue littéraire. Je ne sais si j'exagère ce recours (inauguré magistralement par Rabelais) à la parole par l'écriture, mais je serais tenté d'y voir l'une des leçons importantes de votre essai. Est-ce que je me trompe?

- LG Vous avez bien résumé ce processus de l'élaboration de l'écriture classique qui cherche par-dessus tout à se conformer à un certain usage du français parlé. Ainsi tout le travail des réformateurs du dix-septième siècle a-t-il consisté à remplacer la notion d'usage commun, déjà en cours au siècle précédent, par celle de bon usage. Mais le bon usage, tel que perçu par Vaugelas, est défini comme la façon de parler de la plus saine partie de la cour, conformément à la façon d'écrire des bons auteurs du temps. Grammairiens, courtisans et lettrés sont donc mobilisés pour constituer ce qui deviendra l'idéal de la langue classique. Lorsque Mlle de Scudéry fait le portrait de Madame de Sévigné dans l'un de ses romans, elle décrit sa conversation comme « assez divertissante et naturelle ; elle parle juste, elle parle bien, elle a même quelquefois certaines expressions

naïves et spirituelles qui plaisent infiniment.» Et d'ajouter : « J'oubliais à vous dire qu'elle écrit comme elle parle, c'est-à-dire le plus agréablement et le plus glamment qu'il est possible.» Voilà évoqué l'art de la conversation comme modèle du bien écrire. À cet esprit de la langue, qui est celui d'une langue réglée par le bon usage, succède ensuite, au dix-huitième siècle, l'idée d'une langue « fixée », propagée notamment par Voltaire. L'admiration des encyclopédistes pour leurs prédécesseurs est sans limite. Du point de vue de la langue, seuls les néologismes lexicaux, qui servent à décrire les nouvelles réalités découvertes par les explorateurs, sont considérés comme licites.

Il faut donc attendre le dix-neuvième siècle pour retrouver la notion d'une langue en évolution, notion capitale chez un Du Bellay et chez les écrivains de la Pléiade. Ensuite les auteurs du vingtième siècle, qui tous de façon plus ou moins directe se réclament de l'héritage rabelaisien. Céline dit que Rabelais a « raté son coup » parce que la langue s'est développée sans tenir compte des efforts de l'écrivain pour développer le français dans toutes ses potentialités. On parlera encore du roman oralisé, un roman qui tente de retrouver ce que Zumthor appelle les « valeurs de la voix ». Mais ces valeurs n'ont cessé d'être aussi présentes dans l'imaginaire des auteurs classiques, qui tentent de reproduire dans leurs écrits le naturel de la langue parlée. Donc, oui, c'est un essai qui veut montrer à quel point l'écriture ne saurait se concevoir sans retour et recours à l'oralité, mais une oralité toujours retravaillée et qui prend des formes différentes selon les époques et les poétiques.

RB Comment s'est constitué le corpus de votre enquête? C'est-à-dire le choix des textes. Vous étudiez ce que les écrivains ont écrit de leurs rapports avec la langue, vous étudiez leurs oeuvres en ce qu'elles témoignent de la conquête d'une langue propre à chacun d'eux\elles. Ma question est retorse: peut-on imaginer un livre analogue au vôtre qui porterait sur un choix d'auteurs différents? Disons Ronsard au lieu de Rabelais? La Fontaine au lieu de Racine? Et ainsi de suite. Malraux au lieu de Queneau? Aquin ou Ferron au lieu de Ducharme? En francophonie africaine ou antillaise, je ne sais trop comment soutenir le jeu des substitutions, mais là aussi je suppose qu'un spécialiste mieux informé que moi pourrait avancer ses candidats déviationnistes. Et je songe à ce que vous pourriez dire d'Andrei Makine (*Le Testament français*), de Cioran ou de ce que Beckett a choisi d'écrire en français. . . Bref, je rêve un peu à voix haute d'une (autre) *Fabrique de la langue*. . .

De Clément Marot à Ying Chen. . . (ou De Ronsard à Villemaire). . .

LG J'aime bien cette question, qui m'oblige à justifier mon corpus. Il s'agissait, pour une entreprise aussi vaste, de trouver des repères, des moments forts de l'évolution de la langue et de la pensée de la langue, ce que j'appelle les positions des écrivains et les propositions que forment leurs œuvres. Un certain parcours s'imposait donc. D'abord du Bellay, au lieu de Ronsard. Parce que du Bellay a signé le manifeste de la Pléiade et par là, légitimé les interventions futures des écrivains sur le terrain de la langue. Dans chacun de mes chapitres, j'ai privilégié les manifestes plutôt que les arts poétiques. Or Ronsard reprend, dans son *Art poétique*, que je mentionne au passage, certaines des idées maîtresses du groupe. Puis Rabelais, à cause des mises en scènes de la langue qu'offre son œuvre gigantesque. On ne peut écrire sur les rapports entre la langue et la littérature sans examiner le rôle de Rabelais, sa liberté phénoménale par rapport aux langages de son temps et les jeux de langage qui constituent la trame de ses récits. La Fontaine au lieu de Racine ? Oui, cela aurait été possible. Mais pour rendre justice au sentiment de la langue qui s'exprimait au dix-septième siècle, j'ai dû faire une large place aux théoriciens et aux grammairiens. Racine me semble l'exemple parfait de l'esthétique alors privilégiée, faite de naturel, de transparence et de clarté. La Fontaine aurait pu aussi me servir d'exemple, tout comme La Bruyère : c'est la raison pour laquelle je prends également quelques exemples dans l'une et l'autre de ces œuvres. Malraux au lieu de Queneau ? Alors là non, pas du tout. Malraux n'a absolument pas le même rapport à la langue que Queneau l'iconoclaste et c'est précisément ce rapport à la fois ludique et fort savant que j'ai voulu mettre en évidence dans mon chapitre intitulé « la modernité expérimentale », chapitre dans lequel je me limite à quelques grands noms : Proust, Céline, Queneau et Sarraute. J'aurais pu tout aussi bien parler d'Aragon, de Camus, de Beckett, que je ne fais que mentionner. Mais tout corpus suppose des choix, c'est-à-dire des abandons. Quant aux auteurs venant d'une autre culture comme Makine, ils ont souvent tendance à mythifier la langue française, ce qui n'était pas du tout mon propos. De toutes façons, je crois que les écrivains qui écrivent à partir d'une autre langue, comme Beckett, Huston et d'autres, ont un rapport à la langue qui rejoint ce que Khatibi dit de la traduction, de l'auto-traduction ou du bi-languisme. Encore là, je n'ai fait que mentionner leur présence. Ying Chen, Villemaire ? J'ai déjà eu l'occasion d'examiner

assez longuement leurs trajectoires dans *Langagement. L'écrivain et la langue au Québec*. J'ai donc préféré, cette fois, m'en tenir aux exemples fournis par les œuvres de Miron, Tremblay, Lalonde, Ducharme.

Faute d'espace et parce que je devais rendre compte de l'ensemble des littératures francophones. Encore une fois, tout corpus suppose une dose d'arbitraire et l'on pourrait prolonger mes analyses par plusieurs autres exemples pertinents. Le mien se justifie par la portée de chacune des œuvres examinées et par la spécificité de leur intervention au plan langagier.

RB La notion d'imaginaire des langues, telle que vous en retracez l'apparition récente (théoriquement chez Glissant et Khatibi, et dans la pratique d'écriture de Ducharme: « un feuilleté de langues »), cet environnement linguistique pluriel, vécu à une échelle quasi universelle, dans presque toutes les sociétés actuelles, est-ce que cette notion répond à une situation transitoire, à l'exacerbation du moment postmoderne, ou peut-on concevoir une éventuelle stabilisation des poétiques et des politiques maintenant éclatées, stabilisation qui déboucherait peut-être sur une nouvelle universalité dont la francophonie aurait été le laboratoire? La question s'appuie sur le remplacement des utopies linguistiques dont le français classique demeure un cas historique.

LG Je crois avoir déjà partiellement répondu à cette question plus haut. J'insiste cependant pour dire que l'imaginaire des langues, tel que développé par Glissant (« On ne peut plus écrire une langue de façon monolingue. J'écris en présence de toutes les langues du monde. »), ne suppose pas une connaissance précise des autres langues. C'est d'abord une question de langages, c'est-à-dire de poétiques. Le passage par d'autres langues, comme c'est le cas de Beckett, peut mener à un usage également nouveau de la langue française par une forme de traitement qui repose sur l'économie et la densité. Chaque écrivain doit inventer sa langue d'écriture dans la langue commune. Mais l'histoire des divers moments de la littérature française montre bien que « la meilleure façon de défendre une langue, c'est de l'attaquer », selon la belle formule de Proust. À côté des « poétiques et des politiques éclatées », comme vous dites, il y aura toujours place pour un certain classicisme de la forme et pour un usage, disons, « minimaliste » de la langue. Peut-être est-ce là la grande leçon de la post-modernité que de laisser à chacun la liberté de prendre son bien là où il le trouve. L'apport des écrivains francophones, de ce point de vue, est d'avoir en quelque sorte *exemplarisé*

le fait que la langue, pour celui qui écrit, n'est jamais un acquis mais le lieu et l'occasion d'une expérimentation constante.

RB Je voudrais, pour terminer, tâcher de « canadianiser » l'entretien, en vous interrogeant sur des données mises à jour dans le contexte d'autres travaux, ceux portant sur la réception critique de la littérature québécoise au Canada—hors-Québec. Je suis moi-même engagé dans une équipe de chercheurs qui s'occupe de cette problématique. Or nos résultats montrent que des écrivains aussi importants que Ducharme et Poulin, pour prendre deux exemples de taille, ne rencontrent pas du tout la même sanction appréciative, ni ne mettent en jeu les mêmes stratégies de lecture qu'au Québec. Sans être ignoré, Ducharme fait l'objet de rencensions assez tièdes au Canada anglophone; quand à Poulin, un peu plus largement commenté, il l'est parfois d'une façon très sévère, notamment à cause de sa représentation de l'imaginaire culturel étatsunien, jugée fade ou superficielle par certains lecteurs anglophones. Ce sont là des écarts notables (par rapport au statut symbolique de ces deux romanciers dans le canon littéraire québécois). Aucun des deux écrivains n'approche de la faveur dont jouit Roch Carrier au Canada anglais. Je pense à l'espace considérable qu'occupent la langue anglaise et son imaginaire culturel chez ces deux romanciers. Nos compatriotes de langue anglaise ne semblent pas aussi facinés (que les lecteurs québécois ou français) par le jeu de l'inter-langue lorsqu'ils lisent la littérature du Québec. Il m'a semblé que vous auriez peut-être des hypothèses intéressantes à explorer à ce sujet.

LG Je ne sais trop quoi répondre à cette question, sinon que la réception des textes est toujours d'une certaine façon programmée par un horizon d'attente préalable (dixit Jauss). Pour Ducharme, il peut y avoir aussi un problème de traduction, car il n'est pas facile de rendre dans une autre langue l'extrême mobilité de sa prose. Pour Poulin, cela me semble bizarre que l'on parle de sa représentation de l'imaginaire culturel étatsunien alors que son propos est tout autre, du moins dans *Volkswagen Blues*, cette fable qui arrive à déjouer le *blues* de la langue perdue, en l'occurrence le français en Amérique, par l'utopie d'un co-linguisme tranquille. En ce qui concerne Carrier enfin, ne s'agit-il pas, dans *la Guerre*, *Yes Sir* par exemple, d'une vision rassurante d'un Canada français aux mœurs bien typées et marquées par des oppositions tranchées ? Ou peut-être s'agit-il d'une rencontre heureuse entre un certain humour québécois et celui que l'on a coutume d'attribuer aux anglo-saxons. Mais je m'arrête.

Ce ne sont là que des hypothèses. Vous en savez sans doute beaucoup plus que moi sur ce sujet.

RB Je poursuis, en terminant, l'axe de la canadienité en ce qui concerne la réception critique. Votre lecture des écrivains québécois (notamment Tremblay et Ducharme) les inscrit fermement dans la mouvance « francographique ». Et votre approche ne manque certes pas d'arguments probants à cet égard. Pourtant les aires culturelles francophones, en forme d'archipel, si l'on veut, sont traversées par diverses zones d'influence géopolitiques d'où les frontières, actuelles ou héritées de l'Histoire, ne sont pas entièrement exclues. C'est là une différence que l'on constate aisément quand on lit les discours critiques canadien et québécois sur les auteurs du Québec. Alors que la critique québécoise tend à évacuer pratiquement toute référence à la réalité canadienne, les lecteurs anglophones du Canada semblent projeter spontanément leur identification « canadienne » sur les oeuvres littéraires issues de la belle Province. La démarcation passe, bien sûr, par les réseaux institutionnels, de sorte qu'au fameux « conflit des codes » illustré par les travaux d'André Belleau s'ajoute un certain choc identitaire aux dimensions beaucoup moins bien explorées. Qu'en pensez-vous?

LG Cette dernière question porte, si j'ai bien compris, sur l'influence de l'histoire et des frontières géo-politiques dans la réception des œuvres. Cette influence est bien réelle et je suis la première à croire que l'on ne peut vraiment parler d'une littérature sans la situer dans son propre contexte d'élaboration. À défaut de quoi, on s'expose à en faire une lecture « exotisante », du genre de celles dont ont été souvent victimes les auteurs francophones, au premier rang desquels figurent les Québécois. Aussi l'histoire littéraire ne saurait faire l'économie de l'histoire des institutions et réseaux qui mettent en circulation les œuvres et les légitiment. Qu'il y ait par contre une attitude plus « canadieniste » chez les critiques anglophones que chez les critiques francophones me semble un fait intéressant à analyser, mais tel n'était pas mon propos, puisque mon ouvrage porte sur « la fabrique » de la langue française et le rôle qu'ont joué et que jouent encore les écrivains dans sa création et son évolution.

Monk

he plays
the piano
like it's an animal
he's figuring
to touch
its haunch, its tail something
it still chases
not straight, no chart, plays
like he's got a hunch
there's something
he will do
it likes

Hear, Overhear, Observe, Remember.

A Dialogue with Frances Itani

Susan Fisher (SF): It seems odd that your new novel *Deafening* (2003) is being greeted as if you were a neophyte. Quotations on the book jacket describe it as “your first novel” and your “debut.” But you have been a productive author for many years—you have written three collections of poetry, four collections of stories, a children’s book. And strictly speaking, *Deafening* isn’t your first novel because *Leaning, Leaning over Water*, which appeared in 1998, is, as its subtitle announces, A Novel in Ten Stories. Why do you think that with *Deafening*, you have suddenly been “discovered”?

Frances Itani (FI): Well, I have nothing to do with the way people greet the novel, or any book, for that matter. If the media pretends to suddenly “discover” me, that may be because, generally speaking, little public attention is paid to the short story. Alistair MacLeod worked at the short story for decades and had no wide public recognition. I knew his work from the beginning, and had been teaching it to my students for 20 years before he was “discovered.” But the writers of the country have always known about him.

I have been part of the literary community in Canada for 30 years, and have been content to work away at the short story, a genre I love. It’s the way the world works; reviews for my stories have been very positive across the country since my first collection came out in 1989, but the wider reading audience buys more novels. Publishers, too, are more interested in novels. I have, however, been publishing stories and poems in literary journals since the 1970s. I’ve also been teaching for years in

Creative Writing programs in Canadian schools, universities and libraries, as well as at the Banff Centre. I've been earning a living from my writing for many years. My poetry and short story collections, by the way, are all mentioned on the jacket of *Deafening*, so it's easy for reviewers to see that this is not my first book. I couldn't begin to tell you how many times journalists have phoned me to talk about my "first" book.

As for *Leaning, Leaning Over Water*, that is what I think of as my cross-over book. It was written and begun as a collection of short stories. I sold and published each story as I wrote it, but by the time I had written six or seven I realized that I was returning to the same family, same period, same setting. I had never written a novel before, but began to shape the last three stories in a novelistic way. (The stories were not written in order—not the order they are in the book.) This also meant that I had to return to all of the earlier stories and take out the repetitions. Because I had written each story as a discrete piece, my publisher and I decided to call the book a novel in ten stories.

Certainly it was this book that prepared me for writing *Deafening*. From the beginning, I knew that *Deafening* would be a novel; there was never any doubt. I also had no trouble shaping and structuring *Deafening*, and I think that is because of my work on *Leaning*.

SF As I suppose many of your readers have done, I began with *Deafening* and worked backwards through your short stories. I was amazed by their range and strength. At times I was reminded of Alice Munro's stories of small towns and rural households; at times I thought of the elemental people in Alistair MacLeod's stories. And some of your stories of Europe—I'm thinking of "Scenes from a Pension" in *Truth or Lies*—seemed reminiscent of Mavis Gallant's works. I mention these three just to give a sense of your range. Are there particular Canadian writers with whom you feel an affinity?

FI I have always experimented with different voices, different points of view in my fiction. I think the settings of my stories reflect the places I've been, and I have lived in many places in the world. This actually worked against me when I attempted to have my first collections of stories published. I was told repeatedly by publishers that my stories should be "more regional," that regionalism would have greater appeal. But I resisted those confines. I did not want to set borders around my work.

I grew up in rural Quebec but began to travel alone when I was 15 years old. I went to London, England, to live when I was 21. Later,

I travelled to North Carolina, where I studied at Duke University. After marriage, I lived in seven provinces in our own country, as well as in many countries in Europe. I've always enjoyed moving around, always loved fresh starts. And as I've moved about—I think I've lived in eight or nine countries now—I've been reading the literature of the places I've been. I met Alistair in the 1970s, and always admired his work. I've always felt that he and I both work with rhythm and beat in our prose, though we did not discuss this when we were teaching together at Banff. For instance, while I work—especially after the first draft—I read my work aloud hundreds of times before it is sent out to be published. I've read most of Alice Munro's work and think it is very fine, but I don't feel that my work is similar. I met Mavis Gallant in 1975 and have also read most of her work. I do not think that my stories resemble hers at all. The reason some of my stories are set in Europe is because I've lived in quite a few European countries. My own stories are usually centred on a strong emotional core of some sort. At least, that's the way they begin.

The writers who have immensely affected my work are Heinrich Böll (a wonderful story-teller); Virginia Woolf—I learned more from her letters and journals than from any other writer; Chekhov—for pure craftsmanship (I still return to Chekhov so that I can learn); Frank O'Connor, whose short stories and autobiographies I love; Edna O'Brien—her early short stories are quite amazing; Flannery O'Connor, et cetera. For poetry, I read Seamus Heaney, Lorna Crozier, Michael Ondaatje, Paulette Jiles—all fabulous poets.

SF How did you get started writing?

FI I was writing a bit of poetry when I was 19 or 20. When I was a university student, various professors kept after me to “do something with this writing.” But I was involved in another profession at the time and did not actually begin to write seriously until I was 28 or 29. Our family was moving to Edmonton from Kingston during the early 1970s and, during the drive west, I wrote poetry while in the car. In Edmonton, I arrived at the University of Alberta, where I would finish my BA in Psychology and English, and asked to be admitted into W.O. Mitchell's creative writing class. W.O., who was commuting back and forth from his home in Calgary that term, saw the poetry I'd written in the car and invited me to join his group. I was in his workshop for only three months and, the following year, I studied with Rudy Wiebe. Those are the only two university courses I did in writing. Meanwhile, I was raising two babies

and finishing off my degree. I had a very busy life during my two years in Edmonton, as well as during two subsequent years in Toronto.

But it was the encouragement from W.O., as well as from Rudy, that helped me to “make the commitment.” W.O. and I became very close friends—our families met often over the years, and travelled together—and I always had the knowledge that he and his wife Merna were solidly behind me. They believed in my work and that was enormously helpful—just knowing they were in the background. I learned valuable things about craft from W.O. Mitchell—and, of course, had enormous fun along the way. I miss him and Merna very much—they were an important part of our family life. Later, when I completed my MA in English Literature (in 1980 at the University of New Brunswick in Fredericton), I met poet Fred Cogswell, who was also my thesis supervisor. It was Fred, at Fiddlehead, who offered to publish my first book of poetry, “No Other Lodgings.”

SF Where did you have your first successes?

FI I wrote my first short story the summer after being in W.O. Mitchell’s course, and it was purchased by Bob Weaver for CBC Radio’s “Anthology.” That was in 1974. *Event* published my first poems. Dorothy Livesay wrote to me about a poem I’d written about the World War II internment of Japanese-Canadians, and she published one of my poems in *CVII* in 1976. After that, *PRISM International* published some of my poems. Fred Cogswell published my first book of poetry and, while living in Fredericton between 1976-1980, I published a children’s book with Brunswick Press. Molly Bobak did the illustrations and the book sold out immediately. This one was called “Linger by the Sea.” In the meantime, Bob Weaver continued to buy my early short stories for CBC. I also wrote a one-hour radio drama called “The Keepers of the Cranes,” while I was living in Toronto between 1974-76, and Frances Hyland and Eve Crawford starred in the main roles. My first published story was “P’tit Village.” One of the editors at *Queen’s Quarterly* saw a lengthy draft and asked me to tighten it up, and I did, and he published it.

SF As I read your short stories, I encountered some familiar characters and settings. Your deaf grandmother, for example, who served as the inspiration for Grania in *Deafening*, appears in the story “Grandmother” in *Truth or Lies*. In that story, you portray her with such love and admiration. Did you know after writing that story that there was still more you wanted to write about her?

- FI I did fictionalize the life of my real grandmother for that story, which I wrote during the 1980s. I had no idea that twenty years later I would write a novel with a deaf character. Indeed, the idea would have surprised me at the time, I think.
- SF The story “Grandmother” seems almost unfictionalized or pure memoir. Is it?
- FI It is not pure memoir, but it is based on family stories as well as my own childhood experiences of visiting the farm of my grandparents near Belleville, Ontario. I was most intent on trying to capture sights and sounds and sensory impressions in that story—as well as the love I had for my own grandparents.
- SF What about other stories in *Truth or Lies*? For example, “Foolery” seems to be about your own childhood, and “Songs for the Children,” which describes the death of a beloved sister, seems to be autobiographical. A third story in this collection, the very funny title story “Truth or Lies,” recounts the struggles of a young wife and mother to get her assignments done for creative writing class. How are these stories related to your own experience?
- FI There is as much of me in the old PEI farmer, Clayton (the title character of one of my sea stories), who goes out to do the roadfill on his land and scopes out the whales while he’s there, as there is in any other story I’ve written. What do writers write about? For me it is always about what I hear, overhear, observe, remember and imagine. I love to meet people as I travel, and I listen to their stories. The details in “Truth or Lies” and “Foolery” are not at all taken from actual events, except for the testing of the sister in hospital in “Foolery.” My only sister died of a brain tumour. I knew that if I had any hope of dealing with that terrible loss (and one never does deal with such a loss entirely), it would be through trying to release the emotional part of the experience. That is what I’m always after in short fiction—the emotional experience as told through story.
- When I write, I work very hard at trying to “pull back” to “understate.” It is my intent to leave enormous room for the reader to join me as partner. But the reader has to fill in the emotional part. My job is to be as concrete and bare bones as I can possibly be, in my prose.
- SF Even though many of the materials in this collection seem to have autobiographical sources, the collection as a whole exhibits quite a range. Alongside the memoir-like stories such as “Grandmother” and “Songs for the Children” are impressionistic pieces such as “White Butterfly,”

which describes an old woman in a garden in Japan. Where does a story like that come from?

- FI I don't think writers can be entirely exact about where stories come from. The short answer is that stories come from the imagination. When I am writing a story, it is always after two events have somehow come together in the brewing, percolating part of my mind. Never one. Always two. And the idea for a story is often there for years before the story is written. The only exception to this that I can think of is "An August Wind." I was actually part of a rescue team that saved a woman from drowning in PEI, and the experience was so unusual, so highly-charged, that I sat and wrote the story the day after the event. I think it took me two days to get down the first draft. (And that is pretty unusual for me—sometimes a story takes four to six months, or even years, before I get it right.) Even so, most of "An August Wind" is fictional. I was about thirty-five when I wrote that story, but I gave the "eyes" of the story to an old woman sitting on a chair on the cliff above the scene. Once again, however, the story came from two events: the near-drowning with all of its high drama, as well as a casual remark made by an RCMP officer when he drove me (I was barefoot) from the Summerside hospital in PEI back to the cottage on the north shore where I was staying.
- SF I want to turn now to *Leaning, Leaning over Water*, the collection of linked stories about a girl growing up in a Quebec village near Hull in the 1940s and 1950s. The young narrator, Trude, obviously is about your age. In the dedication, you thank your mother Frances Hill for the period details she supplied. And on the title page and the subsequent section title pages, there are family snapshots. First, are those photographs of your family, of you and your siblings?
- FI *Leaning* is set during the 1950s only. When I finished the ten stories, my editor and I discussed ways of structuring the book and integrating its various parts. I was concerned about it being "choppy" and suggested going to the National Archives in Ottawa to look for photographs from the 1950s, but my editor asked if I had any photos at home. I leafed through family albums and came up with several photos, and we decided to use those as authentic "views" of the period. I think we were mostly intent on setting mood. The reason Trude is about my age is because she grows up in a period that I knew well.
- SF How close is *Leaning, Leaning* to your own childhood? It seems to me that you are often working with materials very close to your own experience—

to events that might be the stuff of memoir or autobiography. But, to choose just one example, in the stories the mother dies, though obviously this didn't happen in your own life since your mother helped you with the research for the book. How do you move from autobiographical materials to a work of fiction?

FI *Leaning* is not at all true to my own experience. What is true is that I know the setting and period, and created the story within those parameters. I was always listening and watching when I was a child. I had big ears and was obviously intent on observing 1950s women—who were, after all, my role models. I also knew the language of the decade, in particular the language of French and English citizens living side by side. Because I grew up next to the Ottawa River, I love that particular place in rural Quebec. It is my place, and I still visit it frequently. I know the river well, and had always wanted to use “river” as “a character” in one of my books. But I needed two connecting themes or ideas. And it was the 1950s milieu combined with river as character, that gave me my book. I loved writing this book, by the way. I enjoyed every moment of it, though it took me a number of years (and all my life, the way I think of it).

If you want to know about facts, I come from a family of seven, with five children; my father was an accountant; my mother, indeed, did not drown and is very much alive here in Ottawa; I am not Trudeau; I did not move to Vancouver; I never worked as a candy-striper in a hospital; I did not have a grandmother even remotely like Granny Tracks. I had only my deaf grandmother (my other grandmother had died when I was a baby). But I do have a large imagination and try always to work from theme and story.

SF Forgive me if I seem to be flogging this to death, but I am intrigued by the correspondences with and then the departures from your own experience. For example, in the story “Graveyard” the narrator has a Japanese Canadian husband, as you do. But the narrator describes her own family as “a family of secrets hidden for generations, grudges held a lifetime.” Somehow, this doesn't square in my own mind with the very positive portrayal of family in many of your other works.

FI As an observer of the human condition, I do not stick to my own experience in my work. Perhaps your questions take this line because I use convincing detail. If this is the case, I am glad it works. If I were to stick to my own experience, I think my work would be impoverished indeed.

Most of the time, I live like a hermit. I believe that we are all surrounded and enmeshed in many relationships, some of which are good, some not so good, some, at times, surprising. I also did extensive work in psychology in university—particularly Psychology of Perception and Developmental Psychology. And had eight years of nursing behind me before I began to write. Those eight years of working with human behaviour at its most intimate probably contributed enormously to my understanding of the human experience. Then, there is the fact of raising children. I may have learned more from raising two babies than from any other experience I've had.

I do have a Japanese Canadian husband, yes, but I spent about three years reading the history of Japanese Canadians in this country—in texts, on microfiche, in documentation. I advertised in one of the Japanese Canadian newspapers for interview subjects, and interviewed extensively for my story “Flashcards.” I might know the history, but if I don't have authentic detail, I don't write the story. It is important to me to get things right in the background so that the emotional part of the story will work. In “White Butterfly,” I listened to tapes of the shakuhachi over and over, while writing the story. I had been to Japan, and as always, had kept my eyes open.

SF Several of your short stories—“Foolery,” “P'tit Village” and of course the stories/chapters in *Leaning, Leaning*—are set in rural Quebec. I know that you are writing about a time that is only fifty or so years in the past, yet the village life you are describing seems so remote. Do you feel that you are chronicling a lost past?

FI Not as remote as you might think. I am often in small Quebec villages, and some things haven't changed that much. For instance, while writing *Leaning*, I went back to my own village and met some of the older people who had been there when I was a child. Their lives haven't altered too much, because they have never left. Others did leave, and their lives would be quite different—as is my own. What has probably changed the most is education for the children. That would be more standardized now than my own was. I probably had a fairly unique experience in that I attended three one-room schools before I was in grade five. That was the decade after the Second World War, and money was just beginning to be put forth for the building of new schools. For some reason, children of my age were sent from one school to another in the country before a local school was built that could house us all.

As for chronicling a lost past, that would be the Duplessis era, which is definitely gone. I know it well, and tried to stay true to it in my book. That was one of the things I tried to accomplish in *Leaning* as well as in my short story “P’tit Village.” The mood of the citizens, of the priest-directed village, of the overpowering Catholic Church in the background, of the seeds of differences between English and French.

SF I can’t think of many Anglophone writers who have written in such detail about Quebec life. Do you read a lot of Québécois literature? Do you see yourself as kind of straddling a border between francophone and anglophone writing?

FI I have certainly read and studied literature from Quebec. I don’t expect that Quebec writers are aware of me, however. At least I have never heard anything to that effect.

I suppose I do straddle a border, especially now, by living in Ottawa. But the place of my heart is Quebec, where I spent almost twenty years (age 4–21 and then back again to attend McGill when I was 23, and then I taught nursing on St. Urbain Street in Montreal at the Royal Edward Chest Hospital). My husband and I eloped in Montreal. The straddling part that I’m aware of is south-eastern Ontario and Quebec. That would be because my large extended family (families of both parents) mostly remained in the Belleville, Ontario region. I frequently visit family members in that city and, of course, I did set *Deafening* partly in Belleville and partly in Deseronto, Ontario.

SF Another kind of border you straddle is that between Euro-Canadian culture and the Japanese Canadian experience. In the story “Flashcards” (in *Man without Face*) you describe the internment of the Japanese Canadians. The form of this story is what one might call reconstructed oral history. How did it come about? What were the sources?

FI I placed ads in a couple of newspapers, and put the word out to the Japanese Canadian community that I hoped to interview Nisei and Sansei. I also flew my late mother-in-law from B.C. to Ottawa, so that I could interview her. I gathered up as many detailed stories as I could and decided to create and imagine one family with several members. Each member would tell his or her own story as he/she experienced the internment. I created parents, two brothers, a sister, an amalgam of people and experiences that I had been listening to. I felt that it was important to get these stories down in as powerful a way as I was capable of telling them.

“Flashcards” might look like oral history, but in fact it is a story very much crafted from my own structural improvisation. And the work required enormous research. I’m certain that I spent over a year collecting material for this. I wanted each small story to add up to something larger. Each story is turned in the palm the way one would hold up a flashcard and then turn it over and go on to the next.

SF I want to turn now to *Deafening*. It is clear from the book itself and from what you have written about it (for example, your article in the *Globe and Mail* [Dec. 20, 2003: R1, R5]) that a great deal of research went into this book. When and where did the book start for you?

FI I began to think about the beginnings of this book in 1996 while I was still writing *Leaning, Leaning Over Water*. I was visiting Belleville, Ontario when I decided to stop in at the old residential school for the deaf, now called Sir James Whitney School. This was an unplanned visit, entirely spontaneous. I just drove into the grounds while I was passing. My own grandmother had lived at the school when it was called The Institution for the Deaf and Dumb, though I did not know her exact years of attendance when I walked into the place. I learned that in 1913 the name was changed to the Ontario School for the Deaf. (Our large extended family has always referred to the place as the OSD.) In any case, it was that first visit to the school that tugged me back. From the beginning, I was intrigued by the place, primarily because I began to imagine what life must have been like for my own grandmother. It is not easy to imagine one’s grandmother as a child, especially if one has no information—and my late grandmother had never talked to me about her childhood.

I was given a tour of the buildings and grounds during that first visit, and I was permitted to wander around and take photos. I guess I knew, when I drove away, that I would be returning. The place had huge attraction for me: the old Victorian buildings, the age of the place, the darkness, the possible and probable secrets, the history, the lives of thousands of children who were isolated and segregated from their families and communities and who virtually grew up in the company of one another, with no trips home permitted except during the summer months.

SF What motivated you to put so much research into what must have been in the beginning just an idea—did you know where it was all leading?

FI I had no idea what I was getting into in terms of research. If I had, perhaps I wouldn’t have embarked. Nor, at the time, did I know that I would

be getting into First World War research or that I was about to begin the study of American Sign Language. That was all ahead of me, and unfolded in the way that life does—entirely unexpectedly. One discovery leads to another and, before you can change course, you are embarked on a long journey during which you cannot at any point turn back.

SF Why is there so much about World War I in the book? I ask this just because you could have written a novel that focused only on your grandmother, on the particular experience of the deaf among the hearing. But about half the book leaves the southern Ontario world of Grania and takes place on the Western Front. What motivated you to divide the book this way, between Grania and her young husband, Jim?

FI The answer comes from the research itself. I set myself the task of reading the school newspapers printed at the school. I chose, in a more or less arbitrary way, the years 1900–1915 as a starting point. The newspapers came out of the school print shop and contained material of enormous interest to me. What fascinated me the most was what the children themselves had written. I discovered a few writings by my own grandmother and was very excited by this, and set her works aside for the family. But I carried on reading because of the children's voices. I could see that they were, in many ways, telling their own stories in a unique language and from a unique time. Their voices literally shouted to be heard. It was when I reached the fall of 1914 in the newspaper reading that I also began to understand how the life of every child in the place was affected by the war. Fathers, brothers, cousins and uncles marched off to that war. The entire tone of the news changed. Everyone was reporting individual war stories which directly affected each family. The editorials became high-handed and war-centred. The children's home communities were raising materials to send to the "poor Belgian refugees." All of the news for the next five years dealt directly or indirectly with war.

I felt, pretty quickly, that I could not possibly set a book during this period and pretend that the war did not exist. That would have been a pollyanna book, indeed. So I stepped in, without caution, and kept wading forward.

As for the structural decisions—I suppose those resulted from my concerns of theme. I always work from theme and knew from the beginning that this would be a book about sound and silence, love and loss, hope and despair. I was particularly interested in how hope can

come from the idea of emptiness. One creation led to another, and after making the decision to have the main character, Grania, grow up in the place and become a young adult, I decided to have her meet a young hearing man. What young hearing men did in those days was go to war, so that was pretty inevitable.

SF Could you tell us a bit about how you proceeded? Did you proceed with a plan, or was your method intuitive?

FI I had no plan. That is for sure. But I began to enjoy finding family information along the way, and shelved that part of things, because my emphasis was not on family but on creating story. I knew that I'd have to learn the social and cultural background of the times in order to set the book at the turn of the last century. I also wanted to be comfortable with the language of the period (and, of course, I was learning a brand new language at the same time—American Sign Language—so that I could interview deaf men and women).

Once I made the decisions about including the war, I began to meet historians and experts, attended lectures, visited the archives of the Canadian War Museum, interviewed veterans, read dozens and dozens of histories and memoirs. I did this in an entirely random fashion, and had two large milk cartons, one for war material, one for material about deafness.

The book set up parallel experiences for me. In some ways, I was learning about my own family history, but my priority was to create a war novel about a young deaf woman and her hearing husband. The later, structural decisions, pretty well fell out of the material. I always work in an organic fashion and let one thing lead to another. I never have a plot or a plan ahead of time. But I walk a lot, and I dream about the work in progress, and I solve problems away from the work. Because of the complexity and length of the book, this all took a great deal of time and much moving around of material.

SF Each chapter in *Deafening* begins with an epigraph. Can you tell us a bit about the epigraphs and how you found and chose them? I am particularly interested in the epigraphs from *The Canadian*.

FI *The Canadian* was first called *The Canadian Mute*, but the word mute was dropped at the time of the change of the school name in 1913 (dumb and mute were both dropped from the official lexicon). The school newspaper and others like it were important to deaf students as well as to the greater North American deaf community. I quickly learned that

these bi-monthly papers were exchanged and sent out to other schools for the deaf all over the continent. Also, graduates from the school kept in touch, subscribed, and occasionally sent back items of interest. So there was a community “feel” to the paper, and the community was a wide-ranging one.

On a practical note, the reason there was a print shop at all in these old schools was so that deaf boys could be trained to be typesetters. There was little work for young deaf men about to graduate, and, because their visual acuity enabled them to be very good type setters, many were able to obtain positions because of the number of newspapers using hand-set type at the time. Also, noise in print shops was extremely loud, and deaf men and boys could work in the shops without damage to their hearing.

Each issue of the paper had one or two entire pages devoted to student writings, and I quickly became fascinated with these. I wrote down the paragraphs that were most interesting to me, and later tried to fit in some that were appropriate to chapter content. I hoped that each would add a note of interest that I would not be able to invent. I wanted the epigraphs to set scene and to provide actual detail of the time—but always from the perspective of a deaf child.

SF Why did you choose to make Jim a stretcher-bearer, rather than an infantryman?

FI I have a medical background, myself, and have never lost interest in this area. It was easy for me to use the language of medical personnel, because the language also belongs to me. Also, I knew that this area had not been covered in other novels. Some of the histories I read were about my own institutions—for example, the history of Number One Canadian General Hospital; the history of medical units made up of members from the Montreal General Hospital and McGill, both of which I attended as a student. So, in part, it was learning something of the history of my own academic background at the same time. Some of these stories and histories are truly moving. Of course, I also read hundreds of documents in the archives of the War Museum—letters, telegrams, memoirs. And I was shown examples of First World War surgeon’s kits, medical paraphernalia, and actual World War I stretchers.

SF It seems to me that you give a very balanced picture of what the war meant, both to the men overseas and to their families at home. For example, several secondary characters, like Grew the barber, lose sons in

the war. Grania's sister Tress must cope with a husband who comes home shell-shocked. And the influenza epidemic also appears in your novel. Was this quite deliberate on your part—to show the range of consequences that the war had?

- FI Yes, I did want to show the range as well as the magnitude of what was happening at the time. But I also wanted to show how innocent boys who knew nothing about what they might be getting into, went tearing off to that war without a second thought (at the beginning). Every community in Canada was affected, and in similar ways. Some men went missing, more than 60,000 died, some were gassed, or were mutilated and returned, some went mad. I heard one of my elderly aunts say that one of her cousins had “never been right in the head after the war.” One of my grandfather's cousins was lost at the Somme, and when I visited the Vimy Monument in France, I immediately found his name as I walked up the steps to that huge and impressive structure. What I was trying to show was that the war affected everyone—most certainly the women and men left at home and those who had to deal with the young men returning. I learned, too, that thousands of men were deafened by the noise of that terrible artillery war. Sign Language and Lip Reading courses were set up for them in the same Belleville school (the OSD) my grandmother had attended, and were taught by the same teachers.
- SF Did you ever talk to your grandparents about the war? Was your grandfather a veteran?
- FI Unfortunately, I never had a chance to discuss the war with my grandparents. My grandfather died in the early 1970s. He was too young to join up when the war broke out, but his older brother served in the artillery for three years and wrote home continually (so the story goes), telling him not to join up when he came of age. Others of their cousins were killed, or gassed and returned home, only to die very young. My grandfather was conscripted in early 1918, but was still training in England when the war ended in 1918. He returned to Canada in 1919.
- SF Over the last few years, a surprising number of Canadian authors have turned to World War I—Urquhart's *The Stone Carvers*, Jack Hodgins' *Broken Ground*, Alan Cumyn's *The Sojourn*, to name just a few. Why do you think this has happened?
- FI My theory about this is that this was our grandfathers' war. And we are of an age to write about it. All of us who have done so have been writing for a number of years, and we seem to be ready and willing to tackle the

material. It is pretty difficult material to deal with, and I can say this first hand. It soon became obvious to me, when I was writing the book, that just about every file I read was going to have a sad ending. That was almost a given. But I kept on because I felt that it was important to tell the stories—especially while I still had access to collective memory.

SF What works about World War I did you read to prepare for *Deafening*? Were there works that particularly interested you? For example, had you read Pat Barker's *Regeneration* trilogy before you embarked on *Deafening*?

FI Mostly, I read histories and documents. Also memoirs. I loved reading the memoirs that came out of the period—"in his own words" sort of thing. And the letters provided direct emotional content. I also read journals in the archives of the Canadian War Museum because I wanted to follow one particular unit through the war—once I narrowed the field to medical/stretching bearer/Canadian field ambulance unit.

As for other novels, I had seen the film "Regeneration" and stayed away as much as possible from Pat Barker's theme so that I could create something entirely different. I read her trilogy long after I had prepared the war sections of my own book. Also Sebastian Faulks—I read *Birdsong*, but not until the end of my own work. I read his World War II novel, *Charlotte Gray*, after finishing *Deafening*.

What I was most interested in when I was beginning my own book was the poetry of the period. I read the British war poets first, and then the Canadian poets after that. I discovered and purchased a number of rare books of our own war literature, and went through everything I could find. But most of these were memoir/poetry/history/unit histories.

I had read *The Wars* in the 1970s but did not look at it at all during the writing of my book. I did not want anyone else's influence or voice leaning into my work. I did read Jack Hodgins' book when it first came out. I have not yet read *The Stone Carvers* or *The Sojourn*. Those both came out while I was writing *Deafening*. Now that I am nearly finished the tour and promotion of *Deafening*, I hope to catch up.

SF As in your earlier fiction, there is a certain amount of family history that seems to form the bedrock of *Deafening*. Do you feel that you have "written out" that source or are there still more stories to tell?

FI Well, as I mentioned earlier, I kept setting aside family history documents that turned up during my research. I am the "keeper of the papers" in our family, so these things do interest me. I also took advantage of the information I was finding with regard to Irish settlement in

Tyendinaga Township, and integrated some of that background history into the book. As for the epigraphs from *The Canadian*, I chose only one that my grandmother wrote and used it at the beginning of the book. That was entirely as a tribute to her.

I have no idea if there are more stories to tell from this source. If there are, they won't be similar, that's for sure. I should add that many people have called or written and asked me to write a sequel to *Deafening*. They want to hear Tress and Kenan's story next!

SF I find it so interesting that you as a writer—a person who works with words—learned American Sign Language to prepare for this book and, to judge from your account of learning it, found ASL fascinating. Can you talk a bit about your experiences learning ASL?

FI I love languages anyway, so it was natural for me to be excited by ASL. I needed it in order to meet and interview deaf persons, and to work with the deaf archivist at the Belleville school. But ASL is a visual-gestural language, so it was entirely different for me and I felt that it was using a new area of my brain. It also opened an awareness of an entire community to me, a community with which I'll be involved in the long term. So I have learned at many levels.

Of course, it was frustrating, too. But I was prepared to put up with the frustrations. I determined that whatever I could use would go into the book. When I wrote about Grania learning “the sign language” when she first went to live at the school, I gave her the frustrations I had experienced while I was trying to learn the language.

The development of ASL in North America has a pretty interesting history and I enjoyed learning about that. Learning the language somewhat has also enabled me to visit many schools during my book tour. I've addressed the students at Gallaudet University in Washington, in Rochester, in Belleville, in Edinburgh and Hamilton, Scotland—just outside Glasgow. I've also been interviewed extensively by deaf writers and students—in Canada, the US, in London, England, in Scotland, Belgium and the Netherlands. My life is much enriched by working (and playing) with the deaf community.

SF *Deafening* has had wonderful reviews in Canada. It seems to be a book that people respond to very strongly. I heard, for example, a bookseller in Vancouver praising it as the book she recommends to her customers without reservation—and they all love it. How has it been received internationally?

FI It is being wonderfully received, but all of the translations are not yet published. I just returned from touring in Amsterdam and Antwerp; in London, England, Edinburgh, Glasgow and Dublin. I travelled throughout Canada and the US between September and December 2003, before I left for Europe. The book is now out in all of the English-speaking countries of the world, as well as Germany and Brazil. I've also seen it in bookstores in Denmark and Switzerland. The other translations will follow later in 2004, including, by the way, the French translation from Lattes.

SF What are you working on now?

FI I have a collection of short stories, "Poached Egg on Toast" coming out in September 2004. So I've been really busy preparing and editing that manuscript. This will be a collection of new and selected stories—about 22 or 23 in all. Seven or eight of the stories are new and uncollected.

Now that the story manuscript has been turned in, I am returning to the novel I began in Geneva last summer, 2003. It is called "Celebration," and will be published in the fall of 2006. That's about all I can say about it for the moment, as it's in the writing and developing stages now.



Whale Sound Trilogy

“People ask what these different sounds mean. I can’t tie an individual call to a specific behaviour, but I can tell you from listening right now what their mood is.”

—John Ford, “Eavesdropping on Orcas” *Canadian Geographic*, 2002

I.

Such a thin sound to nose on through
the sticky glass morning of the sea.

It is the body sound: the body wanting breath.
And tangible, rubber pedal point,

that turning at the waist. Watch
the killer whale slowly rolling on its back.

There, it is night. And there,
night drenched in hydrophony.

II.

Down the insulated corridor
of this hotel, a young couple argues.

Their muffled emotion sings
through the paper-thin walls.

You listen as one struck divine
on hearing a choir perform

from the yellow-lighted church
in the valley, miles away. Listen, there,

with your ear against the water.

III.

One end of a barbed arm forms you. We run
a nylon wire between tin cans. And so

communication pools in an oil-like radius
around you. Your shape: this sound-high frequency

pushed through a dark tunnel; taking density
in effect by the throat, smoothing it over

like the water was glass; the way an ambulance, too,
pushes its own siren song well in advance of itself.

The mass of it barely fits through. Underwing,
a warm pocket pulling your shadow down.

You May Think This, But An Interview with Maggie de Vries

Valerie Raoul (VR): As a specialist in autobiography and gender, I'm interested in your book from that point of view. The title, *Missing Sarah: A Vancouver Woman Remembers Her Sister*, tells us it's a story about your sister, but also about you remembering her—part biography, part autobiography. Did you have any models in mind for this type of memoir?

Maggie de Vries (MD): The only book that I was consciously influenced by is *Experience*, by Martin Amis, where he talks about his cousin who disappeared. They didn't know what had happened to her for years. Finally, her body was dug up in the back garden of a serial murderer in Britain. He writes about her with such sensitivity and love, I found it deeply touching. My sister had already gone missing when I read that book and I cried and cried. I don't read much non-fiction—more children's fiction, because I'm a children's writer and book editor. It's hard to say where exactly the inspiration or the models came from for this book. I was really feeling my way in the dark.

VR Since you are a writer, I'm sure you were very aware of the structure of your book as you were writing it. I wonder to what extent you had a plan for shifting the focus back and forth between Sarah's story and your story and intertwining them. How did you manage the various degrees of identification and distance involved?

MD I pieced the book together at first in a certain sequence based on association. It was a strange book to write, because I was living it at the same time I was writing it; there was no distance. On the same day I could be writing the manuscript and an event would happen that

would later be in the book. For example, the book starts with my learning that they found my sister's DNA on the Pickton property in Port Coquitlam. That happened on August 6, 2002. I'd already been working on the book for several months when I received that news. I attended the preliminary hearing in January 2003 and I conclude the book with that, but I was in the process of finishing up the book at that time. So I was living it and writing it, and couldn't really plan it. Plus, I was constantly discovering more material, whether it was through meeting people who knew my sister, or finding my mother's journals and having her go back through them. They were filled with material about Sarah, and I also asked my father to go back through his old notebooks. I went through old letters from my parents that I found in an orange bike bag in my father's basement, and realized they were really helpful. Like journals, they have dates, so you can tell exactly when things happened. I've always kept all the letters that I've received. Then I started finding letters from my sister. I didn't remember that I had those letters until I discovered them.

VR Was it difficult for your mother to relive the past?

MD My mother didn't remember that she'd written anything about Sarah in her journal. She was doubtful. When she looked she found an enormous amount of material with a lot of useful details, but also a lot about her own feelings. I went back through my own journals, hoping to find things about Sarah, but I found almost nothing. I was in my early twenties and completely absorbed in my own life, whereas my mother was trying to work with Sarah to make changes in her life. Mum wrote about everything that was happening, and I just wrote about my own selfish existence. Once it was known that I was writing a book about Sarah, people who knew her just appeared in my life. So I was writing the book, and simultaneously receiving all the material. It was a process of pulling everything together, putting things in, moving them around, adding some quotations.

VR Did you decide from the beginning to focus on Sarah, rather than all the missing women?

MD At first I thought I was going to include stories of other missing women and their families. I interviewed five of the families that I knew the best and wrote long pieces about them. But my editor was concerned from the beginning about including other stories, and felt it would be better if the book focused on Sarah. I had to go through two

parallel shifts. One was finding out I had enough material to write a book about Sarah. The other was shifting from wanting to do this for the other families, to wanting to create the best book that I could, which are two completely different things. Both of those changes happened while I was working on the book.

VR Was there pressure on you to get the book out quickly, while all this was in the news?

MD My deadline was January 7 (2003), and I only started writing in the fall, when I was also doing my job. Over Christmas I just locked myself away for two weeks and worked on it. Working with Sarah's letters over Christmas was the hardest thing to have to do, because they're so lively and happy and real. By January 3rd I had a 400-page manuscript, and I sent a very rough first draft to my editor, Cynthia Good at Penguin. She phoned me in January to tell me that she had quit. It wasn't only my editor leaving, it was the head of the publishing house! It seemed quite a disruption, but she was still willing to edit the book. It meant I had a month's break, which I needed, but then I had less than a month to re-write it. I took out all the material about the other families, and some parts where I became too preachy. I also had to take out tons of guilt. Cynthia told me to make it chronological, and that was an amazingly useful piece of advice.

VR It certainly helps the reader when you put in what year it is at the beginning of each section, and mention the names of the women who went missing that year. It's very effective for putting what was happening to Sarah in context.

MD It's easier to have a timeline. But what she was saying is that chronology has power in terms of telling a story. Chronology itself pulls the reader through.

VR Especially in a documentary kind of exercise, as this is.

MD There are lots of ways of working with time, in any kind of writing. I did finally start at the end and go back. I had to cut the manuscript up, almost sentence by sentence, and put it all in chronological order and then rewrite the whole thing so that it flowed.

VR An interesting process, but the book still comes over as very polyvocal, because there are so many references to other people's perspectives, through the letters and diaries. I work on diaries, and I was very interested in the different diaries that are part of the book. Citing her journal enables Sarah to speak, so that you're not always speaking for her.

Could you tell me more about her diaries? How did you have access to them? What were they like? Did you use just a small part of them?

- MD She always wrote, all her life. She wrote letters as a child, and stories, and diaries as a teenager, but we don't have those. The diaries that we have are from the last four years or so of her life.
- VR Was that because someone she was living with kept them?
- MD Yes. Wayne, who's in the book. She spent a fair bit of time at his place, and kept her things there, including her diaries. She sometimes shared parts of her diaries, she would hand them around. I had seen some of it before. After her death, on several occasions when I had them in my hands I found them very painful to read. I would read a little bit and then put them away.
- VR Had she read Evelyn Lau's *Runaway*? It seems a possible point of comparison. That was a very extensive diary, and Lau went on to become a writer.
- MD I doubt it, but I don't know. Sarah clearly had writing talent and was driven to write, but she used her journals mostly in a private way, although both Wayne and another man that Sarah knew gave me pieces of her journals. This other man had copies of a lot of pages. If she didn't have a book to write in, she would write on scraps of paper. Her writing was spread around. Some is missing, and all of it might have been destroyed.
- VR That's the trouble with diaries—you never know who destroyed what, either.
- MD Some pieces are probably still out there in other people's possession, and maybe more pieces will come to me. I'm finding people are coming forward who knew Sarah. Wayne gave me her journals soon after she disappeared, and I've kept them. I think I have eight books, and none of them is completely full. Two of them have almost nothing in them, maybe a couple are more than half full, and the rest are somewhere in between. Sometimes she goes back and forth, it's not a consecutive series. She might have access to this one this week, and another one next week. I transcribed all of them, and put them in order.
- VR Do they tend to be recording events, or are they introspective?
- MD More introspection. She writes about some horrific events that I didn't include. I didn't want to include anything that would have the potential to be sensationalist. I felt that there would be enough of that with this whole thing. I didn't need to use Sarah's journals that way. Some of them don't make any sense; they are just rambling. Probably she was

- very high when she was writing some parts of them. Or they don't make sense to me, because I don't know enough about what's going on. Some parts wouldn't be of that much interest to anybody other than her.
- VR You and your mother both also kept diaries. Was that something that a lot of people in your family did? Or do you feel that gender makes a difference—that more of the women did? Were people doing it for the same reasons, or for different reasons?
- MD My mother is the most regular journal keeper. She still writes regularly, every day. She re-read twenty years' worth of journals to help me with the book—about forty journals. She highlighted all the sections to do with Sarah and then recorded those parts on tape. I haven't read her journals, and don't want to, just the parts she wanted to tape for me. My journals are much more spotty, in terms of when I keep them. Mum does more recording than I do, and also more sorting out, making sense of it, expressing feelings. My aunt, Jean Little, the children's author, also keeps journals.
- VR Many writers keep a journal as a workbook or place to collect ideas.
- MD Yes, she has shelves of them. But as for the men in my family, my father kept notebooks where he would record things, but he didn't analyze.
- VR We have a new centre here in the UBC library called SAGA (Studies in Autobiography, Gender and Age), of which I'm now the director. It will be a place where people can archive family documents such as diaries and letters. I was also interested in Sarah's story because I've been involved with a project on narratives of trauma. We've been looking for the ways in which writing, or artwork like Sarah's, can have a therapeutic value in coping with trauma. Would you say that writing and drawing were therapeutic for Sarah? And has writing this book had a therapeutic effect for you, or was it difficult?
- MD Both. I think for Sarah, for sure, her journal writing had a therapeutic value, and her art as well. It had more purpose than that, though, because she wanted to tell the world about her life. She often writes to an audience, addressing other people, for example: "You may think this, but . . ." She did pass some of her diaries around, so I think she wanted to be heard. She also wrote poetry. Some people write poetry just for themselves, not for anybody else, but I feel that she had both those purposes in her writing. It reflects the anger in her life. She felt compelled to write all the time, through fourteen years of living downtown, and to draw.

VR That's pretty amazing.

MD Well it's amazing, and it's not. It's amazing partly because of the stereotypes we hold about women like Sarah. We think they're just sitting there, high, and out on the street. But they actually have lives and generally try to create something and make something of their lives within their context.

VR Do you think it could be effective if there were more facilities for women (and others) in the Downtown Eastside to express themselves creatively?

MD Absolutely. There are efforts in that direction. Those kinds of facilities really need to come from within the community. It doesn't work for people to come in from the outside, because we don't understand enough. But yes, absolutely, there's a lot of writing that goes on down there.

VR Right now I'm teaching a class on the intersections of class, race, sexuality, and gender in autobiographical writing. It seems that Sarah's experience was marked by the fact that she was a black child living in a white middle-class family, and the only black child in her class at school. Do you have anything you'd like to share about that aspect of her story?

MD Class, race, and sexuality in representations of difference: that's Sarah. Her life. She was at all of those intersections. Yes, growing up in a white family was alienating for her. Since the book has come out, I've heard from a number of people who have been struck by the parallels between her experience and their experience—they also have felt that alienation. Not always because of race, sometimes simply because of being adopted, or a foster child, knowing that they don't belong; also knowing that the people with whom they did "belong" rejected them.

VR Was she ever curious to find out about her biological mother?

MD Yes she was, but not curious enough to pursue it. I think that by the time it became possible for her to do that, she wasn't in a position where someone would seek out a biological mother. One would want to be able to say, "Here I am, I turned out well," and Sarah didn't feel that way about herself. It would be hard to go looking for your mother and say, "Here I am, I'm a mess." We found out a bit more about her background through everything that happened since she disappeared. Because of all the media attention, we actually met people who knew her as a baby, and found out her mother's name, and heard things

about her. Sarah has two children, so there is something for them to learn about their roots.

VR Was she happy that they were not adopted by strangers?

MD Yes. She made the arrangement with my mother for her to care for Jeanie, not so much with Ben, but eventually that's how it turned out. Of course, the same thing happened with them, in a way, because they can't grow up with their mother, and they're growing up in a white family. Some of the situations of Sarah's life are being repeated in her children's lives. They aren't alienated in the sense of not knowing anything about where you come from, but what they do know is hard. The good thing is that Sarah really did care about them, and she let them know that. It's really good that we have photographs of her with them.

VR They will know about her story, because it is public. It may be a very hard thing for them to deal with at some point.

MD Her story is part of a larger one. Class, race, and sexuality—those intersections are important, not only specifically in terms of Sarah's story, but for the whole Downtown Eastside situation. Sex-work is defined by class in some ways, because it's a hierarchical system; if you are working on the street, you're in the bottom class, and you often come from lower strata in society. Race also plays a role. If you are working for an escort agency, you might be getting your Master's at UBC and paying for it by working relatively few hours compared to anywhere else that you could work, and it could be quite a workable arrangement. And even though the laws are the same for sex work, across the board, nobody's going to arrest you. But they will arrest the woman on the street, because of the hierarchy that's in place. That hierarchy works within sex work as well, in that it's hard to draw people together because if you're a stripper, you want to be able to say, "I'm not a sex worker"; if you're working for an escort agency, you want to be able to say "I'm not working on the street"; if you're working on the street, but you don't inject drugs, you want to be able to say Everybody wants to distinguish themselves from everybody below them, so you have all these pockets and it's hard to draw everyone together.

VR It was very poignant at one point in the book when Sarah said that she really didn't want to go on the Downtown Eastside, that she was never going to go down there, and then she did.

MD The system as a whole pushes people lower and ignores the lowest. I

went to the National Victims of Crime Conference in Ottawa, put on by Justice Canada. I was listening very carefully to the language that was being used, to see who was being included and who was being excluded when they talk about violence against women. Mostly they're talking about violence in traditional family structures. They're not including the violence that might happen to somebody like Sarah.

VR There's often a sense that anyone who's out there doing that is almost "asking for it," by exposing themselves knowingly to certain dangers.

MD Yes, that if they just stopped doing it, it wouldn't happen. But people don't say, "Well, if you hadn't got married, your husband wouldn't beat you." Violent men who attack women choose vulnerable women. We've set up our society so that sex workers on the street are very vulnerable, and predators know where to find them. I also went to a session on what is changing in BC in terms of support for "victims and their families." Again, it's being constructed so that the only people who deserve concern and support are those with families who care about them.

VR Presuming they have one.

MD Yes, and that the family has contact. Many of the missing women did have contact with their families, and that was extremely important in their lives, but they didn't live with them. They lived in a community of people who knew what they were up to, and who supported them, and were loyal to each other. There's a real awareness of what's going on, but the people who knew them weren't able to file missing persons reports because they weren't family. The definitions become very important. I brought that up at a session and somebody else said, "Yes, and also sometimes a victim of crime is a victim of their family." That's another permutation that the language used makes difficult to acknowledge.

VR "Significant others" needs to be defined differently.

MD It's interesting how language is constructed in such a way that it pushes survival sex workers out of the picture. We have special services just for them, but those services are chronically under-funded, and those services are "down there" where we don't really have to think about them. When I was driving here today I was thinking about what we, as a society, believe about prostitution. I've said over and over again that there are changes we can make that would make life safer for women like Sarah. The Green River murderer said that he couldn't stand prosti-

tutes. I would imagine that whoever is responsible for the deaths of Vancouver's missing women shares that attitude. But we've set it up so that prostitutes are almost non-human.

VR People want them out of sight and out of their mind.

MD Yes, they do. It doesn't mean that people who kill them aren't to be held responsible for their actions, but as a society we actually support the attitudes behind that killing, which is awful.

VR In a way, there is a class issue in the fact that Sarah, having grown up in your kind of family, had a sister who could write her story, whereas so many others might not have anyone who would ever have access to the kind of infrastructure that you need to be able to get your story out. Could you explain about PACE, and how you're trying to make this book of some benefit to other people in similar situations?

MD PACE (Prostitution Alternatives Counselling and Education) society is an organization in the Downtown Eastside that's been around for almost ten years. It's peer-driven, which means that many of the women who work and volunteer there have a background in sex work, or are currently still in it. There are similar organizations elsewhere: STELLA in Montreal, PEERS in Victoria, MAGGIE in Toronto. They are working with women on their own terms, from a place of respect, not trying to rescue women or trying to get them out of sex work unless they want out. PACE focuses on the distinction between sex work where there is choice, and survival sex work, where choices are more limited. Most women in sex work on the Downtown Eastside are survival sex workers who don't have other viable choices. I've been on the board of PACE for a year and a half, and learned a great deal from them. Half the royalties from the book go to PACE. This book may be a useful tool in letting people understand a bit more, not just about Sarah but about her world. I hope it will make people more willing to support the efforts of a group like PACE. I believe that any change that does take place around sex work needs to be driven by sex workers, otherwise it won't work. It's not appropriate when the powers-that-be just sit in a room somewhere and decide what to do. Right now, in Ottawa, Libby Davies and Hedy Fry are co-chairing a committee listening to people on the subject and trying to make some recommendations for changes that should take place at a federal level. It would be really useful if they could travel across the country and listen to women who are actually working in the sex trade and hear a range of points of

view, but funding for that is limited.

VR You mentioned that you had interviewed other families, and obviously you've talked to a lot of women down there too. Do you anticipate writing anything else about those other women's stories, or do you think other people will?

MD I hope other people do. Nobody has asked me to, and I'm not sure that that's my best path. For now it's lobbying government, and supporting the work of organizations like PACE. The families of the missing women are people who've lost loved ones and they're suffering as a result of their loss, but being a family member doesn't necessarily give one automatic insight into what would be best in terms of that person's life— particularly when that person is living a life on the margins. As a family member, you are trying to rescue them from that life, and what you want is for them to stop doing what they're doing. While that makes perfect sense, it doesn't automatically give you insight into what might make that life safer or better. Until Sarah went missing, I was focused on wanting her to stop doing what she was doing. I would not have been a useful person to consult with on what changes could be brought about for people in general around sex work or drugs. I had fairly liberal ideas about those things, but I didn't have any special knowledge. Really, it's the people who are in that world that we need to listen to. Families are in a different position vis-à-vis the whole thing, including me. It's been an incredible struggle to try to get my mind and heart over a lot of big humps, to somewhere where I can try to think clearly about these issues.

VR One of the really valuable things in your book is that it comes out as an account of a learning experience for you, and the reader participates in that. There could be a film or documentary based on this material. Would you feel that would have this educational kind of function, or is there also a danger of voyeurism and sensationalism?

MD Absolutely. There may well be a documentary, and it's very important that it not be sensationalized. There is a contract in place, an option, and the agreement that we reached was that I would be as involved in the whole process as possible, and they agreed that the purpose is a learning experience. By focusing on going back and forth between my life and Sarah's life, and not doing too much reenacting, I think they can avoid the sensationalistic.

VR To me, it seems that your book recounts your own investigation into

what happened, in terms of Sarah's life and the effect on your family. It's parallel to the police investigation into what happened to Sarah and the other women, and yet it was not at all like a detective story. In a detective story, death is never real, it's at a safe distance. When you list the names of the women who died each year, it brought it home to me, as a reader, that this is not a fiction, it is not an investigation being done for the sake of the pleasure of investigating.

MD That's what happens when you write about your own experience. There will be Stevie Cameron's book, which will focus more on Robert Pickton, as I understand, and I hope that she manages to avoid being sensationalistic. I know she's a very accomplished journalist, but it seems to me that her challenge is in a way greater than mine, because she is at a remove and she's chosen to focus on that side of things. I was able to stay away from it, I only touched on the gruesome side. I'm really glad this book is already out and the trial hasn't even started. I didn't even have to address whatever it is that will come out in the trial.

VR Will you go to the trial?

MD I doubt it. I think the trial is going to unfold, as it should, and there will be the appropriate outcome. I don't know that, of course, but if there isn't, I'll just have to see how I feel at that point. Right now, I am fairly confident that the trial will happen and that nothing is required from me to make that take place. Yet I do see a purpose for myself in sharing my story.

VR Now you have some distance from the writing of this story, are there things you would have done differently? Do you have any advice for anyone else who might be embarking on a project in any way like this?

MD It seems that projects like this must each be unique. I can't imagine how I could have done this any differently, because I didn't really have any idea of how to go about it until I'd done it. I needed to have something down in writing: I could only achieve distance by having something there that I could step back from. And I needed feedback from another person so that I would have a lens to look through other than my own very confused one. I'm glad that I had a contract before I wrote the book, because otherwise I think I could have worked on it forever, very slowly, and never have finished. I needed to be forced to do it. I found it very difficult to come to the place where I thought I had the right to write this book. That was perhaps the biggest struggle, because I started thinking about wanting to write something in the

summer of 1999 after I'd spent a year dealing with the police, meeting families, getting to know the Downtown Eastside better and finding out more. After dealing with the media, I wanted to write about it myself. I did write something for a magazine, but it was rejected. I realized it was too painful to go out and persuade someone to want to hear this story. I can handle rejection with my regular writing, but I couldn't with this. Getting an agent and a publisher was a really good step, because then I'd set myself up so that I had to do it.

VR You've talked in interviews about how all the media attention, and the spotlight on your family, have been stressful at times. Do you feel it's changed you as a person? Or as a writer? Will the writing you do in the future be different, even if it's children's writing?

MD Maybe. As far as media attention is concerned, it's much better now because I have a book in place, so I'm not just fodder. Before they could take whatever I said and use it however they wanted. People who choose to can now read the book, and this is controlled by me. That makes me feel on much more solid ground and much happier to talk to the media. Before, I became very tired of it, because you do the same thing over and over again, and often they use only two minutes or forty seconds and you realize that you wasted your time. Or they misquote: in almost every single media experience I've had, although many have been positive in many ways, there have been mistakes.

VR I noticed one just recently in *BC Bookworld*, where it said you were adopted, when you actually aren't.

MD Yes. That's a substantial error. People have to work fast, they don't have time to go and check everything. It's ephemeral. As far as being changed by all this, I know I am. I feel what happened is a tragedy, but also meeting people through writing the book has enriched my life, and so has spending so much time with Sarah's writing. It's so important for these stories to be told, but is it worth the price that has to be paid? If you write a personal story like this, you have to be willing to suffer the consequences.

VR It raises a lot of ethical issues around writing about other people and for other people. But I feel that you've done a service to the women who've disappeared by giving a face to at least one of them, and making readers like me feel that we almost knew her. I can see that it took a lot of courage and I'm glad you did it.

The Stationary Sound

The pigeons queue in across
the school's north-most roof,
 detach white paint flecks
with their wings when they ascend,
flickering paint chips, thin
as smoke.

 There is a window
that appears where the shell splinters, grey-eyed star
blinking through ice, the wood worn.
Picture sugary pitch
 smeared down a birch,
a spirit catcher as window
to the heart of the thing.

The day fills with fog: every inch
mirrored glass. In the overcast day,
she says she felt protected, or
 fell protected,
between "the sound from the line of them"
and "the end of their line."

I Just See Myself as an Old-Fashioned Storyteller

A Conversation with
Drew Hayden Taylor

Sandy Tait (ST): Can you give us a rundown on where you came from, and how you got to be where you are?

Drew Hayden Taylor (DHT): I was born on the Curve Lake First Nation, which is a small Ojibway reserve in Central Ontario, about two hours north-east of Toronto. I was raised there by my mother and my mother's family. I never knew my father. I was born there in 1962 and basically had a fairly uneventful childhood; I was a single child of a single parent and spent a lot of time by myself and as a result I read a lot and developed a very fertile imagination; it must have had something to do with my later career.

John Moffatt (JM): What sort of things were you reading?

DHT A whole bunch, some very surprising. I was always an avid reader, read anything and everything, but some of my favourites that I would return to were *The Outsiders* by S.E. Hinton, *The Wolf King* by Joseph Lipincott, and *The Black Stallion* by Walter Farley, very boyhood kind of stuff, and oddly enough, the entire series (24 books I believe) of the *Tarzan of the Apes* series by Edgar Rice Burroughs. Speaking as a white-looking Indian growing up on the Reserve, perhaps I related to the fish-out-of-water existence symbolized by Tarzan, the ultimate outsider in his environment. And yet, he rose above it to be master of his world . . . but perhaps I'm over-analyzing. Anyway, I was there at Curve Lake until I was eighteen, when I moved to Toronto where I went to Seneca College of Applied Arts and Technology, and gradu-

ated in 1982 with an Honours diploma in Radio and Television broadcasting. The rest of my career is quite sporadic and eclectic; I was a person with absolutely no idea of what I wanted to do with my life. I just lurched from contract to contract as a production assistant; it was always something to do with the arts. My first job out of college was doing the location sound on two half-hour documentaries on native culture funded by Health and Welfare Canada and we drove from New Brunswick to Vancouver Island in a car over five months stopping at about three reserves per province. And since then I did a bunch of things: I did a year and a half with CBC Radio as a trainee producer; I did six months with a television series called *Spirit Bay*, which was about a fictional Indian reserve in northwestern Ontario; I was casting assistant, production assistant, technical advisor; you know, I was like, 24, and they'd give me the scripts to read and ask me if they were accurate or not, and I'd say, yeah, Native people do eat toast (*laughter*) . . . and so I basically lurched with no real career aspirations from job to job until suddenly—when I was 24 I'd just finished working on *Spirit Bay* and I decided that I needed to make some money and stuff—so I decided to write an article about my experiences working on *Spirit Bay*, an article on how to develop Native-oriented stories into a television and film format. And I was doing it for a magazine called *Cinema Canada*. Hasn't been around in awhile, I don't think. I end up phoning up all the producers I could find in Canada who had a television series on Canadian television to see if they'd ever had a Native scriptwriter, and there hadn't been one, so I end up talking with a story producer for a series called *The Beachcombers*. And I don't even remember if it was me or her, but one of us suggested I submit some story ideas, just for the heck of it. I submitted two. They liked the first one, and at the age of 24 I wrote an episode of *The Beachcombers* that was the season-ender for the seventeenth season. And I thought, this is fun, I like that—especially when you consider that I'd never lived in British Columbia.

ST Or seen *The Beachcombers*?

DHT Oh, I'd seen *The Beachcombers* when I was a kid, but I hadn't watched it in about five or six years; I turned it on and it was practically a whole new cast. And then, I went back to doing various things. I worked for John Kim Bell and his organization [the National Aboriginal Achievement Foundation] and I puttered around doing various other

different things. And then in 1988 I guess you could say my life changed. That's when I got a phone call from Tomson Highway. He had just got a huge grant from the Ontario Arts Council for a playwright-in-residence programme at Native Earth Performing Arts, of which he was the artistic director. And at that time there were a scant few working Native playwrights in Ontario, he being one and the other one being Daniel David Moses, who was the outgoing playwright in residence. So Tomson was desperate, and as often happens with many arts organizations—and I'm sure it's the same with education organizations—they hate to give back grant money. So he was desperate, and, being desperate, he went to the bottom of the barrel and there I was, passed out (*laughter*); and he offered me the position and I said, "No, I'm not really interested; I'm not really into theatre," and then he said, "This is twenty weeks work for a good salary," and I went, "Yeah, okay, I'm in." And that was my glorious introduction to theatre. I was playwright in residence for twenty weeks. So my introduction to theatre was sitting through rehearsals of this little play called *Dry Lips Oughta Move to Kapuskasing*, the original production. And afterwards I had to write a play, and I did, and we workshopped it, did a public reading, and after the reading I took it out into the backyard, put a bullet through the title page, and buried it. So that's my introduction to the world of theatre, and it got me where I am today.

JM How do you find that the portrayal of Aboriginal life on mainstream television, at least in Canada, has evolved since the days of *Spirit Bay* or *The Beachcombers*?

DHT I find it interesting that the image of Native people on television has metamorphized somewhat. Ten, fifteen years ago, the dominant image of Native people in America and Canada was one of substance abuse, violence, social injustice, sort of a victimized people. Today, if you watch mainstream television, especially in America, the only reference you see to Native people is in direct relationship to casinos. In America, all Indians are connected to casinos; that's the only contextualization presented on television. I wrote an article on this perception in my last collection of articles ["57 Channels and No Indians On," in *Furious Observations of a Blue-Eyed Ojibway* (Theytus, 2002)].

ST What is your favourite thing of all the things you do?

DHT Of all the things I do?

ST Directing, acting, writing . . .

DHT Well, I don't act. The only acting I do is in singles bars . . .

ST Oh really?

DHT It's hard to say . . . my standard line is that I'm married to theatre, but I have many mistresses. So through a weird, bizarre sequence of events I've become a playwright. Growing up on the reserve, theatre was all dead white people, and I never thought that I would be in this world, and here I am. The best explanation I can give is that I remember when (and I'm using a bad analogy here) Sting began doing his funky jazz sort of stuff and he got a couple of really well-known jazz musicians to play on his tour and they said, "Why are you going with Sting? You guys are very well-respected jazz musicians." And one of them said, "Hey, I love Italian food but you can't eat it 24 hours a day, seven days a week." So, same with me, when I write a play, I'm done with that; I go write an article, go write a television show, go work on a documentary, or write a short story, write a radio play, or any of a number of things. It's the mixture of genres and methods of expression that I find quite pleasurable. I mean, who wants to make love to the same woman twice? (*Laughter*)

ST That'll be good for the article. Have you done other documentaries besides *Redskins*, *Tricksters*, and *Puppy Stew* (National Film Board of Canada, 2000)?

DHT Yeah, but this one is my tour de force. The others were *projects*; I did a documentary on an elder from the Maniwaki Reserve in Quebec (*Circle of All Nations*, about Algonquin elder William Commanda) and I worked on those profiles years ago, for Health and Welfare Canada, but this one was my baby, and this is the one I'm most proud of.

ST Why did you want to make this one?

DHT I actually was approached to do it; it wasn't my idea. I had no real background in documentary directing. The National Film Board had been negotiating with another company called Lockwood Films to do something like this. The NFB felt—they liked the idea—but they felt that it should be done with a Native director and in the world of Aboriginal arts the number of people involved in Native humour could sit around this coffee table. And the number of people involved in Native humour who had some experience with documentary film-making could fit on the table. So they did some research and found that I had done some stuff before in both categories, and they offered the job to me. And I turned it down twice. Because when I was

younger, when I was fresh out of college, you heard me say I did the sound on two half-hour documentaries, and it was real low-budget stuff. We drove across the country; we slept five to a hotel room. We would take the beds apart, and the guys would sleep on the box-springs and the women would sleep on the mattresses. And I thought man, I'm, well, at that time I was like thirty-eight, thirty-nine and I thought, I'm too old to do that, I don't want to do that anymore. Thank you, but no. And it didn't occur to me that somewhere in the world organizations have budgets. And I expressed this to them, and they go, "Oh no, you'll have your own hotel room, you'll be flown everywhere," you know, because we shot in Whitehorse, and I'm not gonna drive to Whitehorse. (*Laughter*) And they explained this to me, and basically I didn't realize it, but it wasn't going to be a poverty-driven production and it was an opportunity for me to go and hang out with all of my friends and have fun. So once that was explained to me I thought, all right, now you've got my attention, let's go do this. Let's go have fun.

ST It looked like it was fun.

DHT It was a hoot.

ST How long did it take?

DHT It took about a year and a half. There were six months off in the middle, because the NFB and Lockwood had a falling out, and they had to decide how to divide ownership of material, stuff like that, so that had to be rectified before we finished off the rest of the shooting.

JM In one of the essays in your third collection, *Furious Observations of a Blue-Eyed Ojibway*, you mention that *Girl Who Loved Her Horses* (Talonbooks, 2000) is your favourite play. Why is that your favourite play?

DHT I often get asked what's my favourite book, and I always say that's hard to say, it's like saying which is your favourite kid, right? But for some reason *Girl Who Loved Her Horses* is different from all my other stuff. It's darker. It has a bitter quality to it. It's almost bleak and, I mean, comparing that with *The Baby Blues* (Talonbooks, 1999) or *The Bootlegger Blues* (Fifth House, 1991), it's like the opposite end of the spectrum. And it has a magical quality to it. Every time I read it, because at one time it was published in *The Drama Review*, in the States, and then it was published in its own book form, then it was published in an anthology [*Staging Coyote's Dream* (Playwrights

Canada Press, 2003)] that has recently come out edited by Monique Mojica and Ric Knowles, and every time I read it I just sit back and go, “Wow! I wrote that.” It’s so different from my other stuff. It’s almost a dance-theatre piece. And I don’t know dance theatre. It just seems to have come from a more poignant, sadder part of my soul, you know, because I’m known as a humorist, and to a certain extent I foster that. I do lecture tours like this one. I write serious dramas; *Someday* (Fifth House, 1993) and *Only Drunks and Children Tell the Truth* (Talonbooks, 1998) are about the Scoop-Up. I write serious probing articles, some of them, but when I go and do stuff like this lecture tour, people want to hear the humour, so I tend to concentrate on humour. Let’s go have fun, I usually say. So people have this expectation of me that I’m here to make them laugh. Which is fine. But with something like *Girl Who Loved Her Horses*, like I said, it’s when you do something and you have no idea how you did it or where it comes from, and I just feel so sad for that little girl, seriously. It just sort of makes me wonder what happened to her.

JM You’ve also written both *Girl Who Loved Her Horses* and *Someday* as short stories. Can you tell us a little about the difference between imagining those stories in dramatic form and imagining them as short fiction?

DHT I refer to the book *Fearless Warriors* (Talonbooks, 1998), my collection of short stories, as my catalogue of future plays. It’s really interesting. I started writing television and theatre, primarily because it’s dialogue, and I’m not well-educated. I’ve never been to university and to me the supreme irony is that I do a whole whack of university lectures in places that wouldn’t allow me to attend, right? There’s a line in one of my plays, I think it was *Only Drunks*, that says “my only connection to University is when I was sixteen and I got to paint the residences.” So, writing prose has always been difficult for me. Not the articles or essays, because I can wing those off, because I’m talking—I, myself, this is what I think. Those are easy. But writing a short story that is prose has always been very difficult. I wrote one a year for nine years until my publisher wanted to publish them but wanted three more stories, and I had to write one short story a month for three months, and I don’t know, I’ve sometimes wondered if the quality suffered, if “The White in the Woods” is as good as it could have been. Writing these stories, it’s like jumping into a lake of cold water. I have to steel myself

before I jump in and write the short story, because I know it's going to be like wading through a swamp, since there are so many words involved in prose and I've never been comfortable with that. But it's a unique opportunity. It's almost like an outline for a play, but in the aspect that your characters are three-dimensionally drawn, your story's three-dimensionally drawn, and the atmosphere is there. So taking it and putting it in play form is disgustingly easy and simple; you don't have to worry about the structure: the structure's there, the characters are there, and it's . . . I want to say it's disgustingly easy but it's not, because when adapting anything you have to figure out what to add in and what to take out. I remember when I was doing the first draft of *Someday*, there's a scene in the short story where the central character sees what's happening through the window and thinks wonderful things are happening, until she comes out and says I'm leaving, and that's the shock. I tried to put that into the original play, but that would have been the whole second act: the whole second act is what's happening through that window, and so I had to go in and do that, because I loved the mystery or the twist of the guy thinking that everything is happening wonderfully and then she comes out and he discovers no. I love that, but it wouldn't work dramatically. I showed the short story to the people at Theatre Direct Canada, and they loved it and they commissioned me to do a play.

And *Someday's* origins are unique. I think it's written up somewhere, but in 1990 I was approached by the *Globe and Mail* to write their annual Christmas short story. And I said, "Well, I don't write short stories," and they said, "Well, we've been following your career, and we think you can do it, and we'd like to commission you to do it." And I said, "Do you have any special requirements?" And they said, "Just two. Make it around 3700 words and don't make it too depressing." (*Laughter*) And I said, "What do you mean, too depressing?" And they said, "Well, the woman who wrote it last year ended it with the protagonist going down into the basement and hanging himself." (*Laughter*) So I wrote it like that, and that was all fine and dandy, and it was published on the front page of the *Globe and Mail* on December 24, 1990. I'm told it was the first piece of intentional fiction ever published on the front page of the *Globe*, and my mentor, a man named Larry Lewis, who had dramaturged and directed all six of my earlier plays and all of Tomson Highway's stuff, read it—he was the artistic

director of a Native theatre company on Manitoulin Island called De-ba-jeh-mu-jig—he read it and he phoned me up and he said, “Drew, I’ve just read your short story. Who owns the rights to that?” And I said, “I do,” and I said, “Why?” And he said, “This would make a really great play.” And I laughed and I said, “It’s a short story,” and he said, “No, no, no, no, read it again, read it objectively and read it with dramatic eyes.” So I sat down and I reread my own story and I thought, oh my gosh, he’s right, this would make a great play. And so, based on his inspiration, that spring we went to Banff School of Fine Arts, to their playwrights’ colony, and I wrote *Someday* there.

I’m thinking of turning another piece from *Fearless Warriors*, “Ice Screams,” into a radio play, for CBC. They’ve approached me; they’re doing a ghost story series this winter called *Winter’s Tales* and they’ve asked me to adapt it into a radio play,¹ but I’m also thinking of turning “Heat Lightning” into a play.

JM In the short-story version of *Someday*, the narrator, Andrew, is both observer and participant in the action. Is there a relationship between Andrew’s reactions as you describe them in the stories, and the ones that the actual audience of the plays might ideally have to the situations, at least on an emotional level?

DHT I can’t really answer that. You know, there’s the old saying about never blame the writer for what his characters say or do. I’ve written the characters’ actions as best perceived by me in that situation. I’m not skilled enough a writer to estimate what the audience will feel, should feel, or any of that sort of stuff. So, I can’t answer that.

ST Do you have any hopes about what they’ll feel?

DHT My whole philosophy as a writer is to create interesting characters, with an interesting story, and to take the audience on an interesting journey. That is the simplest explanation of what I do. People like Daniel David Moses and Tomson Highway, who have, like, Bachelor’s and Master’s degrees in English Lit, they create what I seriously consider art, where every story, every page has three or four different metaphors, different lines of understanding, or subtext. I just see myself as an old-fashioned storyteller. That’s all I want to do, tell a good story. And if I do that well enough, if my characters are interesting enough, I’ll achieve something with the audience. I mean, I started off doing a lot of humour because for some reason I’m very good at it, and people like it, and I always have fun with it, and it’s a great rush to

see the audience laughing where I want them to laugh and to tickle them and stuff like that. But then with *Someday*, I learned the power of tears and of darker emotions and sadness, and at the end of *Someday*, when I saw my audience literally crying when Janice walked out, I was sitting there and I'm going, this is a completely different feeling, but as the creator, it's as powerful and as intriguing a feeling as the laughter is. It was an amazing experience for me.

JM In a couple of the essays in *Furious Observations* you talk about some of the reaction, and the controversy, that greeted *alterNatives* (Talonbooks, 2000) in Vancouver when it was first performed; and in one of them, "White Like Me," you talk about how it was felt that so far you'd only created "nice" characters.

DHT "Sympathetic" characters. Yes, I'd had a bunch of actors and people who had seen a lot of my plays saying that I'm such an easy-going guy and a nice guy that even though my characters are sympathetic or understandable, I'd never written a bad or nasty character. And I sat back and I said, "Yeah, I guess you're right, that's true." I was looking at *Someday* and *Only Drunks*, and of course the comedies, and they're all pretty likeable so I thought, ok, that's a fair enough criticism. So I sat down and I thought well, let's just throw everything to the wind; we'll take a whole bunch of different issues that I'd wanted to touch on but which are not worthy of a whole play themselves, and so I threw everything into the pot, and came up with the casserole of *alterNatives*, where I wanted to make all the characters deeply flawed, equally unsympathetic, and so they all had faults within them, you know. The irony was that the very nature of the flaws, for those not knowing what to expect or what to look for, prejudiced the audience. There are six characters. The play portrays an interracial relationship between a young Ojibway writer and an older Jewish woman who's a professor of Native Lit. She wants him to write the Great Canadian Aboriginal Novel, and he wants to write science fiction. They have a dinner party because they've just moved in together, and she invites her two best friends and takes the liberty of inviting his two former best friends. And that's where things happen because her best friends are these two politically correct white vegetarians, and his former friends are these two politically motivated, aggressive people who call themselves the AlterNative Warriors. And I put them in an environment where the flaws of the white characters were that they are very politically correct,

very curious about Native people but often saying the wrong thing. They had an almost submissive but very accommodating type of flaw whereas the Native characters' flaw was being very aggressive, being a pain in the ass, to the point that everything comes down to a political or social statement. Basically, because their flaws were physically and mentally stronger than the white flaws, it looked like the Indians were picking on the white people, although the very fact that the Native people were picking on the White people was part of their flaw. When a Native friend of mine saw that, she said, "Is that what you really think of Native people?" (*Laughter*) Then a reviewer in Vancouver, and whoever made the bomb threat, basically thought it was "witless white-bashing," making fun of white people. So, yeah, I was damned if I do and damned if I don't.²

JM It's interesting if you look at Michelle in that play, and her particular brand of political correctness, and compare her with somebody like The Warrior Who Never Sleeps in *The Buz'gem Blues* (Talonbooks, 2002).

DHT But Michelle is more realistic. I mean, the comedies are just like farces or celebrations of silliness. I've met more Michelles, although you do see Warriors Who Never Sleep: they do exist out there, but I've kind of filtered them through my tongue-in-cheek, whereas Michelle is filtered through my consciousness.

JM With hindsight, I get a sense of her providing a kind of profile of the person who made the bomb threat, who might think, "I'm a Michelle-like person, that's why I'm here watching this play about Native issues, so why are you laughing at me? You're not supposed to be making fun of me! You're supposed to be making fun of somebody else."

DHT Yeah, the more right-wing people (*Laughter*).

JM We've talked a little bit here about stereotypes and things like that. Is it a stereotype or a cliché to ask about oral tradition if I'm approaching you as a writer from a First Nations tradition?

DHT I grew up in an environment of sitting around and telling stories out in front of my grandparents' house. There was a big old willow tree and a couple of chairs and a firepit and we'd sit there. I'm not talking oral tradition in terms of Nanabush legends or "Legends-of-my-people" or that type of thing, but more stories about funny things that had happened in the community, just talking late into the night—I think that's where I got my concept of oral narrative and also the structure of

humour, and the structure of how to write, because, you know, a good story has a simple structure. It has a set-up, it has the middle, and it has the ending. And that is the basis of any play, any novel, any essay, anything. A beginning, a middle, and an end. And it sounds so simple, but I'm sure you guys know as writers, that oftentimes that's the hardest thing to nail into a student's head. Where does your story start? Where does it end, and how does it get there? And so, by deconstructing any good story or any good joke that's told by a half-decent joke-teller, you have the structure you need for, I'd say, 80 percent of all good writing. Boy, it almost sounds like I know what I'm talking about. (*Laughter*) Can I get one of those honorary degrees?

JM Can you recall your first experience of meeting First Nations literature of any kind in print?

DHT It's hard to say, that would probably be in my early 20s, the early 1980s, I remember coming across one of W.P. Kinsella's books and being amazed that somebody was actually writing about Reserve life. Other than that, Native literature was a slow drip into my consciousness.

Hard to give you details. By the late 1980s, I was swimming in the stuff.

JM Any writers whom you're reading these days whose work you'd like to comment on?

DHT I'm a huge fan of early Sherman Alexie, though I think his work has become a little too serious and dark, unlike a lot of his early work. Leslie Marmon Silko is very good, loved her *Almanac of the Dead*. And of course there's Tom King.

JM Your non-fiction output is considerable. Who are the non-fiction writers whose work you like or whose style you particularly enjoy?

DHT The one that immediately comes to mind is the non-fiction work of Kurt Vonnegut Jr. I always found his various collections of humorous/serious essays very interesting. Isaac Asimov's book *Gold*, which is a collection of his best short stories and best essays on Science Fiction were interesting too.

JM There's something that comes up in a lot of your work. In all the different genres, there's a test or quiz as a motif. Often in some of your essays there's a quiz to see if you're a hip indigenous person. The characters in the plays sometimes quiz each other, and there's that anecdote in your essay "Pretty Like a White Boy" about the child who offers you tea as a test of your "Indianness" [*Funny, You Don't Look Like One*, Theytus, 1996]. What do you like about this device?

DHT It does pop up, not as much any more, but yes, it used to and I guess it's just a device to stimulate conversation or stimulate the advancement of an idea, so I think it's just a process that I used to embrace when I was stuck. Actually, I shouldn't say that, because in "Pretty Like a White Boy" the tea thing, I wasn't stuck, that was a valid observation, that happened, but I don't know . . . I'll have to ponder that.

JM What does it mean when a white guy like me scores well on a Hip Indigenous culture quiz?

DHT It means that you've been paying attention. Trust me, most natives wouldn't get that. They couldn't remember what Kirk's name was in the "Paradise Syndrome" episode of Star Trek. I mean, that sort of stuff is just fun to sit down and put together; there's absolutely no validity to it. I'm just sitting around thinking of all the obscure Native pop culture stuff I could come up with in my head; you know, what was The Lone Ranger's real name? John Reid. You know, stuff like that. And what was the real name of Jay Silverheels, the actor who played Tonto? Harold Smith. I soak that stuff up. Did you read the one about the Seven C's of Colonization? I'm a firm believer that God, the Creator, Mother Nature, whatever, is a far funnier writer than anything I could ever create. And my only talent is being able to acknowledge that, and read it, because in the essays very little, none of that stuff, I've made up. It's all real! And my only talent is recognizing that, and bringing it up. Not many people realize the humour in the fact that Pocahontas's boyfriend was named John Smith. Would you let your daughter go out with a man who calls himself John Smith? (*Laughter*)

JM I'd like to look a bit more closely at this issue of cultural and cross-cultural knowledge. One of the most disturbing moments in *alterNatives* occurs when Angel asks Colleen to translate a number of English words into Ojibway. She rhymes the words off, and then he says, "How do you say the same words in Hebrew or Yiddish?" and she's stumped. The suggestion is that she's trying to use Ojibway culture to fill the gap, to compensate for her lack of connection with her own roots.

DHT Because she's what, third-generation secular, she says.

JM Yeah. But, to be purely speculative, what if she had been able to answer in Hebrew or Yiddish? What would her knowledge of Ojibway have meant in that case?

DHT I think the fact that she didn't, and Angel knew that, is why he asked, and so probably if she could've rhymed it off, he wouldn't have asked

that question. The interesting thing about that, though, is a really interesting discussion I had with some people around the time when *alterNatives* was originally produced, in Kincardine, in Ontario. That weekend in Toronto there was an ATHE conference, the Association for Theatre in Higher Education; it's an American and Canadian thing, and they were having a big yearly conference in Toronto of all places. So there are three hundred university theatre professors in Toronto, and three of them I'd met in my travels in the States. I was invited to come and meet them for drinks, and they said, "You know, we'd really like to go and see some native plays. Is anything happening up here?" Because, as you know, Canada's 15 years ahead of anything in the States in terms of Native theatre. And I said, "Ironically, one of my plays is being produced an hour and a half due west of here." So they skipped out for 24 hours, and came out to Kincardine. One of them was Jewish. They watched the play, and the American one basically said that she loved it, but she had philosophical problems with the fact that Colleen didn't know any of the Yiddish or Hebrew, because she says, "Where I come from in the States, everybody I know who's Jewish can speak some Yiddish or Hebrew." Yet, the woman who was the actress, Sharon Birnbaum, was vehemently arguing: "Well, maybe, but this is Canada, and I don't know Yiddish, I don't know Hebrew, most of my friends don't." So she says it's a viable thing up here. So it was an interesting little juxtapositioning over the usage of Yiddish and Hebrew in a Native play. *Oy vey! (Laughter)*

JM I was listening to something on the CBC a few months ago, an interview with Nancy Huston, the novelist, who lives in France and writes in French, although she's an anglophone who comes from Calgary. She spoke at some length about being what she calls a "false bilingual"; she's somebody who, as opposed to being someone who grew up with one parent who spoke English and French and just grew up naturally having two languages, she acquired the second language and culture as an adult, by choice, and so a "true" bilingual or "true" bicultural is somebody that this just happens to, so you're always a false bilingual if you learn a language by choice. Now, some of your work looks closely at non-natives who have chosen to learn Aboriginal languages; I'm thinking of somebody like Colleen, or somebody like Summer in *The Buz'gem Blues* . . .

DHT Who speaks three languages?

- JM Yeah. There's that line where Ted/Warrior Who Never Sleeps says to Summer, "What could possibly be untrue about speaking Cree?" Is this "false bilingualism" or false biculturalism only a problem when it eclipses "real" identity, as in Summer's case before she talks to Marianne?
- DHT I have no idea, because I don't understand that. (*Laughter*) It's a little too academic for me; it's beyond my simple rez beginnings.
- JM I guess I'm thinking about the difference between the way we respond to somebody like Colleen and the way we respond to somebody like Dale, for example, who's kind of benevolently ignorant, and who finds at the end of the play, when he and Angel sit down . . .
- DHT They bond over science fiction and moose.
- JM So there's that contrast between Dale, who's curious, as you've said, but doesn't really explore these things, and Colleen, who explores . . .
- DHT Who overexplores and appropriates.
- JM Are there lines to be drawn here between exploring, overexploring, and appropriating? How clear are they?
- DHT Oh, I'm sure there are lines to be drawn. The whole cultural appropriation issue is one that's been burning up for fifteen years and I think everybody has their own perception of where that line is. Everybody does . . . I have. W.P. Kinsella has, everybody does, and so, yeah, there are lines there, and in my characters, all my characters have different lines, you know. I'm sure Colleen would hate Summer. If she ever met Summer, she would think Summer was the worst practitioner of that kind of appropriation ever, but she would not see it in herself.
- ST Do you like your characters?
- DHT Yeah. Yeah, I do. I like my characters. You know, it was so funny, a lot of my friends in Toronto think there's a character based on me in every one of my plays and almost everybody is convinced that Rodney is me. I remember seeing a production of *Only Drunks and Children Tell the Truth*, and watching Rodney, and I remember just thinking, My God, if I was in a room with Rodney for an hour I'd want to kill him. (*Laughter*) He's so high-energy, inane, and so full of pop culture that you want to give him a valium. But then I think of something like *alterNatives*, where I don't know if I would get along with Bobby or Yvonne. There's a nasty edge to them; they enjoy inflicting chaos. And so obviously, that's the one where I was trying to create unsympathetic characters and I think maybe I succeeded! (*Laughter*) Yet again, I

remember, it's so interesting, when that play came out, I had so many people come up to me and say, oh, I know Bobby through and through.

JM Your third collection of essays is called *Furious Observations of a Blue-Eyed Ojibway*. What are you going to be next time around?

DHT Futile! It comes out in March. *Futile Observations of a Blue-Eyed Ojibway*. (Laughter) It's *Futile*, and then possibly *Fabulous* or *Fantastic*. All the F-words you can come up with.³

ST In mixed company, with children. (Laughter)

DHT Yeaahhh. *Feminist Adventures of a Blue-Eyed Ojibway!* (Laughter)

ST You're bound to get that honorary doctorate.

DHT I was actually offered one about three years ago, but for some reason it just evaporated. Sigh. Oh well.

JM But your name has become a recognized pejorative in some circles.

DHT "That Drew Hayden Taylor Métis Half-breed Wannabe." (Laughter) Thank you, thank you. I'm here all week; try the veal.

NOTES

- 1 "Ice Screams" was broadcast as a radio play 25 January, 2004 on *In Performance* on CBC Radio 2.
- 2 In 2000, an anonymous caller threatened to bomb Vancouver's Firehall Arts Centre in response to the perceived racism of *alterNatives*. For more details on the incident and the critical response to the play, see the essay "White Like Me" in *Furious Observations of a Blue-Eyed Ojibway* (Theytus, 2002), 86–88.
- 3 *Futile Observations* appeared in August 2004

Self-portraits in Youth

1 Approach to Middle Night

An arbitrary ritual of ricerars
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.

Organic Re-Membering

Shari Andrews

Bones About to Bloom. Oberon \$12.95

Margaret Avison

Concrete and Wild Carrot. Brick Books \$15.00

Bernice Lever

Blessings. Black Moss \$17.95

Carolyn Souaid

Snow Formations. Signature Editions \$14.95

Reviewed by Jes Battis

All four of these texts are charged with the task of re/membering natural imagery, of underscoring sharp moments of loss that press (naturally?) against fragments of unexpected hope. I use the ‘/’ not as a post-modern affectation, but as catachresis, a flickering referent for the teasing empty spaces—the snow formations and concrete cracks—which say so much while remaining unsayable. Avison and Andrews, especially, pose remembrance as an essential practice, a reiteration of moments, touches, people—even scraps—that gives them flesh, re-members them.

Holding on to the memory of her children, even as they stand on the threshold of departure, Andrews admits that “I must prepare like the autumn trees / for these leavings.” Similarly, Avison looks back upon an older Toronto, resigned that “through spy-/holed fences, we inspect / the backs of streets we knew / before.” The loss that Andrews encodes haptic and human, a person-shaped void that is “the hole / your death has left”; Avison’s sense of

loss is more metaphysical, as she redacts scriptural passages in order to comb meaning from them, even when “it makes no sense today / to talk this way, nor did / in A.D. 30, or thereabouts.” Both poets concern themselves with holes that must be examined, cracks that must be singled out.

Souaid’s *Snow Formations*, drawing from the material character of its own title, presents verses that read like white drifts, scattered landscapes. Like Avison, she muses about the Garden of Eden and its “hypothetical apple.” But she also offers imperatives to the reader: “roll your rational eye backwards into the / brainless dark.” To read this text, we must peer through a screen of snow, welcoming—rather than criticizing—its imprecisions and flashes of obscurity. When Souaid playfully suggests that “the way to understand a metaphor / is to undress her, coyly,” she is offering up her work as a shifting formation, a cloud to be scanned rather than an artifact to be typed. Her disjointed inclusion of the Inuit myth of Sedna—re/presented through a loose *mise-en-scene* narrative—only further complicates the classification of *Snow Formations* as anything other than what its own cover suggests: a play of snow and words.

While Souaid’s imagery is mutable and airy, Andrews and Avison employ dark, earthbound calls to the senses: bones, flowers, grit and blood. Humans and animals grow conflated within *Bones About to Bloom*, as the poet becomes “a dog that sleeps on a mat / next to the heat register,” and bodily possession is likened to “the way

a cat rubs saliva / on anything it chooses to own." Avison, similarly, enacts a kind of material heaviness within her verse, describing how "stone makes every thing / more what it is: / sun-hot," and she ends *Concrete and Wild Carrot* with the observation (hope?) that "there will begin, / perhaps, a slow / secret, gradual, germinating / in the darkness." The '?' is no bit of scribal midrash on my part, since Avison employs '?' as a rhetorical strategy—a spacing device, like the '/', meant to signify a bridgeless darkness where something, perhaps meaning, might be "germinating."

Lever's *Blessings* is the odd text out, using a disjunctive voice that must be examined separately from those of Andrews, Avison and Souaid. The title suggests that a list of "blessings" is to follow, although grim recollections and moments of startling pain cohabit among joys and pleasantries, as if forming a complete resume. Her two characterizations of divorce—first a "birth with no promise," then a "hockey game"—are emblematic of the long-suffering, but oftentimes charming, treatment that Lever gives to her poetic subjects in *Blessings*. Her voice clearly evolves, from the angry and immediate verse written in "Yet Woman I Am," (1979) to the scattered, almost idly curious musings of the post-1997 "New Poems." Still, that originary anger appears in later poems such as "It's So Hard To Hurt The Dead!," with the '! ' intimating a powerful need for emphasis, and the suggestion that one might "dump the ashes in the sewer /where they belong" revealing the edge of fresh animosity that can always be uncovered.

These poems are, stylistically, less refined than those of Avison, and less introspective than those of Andrews and Souaid—but they are treble-charged with feeling, and their often anecdotal quality brings the reader closer to a real body, rather than a distant authorial subject. Lever's voice only nuances this whole collection of voices, this distilla-

tion of bodies ranging from the distinct feminine to the expansive geographic, where the pauses, gaps and hints, be they within concrete or snow, remain most important.

Atwood on Writing

Margaret Atwood

Negotiating with the Dead: A Writer on Writing.
Cambridge University \$18.00

Reviewed by Janice Fiamengo

A literary scholar reviewing Atwood's criticism is in an awkward position given Atwood's longstanding hostility to academia. In reviews and essays over the past three decades, she has pointedly rejected scholarly analysis of the sort she identifies as academic, choosing a colloquial style that includes jokes and occasional oversimplification to make a point. To fault her for lack of argumentative rigour, then, seems merely to confirm one's academic bias. Yet, in an earlier book such as *Survival*, Atwood's tendency toward the reductive was offset by the bold incisiveness of her thesis. One forgave (or, at least, I did) the vast generalizations because the analysis of the Canadian psyche was provocative and fresh. The same cannot be said for her most recent collection of essays, *Negotiating with the Dead*, which began as a series of six Empson Lectures given at the University of Cambridge. Although the hallmarks of Atwood's style are all evident—anecdotal development, humorous digressions, obvious erudition—cogency of argument is lacking, making the collection less satisfying than it might have been.

Atwood's subject in these essays reflects her ongoing interest in the cultural significance of writing. What does it mean, she asks, to call oneself a writer in a consumer-oriented society? What maze of social expectations, myths, and metaphors is

evoked by the term, and how have writers deployed and revised these myths? Such questions prompt her to consider the craft of writing from a variety of perspectives in a discussion organized around a set of archetypes. The idea of the double, or *doppelgänger*, focuses a consideration of the writer as a person divided between the creating self and the ordinary self. The motif of the descent into the underworld is the focal point for reflections on writing as a response to death and otherness, with inspiration figured as a visit to a demonic or heavenly realm. This archetypal approach enables Atwood to unify diverse reflections while at the same time assuming a wide latitude to explore how civilizations past and present have understood the role of the story-teller, the source of inspiration, and the ethical responsibility of the writer.

Atwood prefers to consider such questions rather than answer them, telling stories of her own experience and introducing an eclectic range of citations from Homer to Alice Munro and from Shakespeare to Susan Sontag. A major strength of the book is the sheer range of references, which highlight Atwood's formidable command of Western literature as well as the exuberant catholicism of her tastes. Modern commentators are placed side by side with ancient myth. The Epic of Gilgamesh is the starting point for a discussion of the writer's descent to the underworld, while Alice in Wonderland structures a meditation on the necessary duplicity of the writer. The gods of Greek mythology make frequent appearances, but so do the Wizard of Oz and Grimms' fairy-tales. To make so many texts and authors speak to one another—to demonstrate how they do, in fact, participate in a continuing conversation about art as illusion, power, and testimony—is no small achievement.

And yet one wishes for something more: a more focused argument, fuller analysis of the examples, and a less breezy approach.

In keeping with her self-identification as a story-teller rather than academic, Atwood tends to recount stories or quote other writers with little or no analysis, leaving readers to make of her references what they will. Perhaps this approach signals trust in readers' abilities, but the result seems more flabby inconclusiveness than provocative open-endedness. Most readers look to writers to provide answers and guide interpretation, and Atwood too often sidesteps complex issues. When she does analyze, she seems determined to be as flat-footed as possible, perhaps in the cause of accessibility. She concludes an account of *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, for example, by announcing its "motto": "if you've got a magic picture, don't mess around with it. Leave it alone." Too much is played for laughs, and the really good bits—reflections on the text as disguise, on artistic dedication as a form of martyrdom, on the limits attending the writer's ability to take on other identities—are too quickly abandoned in favour of amusing anecdotes. Often I found that her citations of others, including Oscar Wilde, Jorge Luis Borges, and Nadine Gordimer, highlighted the greater elegance and subtlety of these formidable thinkers. I wanted to hear more of *them*. Moreover, Atwood is treading familiar ground, relying heavily on her own previous work as well as that of others. Her discussion of the writer's responsibility to witness, for example, will be familiar to anyone who knows her earlier non-fiction. There is little sense of a writer thinking through new problems; Atwood seems content to stay on the surface with a series of rather orthodox propositions (that literature is always political, but more than just that; that literature brings the dead back to life) addressed without complexity or risk.

Despite these criticisms, Atwood deserves respect for her willingness to engage a wide readership in discussing the social meaning of literature, and she has undoubtedly

created an accessible volume that will enable interested readers to follow up on the magnificent sources she has brought together. Still, it is hard to escape the conclusion that she has put less than she is capable of into these essays. In recycling old material and emphasizing humour over complexity, she has not done justice to her subject.

Bad News

Margaret Atwood

Oryx and Crake. McClelland & Stewart \$37.99

Reviewed by Coral Ann Howells

Margaret Atwood's novels of the 1990s up to *The Blind Assassin* in 2000 have all been about history, but her latest novel appears to be about the end of history. *Oryx and Crake*, as so many reviewers have noted, is a futuristic dystopia like *The Handmaid's Tale*, but now the dimensions of catastrophe are global, with one solitary human figure in a ruined North American landscape devastated not by terrorist attacks or nuclear weapons but through biotechnology and environmental degradation. Snowman, who believes himself to be the last man, is the survivor of a mysterious viral disease that has wiped out human civilization, leaving him together with a nightmarish menagerie of genetically modified animals like pigoons, wolvoogs, rakunks, and a mysterious tribe of childlike humanoid creatures called the Crakers, for whose welfare he is now solely responsible. This is Atwood at her most uncanny as she keys into widespread contemporary anxieties about the environment, genetic engineering, urban degeneration, Third World poverty, internet abuse, and offers a speculative scenario in which the world has become "one vast uncontrolled experiment." Though Snowman's post-disaster narrative begins "once upon a time," the time frame is actually very precise. His childhood memories of huge bonfires of

slaughtered cattle, reminiscent of the 2001 foot and mouth epidemic in Britain, suggest that the fictional scenario unfolds within the next fifty years. Is the twenty-first century Our Final Century? Atwood's question is weirdly echoed in the title of a new book by Martin Rees, the Astronomer Royal, published in the same month as *Oryx and Crake*. No wonder Atwood chooses to call this "speculative fiction" rather than "science fiction" as she issues her strongest warning about the dangers of separating man from nature, the same message that she delivered twenty-five years ago: "You aren't and can't be apart from nature. We're all part of the biological universe."

If Atwood is at her most uncanny here she is also at her most satirical, for she is a deeply serious moralist in the Swiftian tradition, as the first epigraph to the novel indicates. *Oryx and Crake* is a *Gulliver's Travels* for the twenty-first century. What could be more Swiftian than the view of human history portrayed in the terrible Blood and Roses video game that Snowman (formerly Jimmy) plays with his best friend Crake after school, where "winning meant that you inherited a wasteland," or the depravity of the global porn website HottTotts, and brainfrizz.com where human suffering is reduced to virtual reality? Jimmy's visit to Crake at the prestigious Watson-Crick Institute of Life Sciences where research is funded by vast pharmaceutical corporations is very like Gulliver's visit to the Lagado Academy. (Incidentally, there is an anti-American joke embedded in the name of the Watson-Crick, and indeed this grim novel is full of jokes. As Crake remarks, "For jokes you need a certain edge, a little malice.") And like Gulliver, it is Snowman who appears monstrous in this alien post-disaster world.

However, we find more than satire here, for Atwood's remarkable range as a cultural critic combines with her imagination as a

novelist, producing the kind of tension foreshadowed in the two epigraphs. The first, as I have mentioned, is from *Gulliver's Travels*. The second (from *To the Lighthouse*) opposes Gulliver's "plain matter of fact" with "miracle" and vision. But is there really an opposition between science and art? Is it not the case that the creative imagination is a distinctively human quality shared by both scientists and artists? Snowman is the artist figure, wordsmith and storyteller, and Crake is the scientist, a Mephistophelean figure perhaps, but also a failed idealist like Frankenstein or Dr. Moreau. Atwood is at her most Swiftian when she asks the same philosophical question that *Gulliver's Travels* addresses: What does it mean to be human? This becomes notoriously difficult to answer in an era of gene splicing which produces pigoons with human neocortex tissue in their "crafty wicked heads" and the perfectly formed Crakers from whose brains all negative human impulses have been erased and who smell like citrus fruit. By contrast, the stinking, starving Snowman seems all too recognizably human, like King Lear reduced at zero hour to his primal condition as "a bare forked animal," but also, unlike the Crakers, possessed of – indeed tormented by – imagination and memory, that "burning scrapbook in his head."

Snowman's survival narrative, like Offred's, continuously interweaves present and past, shifting between the world he is stuck in and fragments of his life before the disaster, when he lived briefly in Paradise. Finally he gives his eyewitness account of the end of *Homo sapiens*. Like Iris Chase Griffen, Snowman is negotiating with the dead: "It's loss and regret and misery and yearning that drive the story forward, along its twisted road." There is much that is twisted here, not least Jimmy's relationships with Crake and the beautiful enigmatic Asian woman Oryx, with whom both men fall in love, ending in a romantic tri-

angle of betrayal and revenge. It's Snowman/Jimmy with whom the reader sympathizes most, not only because he bears the "thumbprints of human imperfection," but also because of his anguished loyalty to Crake and to his mother's memory, his blind, hopeless love for Oryx, and his sense of moral responsibility as the Crakers' protector. Everyone he loves has said, "I'm counting on you" or "Don't let me down," and he tries to honour that commitment. Most crucially Snowman, like his creator, loves words. Caught on the edge between language and the silencing of human voices, his narrative celebrates words: "Hang on to the words . . . When they're gone out of his head, these words, they'll be gone, everywhere, forever."

So it comes as a relief to the reader to discover that Snowman is not the last man alive after all. But is it a relief to him? And whose are the footprints on the beach? (Are they Canadians, I wonder? Possibly, for no Canadian city was listed in the catalogue of worldwide catastrophe that Snowman watched on the television.) Will he be able to protect the Crakers? And is history about to repeat itself? The old scripts in his head provide no answers. Neither does Atwood, as Snowman steps forward, "leaping from the pinnacle of a tower into the air." This novel is a remarkable achievement of Atwood's own genre splicing, where science fiction fuses with savage satire, thriller, and tragic romance to present a serious moral vision of all that it means to be human at the beginning of the twenty-first century.



Film and Form

Guy Barefoot

Gaslight Melodrama: From Victorian London to 1940s Hollywood. Continuum \$29.95

Bill Nichols

Maya Deren and the American Avant-Garde. U of California P \$28.00

Michael Ondaatje

The Conversations: Walter Murch and the Art of Editing Film. Vintage \$34.95

Reviewed by Brenda Austin-Smith

In each of these books about film, the imposition of form on the material excesses of content is something of a theme, whether that imposition comes by way of genre and style, by way of insistent personal vision, or by way of expressed vocation. Guy Barefoot's *Gaslight Melodrama* is concerned with the way historical settings and technologies intersect with the formation of film genres. Bill Nichols's edited anthology on Maya Deren considers the figure of the artist-theorist from angles of critical vision committed to contextualizing a brilliant figure in the history of avant-garde practice. Michael Ondaatje's conversations with legendary film editor Walter Murch explore Murch's contributions to several of the late 20th century's most culturally significant film masterpieces.

"Gaslight, crime and melodrama" are the common ingredients of the films Barefoot examines in his book, a revision of his doctoral dissertation. His focus is a loosely-related cycle of mystery and crime films, produced from the early 1930s to the early 1950s, in which period settings, usually late-Victorian or Edwardian London, predominate. Barefoot finds in 1940s Hollywood's fascination with gaslit London an anticipation of the filmic codes that will define film noir in the postwar period, as well as an ambivalent response, veering from nostalgia to critique, to the era in which the films were set. Though Barefoot reviews the con-

siderable work done to date on the melodramatic genre, and briefly positions the "gaslight melodrama" within this critical history, he declares his own intention as contextual rather than textual or generic. He will, he writes, study these films in relation to a pattern "spanning literature, the theatre, design, art-works, furnishing, and collectibles, and the responses to these different objects, productions and processes." This list is distressingly long for a slim volume, and gives early warning of the problems the writer encounters when he attempts to do justice to his ambitions. Barefoot's strengths are in historical research, as the wonderful chapters on the history of gaslight itself, and on the American yearning for, and reaction against, Victoriana, attest. But the book becomes mired in detail as the intellectual conception that initially propelled the study, the phenomenon of the gaslight melodrama as a distinct genre with particular cultural implications and resonances, dissolves into a welter of additions to the central concerns of the author. British films as well as American ones are examined; later films as well as earlier ones are included. Strangely, even though London as privileged locale forms the subject of an entire chapter on "Londonia" and "the London discourse," Judith Walkowitz's *City of Dreadful Delight*, has not informed Barefoot's discussion. It is an odd omission in an otherwise thoroughly researched book that lacks, finally, the judicious and distanced eye of a ruthless editor who could have helped bring the good bones of its forming intentions to light.

Maya Deren is a paradoxical figure in the postwar American avant-garde film movement. Her films, particularly *Meshes of the Afternoon*, are celebrated, but her theoretical writings go unread. She was a relentless self-promoter who championed a depersonalized approach to art, and a woman who appeared uninterested in the implica-

tions of gender in her work and its reception. This edited collection of essays on Deren confronts her contradictions directly, producing excellent re-examinations of her contributions to film theory, and to feminist film practice, and offering completely original research by scholars such as Mark Franko and Lucy Fischer on subjects as varied as the representation of racial agency in Deren's work with the tradition of American modern dance, and the role of magic in her films that links her to another "spiritualist photographer," George Melies. As an appendix, Nichols has reproduced Deren's major theoretical treatise, "An Anagram of Ideas on Art, Form and Film," to which most of the essays in the collection refer. Deren's theory that form is not only aesthetic, but also ethical, that structure carries a moral charge because it is an imprint of human consciousness, is an insistent feature of her written work. Renata Jackson turns to the imagist poetics of Pound and Eliot, rather than to Deren's well-known interest in collective ritual, to account for Deren's development of this position, which clarifies Deren's view of both surrealism and cinema-verite as evasions of the ethical burdens of artistic consciousness. Ute Holl's essay on Deren's relationship to theories of the unconscious, partially routed through her father's training in psychiatry, visits similar concerns, but uses the deterioration of Deren's friendship with Anais Nin to contrast surrealist and constructivist notions of the self and identity. Other essays discuss Deren's Haitian films, the making of which were supported by the first Guggenheim Fellowship awarded for filmmaking, or argue for a "bisexual" reading of Deren's film work in view of its refusal to channel desire and bodies into "coupled resolution," whether homosexual or heterosexual. In contrast to the academic pieces, a cleverly ironic view of Deren's taste for the mythopoetic is provided by Jane

Wodening, who writes, "she became a priestess and her red hair stuck out all over her head like sparks and she wore her hair that way for the rest of her life."

The role of the editor in the creation of a film is obvious, but also obscured by the legend of the director as *auteur*. Michael Ondaatje's *The Conversations* is offered as reparation for the oversight, and it is a thoughtfully convivial book that conveys the staggering artistic talent of Walter Murch in Murch's own self-deprecating terms. Murch is the editing genius whose work on *American Graffiti*, *The Godfather* trilogy, *The Conversation*, *Apocalypse Now Redux*, and *The English Patient*, among other films, has made him a legend in the industry. From the transcriptions of five conversations that took place between July 2000, when Murch was re-editing the original footage from the 1979 *Apocalypse Now*, and June of 2001, when Murch was working on *K-19: The Widowmaker*, Ondaatje has crafted a set of marvellous insights on the art of selection, on editing as architecture and as surgery, as the *techne* of "invisible specifics." What emerges over the course of the judiciously illustrated book is a portrait of Murch as a polymath, equally at home discussing theories of the musical notation of the spheres, and translating the works of the writer Curzio Malaparte's from the original Italian. Along the way, Murch shares observations on working with Marlon Brando, as well as his theory of the "blink" as an editing principle, and on the realism of Flaubert as the inspiration for narrative film. Synaesthesia and animism are persistent: sound is both sheer light and colour, a presence that can darken or brighten a shot, while film is sentient, with limbs that can be cauterized or re-attached. Murch describes worrying over a scene in a film that seemed to swell with pride at his attention, and when he decided to remove it completely, reproached him, much as Job complained to God. No matter how

detailed the talk, the stuff that informs Murch's capacious talent remains, by the end of this tremendous book, both concrete and mysterious, as precise and as inexplicably magical as the film editor's cut.

Fat, Fiction, and Frogs

Gary Barwin

Seeing Stars. Stoddart Kids \$9.95

Mario Girard

The Fat Princess. Susan Ouriou, trans. XYZ Press \$19.95

Reviewed by Roderick McGillis

The covers of these two books are instructive: Murray Kimber's Magritte-inspired drawing for *Seeing Stars* invokes modernism in its surrealist form, whereas Barbara Klunder's cover for *The Fat Princess* reminds us of a child's art. Child art and surrealist art cohere in their free-floating images that work by a sort of visual incantation, an intertextual necessity that draws the reader into fiction that refuses to accept the definitions of genre, readership, or verisimilitude. These two novels are examples of cross-writing, that is, writing for both an adult and a young adult audience. *Seeing Stars* appears under the Stoddart Kids imprint, clearly announcing itself as a book for young readers, and yet the cover-art, by an artist known for crossover work (e.g. *Fern Hill* 1997), suggests a dual audience. *The Fat Princess* appears with a cover that suggests a young readership and a title that asserts "A story for grown-ups." Both books use, among other intertextual scaffolding, fairy tales. These are similar to books by J. K. Rowling and Philip Pullman that appeal to both adults and children.

Gary Barwin's *Seeing Stars* uses *The Wizard of Oz* as an intertext to accentuate the theme of home—its loss, dysfunction, and reclamation. The drift between reality and fantasy is also relevant, although in

Seeing Stars, fantasy is more of a feeling than an aspect of form. In *Seeing Stars*, the story of a young girl's cross-country flight constitutes the mystery that draws fifteen-year-old Alex Isaacson to discover the whereabouts of his long-lost father. The story is familiar to readers of Young Adult fiction—troubled teenager from dysfunctional family finds capable adult to guide him through the rite of passage to maturity and understanding. What distinguishes Barwin's narrative from the run-of-the-mill fiction for young readers is precisely the feeling that Kimber captures in his cover art. The narrative works on coincidence, picking up the theme of divination from star-gazing. Alex's mother, known as "Starbright, the star reader," makes her living by reading the stars for those who call her on the Psychic Phone Network. Mrs. Isaacson also lives in bed. She took to her bed the day her husband left, some twelve years prior to the action of the story, and she stays there, growing fatter and fatter, until she can no longer get up or fit through the door in her bedroom.

Mrs. Isaacson, along with Alex's wacky Uncle Barnard, the flier Chuck Ambersoll, the redoubtable and irascible Nicholas Copper, and a few others, constitute an eccentric cast of characters reminiscent of the characters who populate Brian Doyle's novels for young readers. Not only are the characters similar to those in Doyle's novels, but so too are the cunning and punning use of language and the impish chapter titles. As appealing as this writing is to an adult readership, the story remains that of a young boy's coming of age. This novel crosses over from Young Adult to mainstream fiction, but only just.

For an adult reader, the more gratifying of these two books is Mario Girard's *The Fat Princess*, a novel that reminds me of the intricately plotted and unusually voiced fiction of Laurent Chabin (e.g. *Misère de chien*, 2000). In Girard's novel, the narrator

is four-year-old Charlotte, daughter of two health-conscious modern parents.

Charlotte has diabetes; she is also smart. As Aritha van Herk notes on the book's back cover, Charlotte is psittaceous; she can repeat just about everything she hears without comprehending it. Her intense, intelligent, and concerned observations are unceasing, meandering, and witty. The slippage between the four-year-old narrator, the book's 'Author,' and its 'Correctrix' makes for clever word-play and genuinely sharp ruminations on a variety of subjects ranging from Young Adult novels, to family relations, to sex, to death, to the publishing industry, to capitalism. The novel is a *tour de force*, and Susan Ouriou's translation captures its serious playfulness gracefully.

Like *Seeing Stars*, *The Fat Princess* is resolutely rooted in the real world, but also manages to communicate the feeling of fantasy. Charlotte's narration, as she freely admits, is not always trustworthy, and this incorporation of the imaginative with the actual means we can never be certain that what we read is what we are supposed to accept. The same is true of the narrator herself. When are we listening to a four-year-old and when are we listening to Mario Girard? Yes, we are always listening to Mario Girard, but then again we are never listening to Mario Girard. Girard's achievement strikes me as genuinely original and provocative.



From Routes to Rails

Barbara Belyea, Ed.

A Year Inland: The Journal of a Hudson's Bay Company Wanderer. Wilfrid Laurier UP \$29.95

Richard Somerset Mackie

The Wilderness Profound: Victorian Life on the Gulf of Georgia. Sono Nis P \$22.95

Barrie Sanford

McCulloch's Wonder: The Story of the Kettle Valley Railway. Rev. edn. Whitecap \$19.95

Reviewed by Bryan N.S. Gooch

Barbara Belyea's careful presentation of the four copies of Anthony Henday's Journal (June 1754- June 1755) noting details of his trip from York Factory to a point west of the French post Basquia (The Pas), the Saskatchewan River country and his more southerly sweeping return, brings to life not only the ardors of such a journey by canoe and foot, but also sheds light on the nature of the fur trade, the policies of the Hudson's Bay Company in the Northwest and in London, and the exacting task facing an editor endeavouring to reconcile the variations in four manuscripts (1755-c. 1782) based on a missing original text. Belyea is scrupulous in her attention to detail and in pointing out what can and cannot be derived from the copies, all made by Andrew Graham who, one has to surmise, had his own editorial agenda, given instructions provided to him and the real or imagined predilections of the HBC's committee in London which would determine the nature and extent of future journeys, and the building of outposts. Belyea's decision to print the entries of all four texts together in chronological order is sound—quite the proper course when discrepancies and omissions need to be considered. Following an introduction and an essay "From Manuscript to Print," which explains the problems, comments on Graham's role, and discusses editorial policies, the book presents the orders given to

Henday by James Isham, Factor at York, the Journal texts (with notes to the B.239/a/40 journal), maps, detailed notes to the entries (a superb piece of scholarship), a brief commentary, which wisely offers a cautionary note on the extent to which Henday's details are wholly reliable, and three further essays (each with notes) on a) Henday's route, b) the native Canadian groups encountered and the question of native/tribal locations, movements, and territories, and c) the "uses" of Henday's Journal. A list of sources and an index are appended. This book is a fine piece of work; moreover, despite the textual problems, Henday's entries (which Belyea insists must be seen in the context of other reports of explorations) have much to reveal and suggest, and neither they nor Belyea's lucid and thorough consideration offer anything less than a rewarding excursion into the mid-18th century fur trade accounts that are so important in understanding the opening of the Canadian West.

The Wilderness Profound, by Richard Mackie, details the experiences of George Drabble who, leaving his wife and family, ventured to Victoria in 1862 and settled in Comox (where he died in 1901), having worked as a surveyor of lands in the Comox, Courtenay, and upper Gulf of Georgia region, as a planner of roads and local magistrate. Mackie offers more than a biography of Drabble and the nature of pioneer life in the development of this rich farming, coal-laden, and salmon-rich area: the book incorporates the growth of a coastal community with its marriages, quarrels, successes, and lamentable anticlimaxes laid out by dint of assiduous research, revealing a wonderful and often entertaining panoply of people and their activities. Drabble was a central figure in the endeavour to develop roads from trails, plan bridges, survey property for settlers, hear cases both civil and criminal, and, in the end, was a somewhat sad witness to his

own decline in a community he had done so much to build. Drabble was, in many ways, an energetic virtuoso, and the account of his activities and the insights to Gulf of Georgia life are as engaging as they are historically useful.

Barrie Sanford's 25th anniversary revision of his *McCulloch's Wonder* updates the story of the Kettle Valley section of the Canadian Pacific Railway (finally torn up, except for a small portion west of Summerland, in 1991) focusing on the engineering exploits of Andrew McCulloch, who managed to push a route through from Hope and the Coquihalla River to Princeton, Penticton, and beyond. This line of trestles, and tunnels, heavy ruling grades passed through climatic and other natural hazards that seemed endlessly to pitch human handiwork into the nearest available abyss. Sanford's story is one of doggedness, toil, terror, spectacular scenery, wrecked locomotives, and financial hazard. Route planning, construction, operation, and demise (leaving present day BC without a southern railway link)—are well described in a detailed and clear fashion. Even the question as to whether or not the railway should have been built (especially west from Brodie to Hope, given a natural connection from Merritt to Spence's Bridge on the Railway's main line) is not avoided. The edifice was magnificent. Now it is gone, along with its romance, like some impractical but gorgeous clipper ship. A few structures remain—alas, many fewer after the 2003 fires around Kelowna—and a short tourist ride is still available between Trout Creek and Summerland. But the ghosts are there in the Coquihalla canyon and beyond the Myra Canyon trestles, and Sanford conjures them splendidly.



BC Before the Logo

Tim Bowling

Downriver Drift. Harbour \$18.95

The Paperboy's Winter. Penguin \$24.00

Reviewed by Charles Dawson

Across four poetry collections Tim Bowling has recorded the pulse of his memory bound in BC's Fraser River. His novels extend that focus. Some psychogeographers suggest early attachment to place flourishes around ten years of age. This seems corroborated as Bowling returns to the river he knew (and in a sense inherited) as a child, for both books are set in imaginary settlement Chilukthan, on the Fraser (Bowling grew up in Ladner and worked on a Fraser River gillnetter for many years). And Bowling makes it clear he feels that river, that age, has gone. *Downriver Drift* and *The Paperboy's Winter* draw on a remembered Fraser River and an apparently vanishing way of relating to that place.

Downriver Drift is set in a season of endings: dwindling salmon runs, dwindling union power, small town transitions from hinterland to outer suburb, and characters in the central Mawson family growing from puberty or into middle-age.

The local papers would be owned by a chain, teenagers would eat their lunch at McDonald's, and American filmmakers would turn Chilukthan into small American towns. . . . It was one of the last seasons for citizenship, for paperboys, for schools that teach music and drama, for living where you grew up, for the heron's stillness, and for dogs barking to each other across the quiet miles, for catching tadpoles and for spying on muskrats.

The salmon are moving out, the golden arches will shortly move in. Welcome to the end of Canadianness. The quotation is from an extended passage that lists a range of qualities, aptitudes and lifestyles commonly used to mark Canada as different from the USA. Bowling marks this against

carefully developed descriptions of the Fraser and its environs. Unlike its successor, almost every chapter of *Downriver Drift* opens with a description of place. Initial chapters lavish attention on building up the river and its atmospheric reach: fogs, rain, trees, and water are the primary descriptive foci; dwellings are incidental, tenuous; people tag along for the ride, but they would not be there without the river.

Downriver Drift recounts a few months in the early 1960s where a strike brews and boils over. The fishing strike brings energy to the narrative. Resource-scarcity is a matter of livelihood. The Mawson family, dependent on fishing, are in the centre of the action. Kathleen Mawson suffers increasingly severe depression; her husband Vic and three children look on, helpless and unhelped. The depression is a focus for much of the novel's first half, which appropriately, if not elegantly, tends to meander somewhat, partly due to an overly explanatory form of interior monologue; I sense Bowling is never quite sure what to 'do' with Kathleen and the fact her development is rather hurried at the conclusion confirms this for me.

The Paperboy's Winter demonstrates how much potential Bowling fostered in his first novel: the follow-up demonstrates real poise and assurance. As in *Downriver Drift* there are key river scenes; some are so remarkable they delineate entire lives. But the book does not feel the need to open each chapter with place. Grounded in the compelling echoes of home and heart, *Winter's* focus on the world of childhood is detailed, evocative and assured. The Fraser River was host to creatures and memories that are lost now, but Bowling performs an act of salvage and of love: what is recovered may not sit easily in the present, but it is forever shaping it. He honours the place, its small-town bonds, the promise and trials of childhood, and the way inclinations build into passions in later years. Late in the novel the protagonist wonders if "memory was useless in a world

of violent headlines”; Bowling demonstrates it gives us our bearings in the world.

The distractions of childhood drive the novel and bring it home to every reader. It is the early 1970s. Ten year-old Callum Taylor’s father fishes the Fraser, but it is Callum’s world we enter, as he nurtures and then discards his obsession with the eccentric Ezra Hemsworth. When Ezra resurfaces in Callum’s life (and prompts the narrative into being) he rescues a young man who has almost forgotten how to remember because his homeplace has forgotten too: “The shadowy, gently haunted place of my boyhood . . . had almost vanished, replaced by strip malls, fast food franchises and gated condominium developments named ‘Heron’s Shores’ and ‘River Point.’” Ezra prompts Callum’s return into a “retrieved life. . . . my eyes that were open, opened again.” Ezra’s vulnerable abandon fascinates and scares Callum. His coming-of-age resides in the borderland before puberty; it is marked by an appreciation of human complexity (relationships become touchstones for his own moral development) and “the light of limitless imagination, stories and jokes.” So the novel has plenty of real glee, of the energy of risk. Bowling describes the violence and loyalty that mark boys’ friendships with great skill. And he retains a poet’s eye for fine imagery and chapter conclusions. In honing character development, Bowling creates a sense of community on the edge of change in a way that focuses the narrative, and allows each character to breathe.

Island Ideas

**Laurie Brinklow, Frank Ledwell
and Jane Ledwell, Eds.**

Message in a Bottle: The Literature of Small Islands. Institute of Island Studies \$19.95

Reviewed by Kristjana Gunnars

Message in a Bottle: The Literature of Small Islands is a selection of papers from the first

biennial international conference on the literature of small islands hosted by the Institute of Island Studies at the University of Prince Edward Island. The conference took place in June of 1998 and fifty scholars gave papers on islands as diverse as Tasmania, the Isle of Man, New Zealand, and Iceland. Such a framework allows for a great variety of subject matter, because the glue that binds, the idea of islands, is in itself ambiguous. The collection is divided into four overriding themes that seem to have emerged organically: Imagination, Exploration, Emigration, and Home.

But the organization of the book is not so overbearing that it impinges on the real magic of the whole effort, which is the sense of sheer possibility. In a word, this volume of essays, diverse and far-reaching, is unhingly fascinating. Geographies and their relationships to literature provide an interesting study, but in the context of islands, geography becomes highly symbolic and suggestive. There is an archetypal feature to islands that has appeared in all cultures, and when talk of islands appears, all cultures can participate. There is island mythology, poetry, language, historiography, and island science, and this book tries to capture them all.

There are essays here on Shakespeare, Atlantic Canada, Eddas and Sagas of Iceland, psychological islands, Santorini, the Isle of Man, Ireland and J.M. Synge, Caribbean literature, Derek Walcott and St. Lucia, Prince Edward Island in relation to mainland Canada, Tasmania in relation to Australia, Hawai’i and Pidgin English, and inevitably, essays on Lucy Maud Montgomery. In particular, Patricia Babilondo writing on Oliver Sacks and “The Island of the Colourblind” is a fascinating moment in the book. Juniper Ellis’s study on literary cartographies is compelling. Margaret Soltan’s discussion of James Merrill on Santorini makes you want to read all of Merrill again. Folksongs and

emigration in Fenella Bazin's paper on the Isle of Man is thought-provoking. The brief investigation of "paradoxical space" in the Caribbean in Patricia Srebrnik's essay is also engaging, and like so much else in this book, acts as a door into an area of study rather than a full treatment. Space simply prohibits full investigations, but the editors have to choose between breadth and depth, and they have done their best with depth while maintaining variety. The literature of Tasmania is engagingly discussed by Fiona Polack, and Anne Reevesman's paper on Hawai'i writers is intriguing. Gabrielle Ceraldi provokes a rereading of L.M. Montgomery on the subject of "broken families."

The concept of the "message in a bottle" is highly suggestive—the island that sends its messages, never knowing whether these will reach any destination at all, is a metaphor for the psychological conditions of islanders. Their lives might be complicated by desperation and danger. Islands are not always safe; they can be claustrophobic, and the relationship between islands and colonization is very much present in this collection. Gisli Sigurdsson's paper on Sagas and Eddas of Iceland points to how social and literary experiments have always characterized islands. Islands are places of difference, experiment, colonization, danger, insecurity, and belonging, and the conceptualization and problematization of islands in all their aspects are welcome indeed.

The Best Defence

Randy M. Brooks, Ed.

Almost Unseen: Selected Haiku of George Swede.
Brooks Books \$25.00

Trevor Carolan

Celtic Highway. Ekastasis Editions \$16.95

Reviewed by Greg Yavorsky

They say the best defence is a good offence, and that seems to be the way *Almost Unseen* is presented. Both the inner page of the

dust jacket and the introduction to the book adopt an unnecessarily antagonistic and intellectually superior stance towards the reader:

Many people believe that haiku is a three-line poem with seventeen syllables arranged in a 5-7-5 pattern. Such persons are not bothered by the fact that their definition of haiku is similar to stating that a housecat is a small mammal with fur, four legs and a tail . . . These misguided individuals have not learned. . . .

And

But if, in reading this poem, you think of oneness, and don't instead see bare limbs. . . . why then you are dead to the world and not even haiku will resuscitate your lifeless form.

As a reader I would prefer to have the poetry stand alone and speak for itself, rather than being told what it is or isn't, or what I should think of when I read it. Despite being put off by this arrogant tone, I found *Almost Unseen* a book full of poetic images of great clarity.

sailboat race:
at the finish a small cloud
crosses first

Almost every haiku shows the author's ability to capture a thought or an instantaneous connection between man and nature in a fresh way:

grandfather's old boots
I take them
for a walk

streetwalker
with a black eye halo
around the moon

As a scholar of classical Japanese literature, I find haiku in English to have several disadvantages. The first is the lack of the visual elements of written Japanese characters, and the second is the absence of the poetry inherent in the repetitive sounds of the Japanese language. Despite these

differences, the strength of a single image brought into focus in haiku, succeeds well in English.

This brings me to the question of how a book of haiku, especially “selected haiku” works. It is not a novel or a magazine article, which is best read from start to finish. I have a personal preference for works such as Basho’s “Narrow Road to the Deep North” (Oku no Hosomichi) which present haiku within the context of a journey and so have a thematic continuity. The distinct haiku moments often lead to poems that do not sit well next to one another on the same page. I went back to read George Swede’s book selectively, arbitrarily choosing where to start and how many poems at a time to read and each time was taken by the power of the isolated imagery.

Celtic Highway is a collection of poetry that covers a lot of physical and thematic ground. The poet takes us from Deep Cove to Calgary, and from the Himalayas to China. The subject matter ranges from love, death, and family, to Buddhist spiritual practice and the search for enlightenment. The poems are largely rooted in observations of the natural world, whether describing nature or placing transient human experiences within a larger context. The forms of these poems vary considerably. Some short poems like “Cortes Meditation” or “Meditation II: Calgary” are minimalist in creating a single haiku-like image. Others such as “For All The Tea in China,” or the suite of poems “The Music of the Stone” carry on a larger single theme for a number of pages. The imagery is frequently skilful as in “An October Walk Along The Bow”:

Poetry here is all in the land
in awkward prairie ways that linger
like the leaves of mountain ash
along the runoff slopes

In some of the spiritually oriented poems, such as “Practice” or “Satori, Lonsdale Avenue,” however, the realizations of the

poet do not result in inspiring poetry and many of the poems tend to be prosaic or end weakly:

Clear Skies ahead
More light

And so, each day passes.

From the point of view of poetic style, there is little new in *Celtic Highway*. The straightforward descriptive realism we have become accustomed to since the 1950s, seldom approaches the best poetic language of Kenneth Rexroth or the early work of Gary Snyder, for example.

As in painting, music or photography, when a style becomes commonplace it is the strength of content and the artist’s craft that raise the ordinary to the level of art. Unfortunately in “Celtic Highway” that transformation does not take place often enough.

Artistry to What End?

Michael Bullock

Colours: poems. Rainbird \$30.00

Adam Dickinson

Cartography and Walking. Brick \$15.00

Gary Hyland

The Work of Snow. ThistleDown \$15.00

Reviewed by R. W. Stedingh

In the Foreword to *Colours: poems*, Michael Bullock, Canada’s high priest of surrealism, equates deadly nightshade with the rose. The comparison is key to understanding his seductive methods and poetic vision, which is augmented in this book by eight plates of his colourful paintings and one black and white print entitled “Blackfish,” which in contrast is a kind of portent. In addition, Bullock’s poetic vision is clearly indicated in the titles of his 38 books of poetry and fiction, especially *Green Beginning*, *Black Ending* and *Black Wings White Dead*, which denote an ominous transformation and a preference for the

dark, a powerful darkness which manipulates the colours in prismatic sunlight to its own ends. While Bullock admits to using a “simulated synaesthesia,” an old surrealist ploy designed to confuse the senses, as a frequent method in these poems, his free associations are anything but free. They are controlled, deliberate, and therefore telling. In “Rainbow,” the first poem in the book, colours rise “into an uncontrollable crescendo / *beyond reach of reason*” [italics mine]. The same hocus-pocus is flagrant throughout this book, but in “Green I” it ends with ironic foreboding:

In its flow the river
 gives off a green sound that mingles
 with the green scent of the
 water to induce a trance
 that transports the watcher
 to a realm beyond time and space
 ruled over by naiads
 hidden behind a curtain
 of hanging moss
 waiting to pounce on the dazed intruder

This “dazed intruder” might well be the writer speaking from experience, or more likely, the unsuspecting reader trusting in all the seeming and feigned “delight in disorder” of these poems and the poet’s repeated counsel: to believe in mystery, magic, and darkness, and to distrust reason. This *leitmotif* against “daytime’s / pilfering fingers” and “the principle of conceptuality” appears in no less than seventeen of these poems. This necromantic advocacy of ignorance and anti-rationalism is an incremental refrain throughout Bullock’s alluring poetic oeuvre. The same is true of his painting. The drawings in this book consist of abstracted figures in dazzling hues often contrasted with black. Each has the character of a Rorschach blot presented for specific, directed, manipulated interpretation, which is in almost every case Freudian with all the necrophilia implied.

While Michael Bullock’s texts are masterful artifices with albeit questionable motives,

those of Adam Dickinson in *Cartography and Walking* are aesthetically flawed expressions of his map of the interface between man and Nature. Divided into three sections, Escarpments, Cordillera, and Standing Water, this first collection is a detailed chart of the emotive and intellectual geography of alienation. The result is often labyrinthine, as convoluted as the contours of the human brain, but fraught with *cul de sacs*. Too often, these poem-maps are blurred by an abstract diction. The leaves and grains of hardwood trees, for example, frequently occur as symbols but are left unqualified, and the mind gropes in vain for a denotative or connotative significance in context. Unlikely metaphors also prevail leaving one lost without a compass in a wilderness of words, as in “Rejoinder”: “Her outstretched legs / were the lifted necks / of mallard ducks, / as they beaded and fled / in the kicked-up light.” Come again? Mixed metaphor perhaps? This same nonplussing effect is continuous in “Or Was It the Smell of Cut Wood”:

The rain organizes itself on the pavement,
 the clouds are burned towels draped
 over the oven doors of buildings
 above the grey, milling sidewalks of town.

.....

... a dangerous proposition: too little
 and the boreal
 loses its fear, too strong and the conifers
 rally,

withdraw their concessions, plug the
 town with pitch,
 emerge in the cleared grounds of parks
 and yards,
 and swing their black bats about the oven
 doors
 breaking union ranks with their granite
 trust.

The use of metaphor, especially personification, in this poem is typical of most poems in *Cartography and Walking*. The relation between primary and secondary elements in the comparisons is viscerally,

logically, and imaginatively non-associative. The inquiring mind continually reels but draws a blank. One of the most frequent causes is Dickinson's use of abstract nouns. His attempts to concretize them in extended metaphor is unique, but too often the pathetic fallacies are too pathetic, the effort to clarify obscures, and the effect, while novel, is oblique if not obtuse. While this technique is flawed, it has organic potential, for alienation is Dickinson's major thematic concern, a theme that has everything to do with the failure of articulation. If there is a justification for continuous stupefaction, this is it.

Or is it?

Or is it just a bad joke? If a poem as a work of art is intended to communicate, is a poet's refusal to do so legitimate? There must be an improvement on the blank page at all costs, and the reader shouldn't have to wrack his brain trying to make sense of incoherence. Having to do so violates the writer-reader contract, which is dependent upon a mutual trust.

Gary Hyland's *The Work of Snow*, on the other hand, is an auspicious book that similarly sets out to map the emotional latitudes and longitudes of a personal cartography. However, he does so skillfully and is a master of his craft. In poems that reflect on childhood, marriage, the seasons (with the accent on winter), the earth, Al Purdy, Anne Szumigalski, and John Hicks, the nostalgic tone, often elegiac, dominates. Although maudlin at times, Hyland's diction evokes a sense that the poet is beleaguered by an enormous sense of loss. Yet it is his laconic memories associated with people and places, physical and spiritual, that sustain his sense of belonging, and to the extent that he charts this territory successfully, he gives us the blueprint of a ground we all share.

This common ground has everything to do with empathy and feeling, even sentimentality, that mortal sin in the canons of Modernism and Post-Modernism, which

Hyland has studied and wisely ignored. Especially in the elegies, Hyland recaptures the spirits of the dead and makes the burden of their loss lighter. In "Audrey" he remembers a feisty waitress in a border town who gave her tips to runaway girls and whose humour was either self-deprecating or, when directed at the poet, outrageously offensive. In "Angel Bees," he recalls Anne Szumigalski in a parable about poets being stung in honeycombed brains by bees the size of hummingbirds. In "November Waltz," he likens memories of his deceased mother, father, and grandparents in a graveyard to a dance with vanished bones left in his arm's embrace. In "Lament for Purdy," Hyland blesses "with gruff praise" a man who did the same and remains for many the personification of Canada. But the best of Hyland's elegies is "Air for One Just Fallen," dedicated to the memory of John Hicks. It is superior for its avoidance of lugubrious praise. It ends as follows:

No matter. Art
never made substance of sentiment
without a flaw in the dance.

Except perhaps
in your new
circumstance.

But this book is not all lamentation. There are lively, admirable poems here, extended personifications of winter, spring and the earth, for example, which are vivid, lyrical allegories of great power. And there are poems like "Practice of Great Harmony" containing true wisdom and advice for any writer or reader:

Move while rooted. Walk as a tree might
walk,
directed by the trunk, to where the light
draws.
A tree that seeks the image of a long
intent, without stutter, without pause.
Be like the tree that thinks leaf and moves
because
it hears inside itself a slow green song.

Nothings Safe

Christopher Butler

Postmodernism: A Very Short Introduction,
Oxford UP \$15.95

Catherine Besley

Poststructuralism: A Very Short Introduction,
Oxford UP \$15.95

M.W. Smith

*Reading Simulacra: Fatal Theories for
Postmodernity*, SUNY UP \$16.95

Brian Massumi

*Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect,
Sensation*, Duke UP \$21.95

Reviewed by Charles Barbour

All four of these books could be read as slightly anachronistic monuments to the end of high theory. Butler's approach to postmodernism is deeply skeptical, and he at no time endorses the cultural phenomena he describes. Indeed, his essay is clearly intended as a postmortem for the postmodern. Butler's demeanor is typical of the intellectual who always knew that this fad would consume itself long before it destroyed the entire history of western aesthetics or revolutionized bourgeois culture, as its own hyperbolic press suggested. For Butler, postmodernism served the more modest function of showing that modernist art was only playful to the extent that it "played fair"—to the extent that it accepted the demand for formal innovation and the limits of possible worlds. At their best, Butler concedes, postmodern artworks, especially novels, were able to "question" established distinctions between imaginary, symbolic and real. At the same time, Butler is sure to flag his distance from his object. Discussing the familiar postmodern trope that derides the value of originality and constructs representation not as reference to a thing but as translation between codes, Butler asks "[m]ay not [such] intertextuality be the symptom of cultural exhaustion, brought on by the failure to meet the

avant-gardist challenge of doing something creatively different after the heroic era of experimental modernism? Or might it even be a moral and political failure to engage with the real in society?" Could it be that postmodernism was not radically transgressive, as its champions declared, but symptomatic of a much more apprehensive withdrawal from "the new," especially in the wake of the colossal social and political catastrophes with which modernism, and its call to "make it new," seemed so complicit? Could it be that, following the devastation of the first half of the twentieth century, postmodernism, with its evacuation of subjective intentions, its infinitely layered irony, its composite intertextuality, and its theoretically sophisticated conceptualism, was not undecidable or indeterminate or problematic, but safe—a safe philosophy for a dangerous world?

Butler concludes that, despite its aesthetic clumsiness and forgettable chicanery, postmodernism did keep alive the complex, skeptical, even "perennial philosophical questions" that are always in danger of being expunged in the name of efficiency and control. This reference to "serious philosophy" provides a fortuitous segue to Besley's "short introduction" to postmodernism's more turgid academic twin—poststructuralism. As Besley tells the story, poststructuralism begins in the late 1960s, when a group of French intellectuals associated with the journal *Tel Quel*, notably Julia Kristeva, Roland Barthes, and Jacques Derrida, challenged some of the central assumptions of figures such as Claude Lévi-Strauss, Louis Althusser, and Jacques Lacan, and in so doing developed a more radical, more politically engaged reading of Ferdinand de Saussure's claim that "language is differential not referential." Out of this initial challenge to structuralism, and over the course of a long and complex series of negotiations during which all figures involved changed their positions

numerous times, there emerged a new understanding of subjectivity. Now the subject is seen neither as a transcendental and fully autonomous individual nor as the product of external structures that determine it, but as the effect of differences from and relations to others. The subject, moreover, is capable of making decisions and accepting responsibility precisely *because* it is an effect of its relations with others. While Butler knows he is writing a post-mortem, Besley's injunction is to keep the challenge alive. If structuralism did an extraordinarily, even disturbingly good job of describing the universals that structure all social relations, poststructuralism insists that it is necessary not only to describe what is possible, but also to remain open to that which is impossible, or what always remains off in the future and yet to come. Thus Besley asks "[a]re you able to think beyond the limits of what is already recognizable? Is it possible to acknowledge the hitherto unknown?"

Smith's *Reading Simulacra* is a good example of the theory that makes it possible for Butler and Besley to write their pigeon-holing "introductions." Drawing heavily on Baudrillard, Smith seeks to "read" the contemporary experience of hyper-reality in the work of Kathy Acker, Oliver Stone, Clarence Major and a handful of other postmodern authors. These figures are said to disrupt, transgress, implode, displace, exceed, overwhelm and otherwise destroy a whole array of hegemonic institutions and apparatuses that, in fact, seem to have registered precisely none of it. The most interesting part of Smith's book, published in 2001, is the chapter on "Baudrillard's *America*." It concludes with a reading of Baudrillard's discussion of the World Trade towers. "The fact that the towers double each other," Smith writes, "signals both the end of the original and the end of representation (because one can no longer distinguish between the two)." Now

that these towers are both gone, does this also mean that it is no longer possible to make sense of the claim that we can no longer distinguish between original and copy? Has even that meta-claim (which, to be certain, only ever existed to distinguish the sophisticated ones who knew they could not tell the difference from those deluded enough to think they could) disappeared as well? Perhaps what we no longer have is precisely the appeal to what "is no longer." Perhaps we have lost even the perfect fantasy that something real has been lost. As Slavoj Žižek says, we lack the lack.

Enter Massumi, and his celebration of the body—the affected body, the sensuous body, but most of all the moving body. Massumi wants to gesture beyond the spatial metaphors that have dominated not only discussions of the body but cultural theory in general—the language of geography, location, position, situation and so forth. "Because every body-subject was so determinately local," Massumi writes of this earlier approach, "it was boxed into its site on the cultural map. Gridlock." Here "[t]here is displacement but no transformation." Thus Massumi asks "[w]here has the potential for change gone?" and "[h]ow can the grid itself change?" A consideration of Henri Bergson's theory of time leads Massumi to suggest that the body is neither a pre-discursive "given" nor an over-coded "site," but a dynamic form or immanent potential. Our understanding of the body is not too abstract, or too far from concrete reality. On the contrary, it has never been abstract enough. To be abstract is to be in motion. The body is not located in a single position, but passing between a multitude of positions. Massumi highlights the work of body-artist Stelarc. In Stelarc's performances, the body remains inseparable from a whole array of prostheses which extend it and which it extends in turn. Sensation is configured, not as that which constitutes, but as that which overwhelms experience.

After the age of theory, language and discourse, during which seemingly everything and everyone was put in its place, the moving, affected, sensuous body returns sublime.

Private Lives of Girls and Women

Kathryn Carter, Ed.

Small Details of Life: Twenty Diaries by Women in Canada, 1830–1996. U of Toronto P \$37.95

Reviewed by Laurie McNeill

In *Small Details of Life*, Kathryn Carter brings together excerpts from twenty women's diaries. Spanning two centuries of life in British North America and Canada, diarists range from public figures (Marian Engel, Dorothy Duncan MacLennan) to women whose lives have not been a matter of public record. This book joins a growing tradition of anthologies of Canadian women's diaries, including Margaret Conrad's *Recording Angels* and Conrad, Toni Laidlaw and Donna Smyth's *No Place Like Home* but Carter's collection aims for a wider representation of anglophone Canada and Canadian women as a whole. She acknowledges, however, that her representation remains largely on white, middle-class women, since historically these have been the individuals with the time and literacy to keep diaries deemed "valuable" enough to save in public archives and family records.

This question of value is central to *Small Details*, both for the scholars who contribute to the volume and the diarists whose work fills it pages. While some diarists, such as Amelia Holder (1855–1936), thought enough of their notebooks to write them out in fair copy or explicitly bequeath them to family members, other diarists' work survived through sheer serendipity: Mary Dulhanty's notebook from 1926–27 was found between the walls of a Nova Scotia house during renovations. Anthologizing these diaries makes the argument that they

have literary, social and historical value that has long been overlooked. Exemplifying the recovery work of women's lives and writings that Helen Buss and Marlene Kadar advocated in *Working in Women's Archives* (2001), Carter creates a critical space for reading these personal records.

Excerpted texts represent a range of styles and functions that highlights the multiplicity of uses these women found for the diary genre. Some, such as Sarah Welch Hill's, Elsie Rogstad Jones' and Sarah Crease's texts, consist of short, terse entries, the kind of coded, shorthand style diary critic Lynn Bloom associates with a "truly private diary." Reading the brief entries in Jones' diary, in which she succinctly chronicles an overwhelming daily workload, however, suggests that some diarists adopt this style due to lack of time, rather than a concern about privacy. The fact that she, and so many other women, even wrote demonstrates just how powerful the need to inscribe one's life, even in its familiar rhythms, can be. Other diaries in the collection adopt a more literary approach, with longer entries covering more personal territory. Often, such journals are those of diarists who were also published writers, including Miriam Green Ellis, Dorothy Choate Herriman, Marian Engel and Edna Staebler. Each diary excerpt is prefaced by a brief essay from the contributor, providing personal and historical context for the text and diarist.

The breadth of materials and of diarists is a compelling feature of this collection. Given this variety, I found Carter's division of her text into narrative themes—Conflict and Confusion; Hesitation and Pause; Love, Loss and Work—too programmatic. In her introduction, Carter discusses the "two fictions," the *künstlerroman* and chronology, that organize her collection and that, presumably, these sections support. But I wonder if such categorizations limit the kinds of stories the diarists grouped under these headings could tell, or reinforce the

stereotype of women's diaries as driven by emotion, romance and the domestic. Carter's own introduction is excellent, providing a clear overview of the volume and its place within both the literary and historical traditions in Canada. She deals with the stickier theoretical issues that surround the study of diaries—including terminology ("diary" or "journal"?) and the public-private debate—with clarity and concision, making this essay, as well as this anthology, a useful critical study for diary scholars and academics in other disciplines.

Québec Studies in Translation

Daniel Chartier

Methodology, Problems and Perspectives in Québec Studies. Éditions Nota Bene \$8.95

Reviewed by Jane Moss

This slim volume is the first in the collection "New Perspectives in Québec Studies" launched in 2002 by Éditions Nota Bene to provide English translations of articles published originally in French in the Québec journal *Globe, Revue internationale d'études québécoises*. Canadianists and Québécois (a neologism coined by the Association internationale des études québécoises [AIÉQ]) have long argued that, outside the literary domain, scholarship on Québec and francophone Canada is limited by the natural propensity of Québec scholars to write in French. Non-Francophone historians, sociologists, political scientists, economists, geographers, urbanists, and public policy experts who would like to do research on and teach about Québec are hampered by the lack of available scholarly and pedagogical materials in English. This is true not only for Anglophones but for many non-Canadians who are more fluent in English. The new series by Nota Bene responds to the need reiterated by many of the twenty-five articles in the special issue

of *Globe* (4, 2 [2001]) on the topic of "Québec Studies in the World."

In fact, Chartier's essay is the English version of his introduction to the volume on the development and status of Québec Studies in universities around the world. Recounting the history of the institutionalization of Québec Studies, Chartier describes how the new field found footholds primarily in Canadian/North American or French/Francophone studies programmes. In addition to the language issue, he deals directly with the problems posed by interdisciplinarity and area studies, and with the precarious state of a field dependent on individual national leaders and government subventions. Chartier does a brilliant job of synthesizing the *Globe* articles and previously published studies on Canadian and Québec Studies in Canada, the United States, Germany, Italy, France, and Brazil.

While it was wonderful that Nota Bene is making new scholarship on Québec available to non-Francophones, it is regrettable that the translation of this first in the new series is marred by numerous Gallicisms and some sloppy editing. To give just a few examples of the translation problems, "scientifique" is translated directly as "scientific," thus confusing the sense of "scholarly"; "animé" and "attribué" are translated as "animated" (37) in referring to the organizers of a week-long seminar and "attributed" (100) when naming the holder of a research chair, etc. The translators' choices of English prepositions also lead to some awkward sentences. In addition, there are some factual errors: the Northeast Council for Québec Studies was not founded in Radford, Virginia (90), and the Trier Centre for Québec Studies is mentioned as having been created in 1976 (71) and 1978 (89). With apologies for nitpicking, I urge Nota Bene to pay more attention to detail and at the same time I applaud the translation initiative.

Mine Not Mine

Stephen Collis

Mine. New Star Books \$18.00

John MacKenzie

Sledgehammer. Polestar \$16.95

Billeh Nickerson

The Asthmatic Glassblower and other poems.

Arsenal Pulp \$14.95

Reviewed by Robert Stanton

Three first full-length collections, three very different varieties of Canadian masculinity. Stephen Collis takes a historical approach: his *Mine* deals with the coal-mining industry on Vancouver Island in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, in particular the miners' confrontations with dangerous conditions and exploitative bosses. These struggles are placed (if a little uneasily) in a more objective historical perspective, complete with touches of eco-consciousness (coal seen, for example, as "(groves *compresst*)"). If Collis seems simultaneously a little too pleased with his overarching image (the individual sections of the volume are titled 'Shaft One,' 'Shaft Two,' etc., with repeated references to writing resembling an excavation of the earth) and a little too concerned about whether or not he is appropriating the miner's stories (a fair chunk of the book is taken up by an eloquently anxious Preface, and Collis often interrupts his narrative with little jabs of worry: "these words / ceaselessly / prefatory / lamps held into / the dark"), the narrative elements carry the reader along. There is even a memorable villain in the figure of racist, cold-hearted, strike-breaking mine-owner Robert Dunsmuir, acting "according to his archetype [. . .] like some Victorian nocturnal beast of / commerce." If the idea of poetry-as-archaeology recalls Charles Olson and the linguistic-resurrection-of-a-too-hidden-past recalls Susan Howe, Collis's subject matter, and his own personal

investment in it (his grandfather was among the mine-workers), work to make his investigations individual. The most successful parts of the book are probably the Howe-like lyrics that open, close, and punctuate it:

coal productions
the soil
cat like contorts
leaves of
the Dominion
beholden
to dust mite
Arcadian
discourses

Here the basic matter of Collis's study, and his anxieties over it, are compressed and reformed into something unique: a true "collis/ion," as he writes at one point. This is a fine volume, following on from a handful of chapbooks – the rare sort of debut that reads more like a culmination than a jumping-off point.

In contrast to Collis's historical canvas, with its cast of thousands, the "author notes" for John MacKenzie's *Sledgehammer* give a picture of the artist as blue-collar drifter: "He quit school in grade seven. At thirteen, he was in reform school. At nineteen, he began to write poetry and travel across Canada. He has worked in sawmills, bakeries and kitchens, and on farms and construction crews." Such personal orientation turns out to be the collection's main failing: it is too squarely centred within the self. This is not a complaint about the confessional nature of the volume – the intensity and honesty of the love poems and the poems to MacKenzie's son, Connor, are impressive and moving – rather that the "I" here is too often inflated beyond the human into a mythic creature:

I stood at the center of the galaxy
And screamed. Sparks fell from my lips
And smouldered. Worlds burned.

Most of the poems work better at a micro rather than macro level: "This crescent

moon is the hook/On which I've hung myself to wait." There are still, however, some absolute howlers: "On a late jurassic plain the diplodocus died,/decayed, descended – long before the jaded jurassic." A textbook example of how *not* to organise sound-patterns in a poem – and it doesn't make much sense either. One of the few pieces in the book that does work outright is "Lower the Boom," a lament for a friend who died on a construction site, in which MacKenzie's passion and energies are fully directed at something outside himself. However, even here it is debatable whether ending the poem "Ruth // miscarried" – a conclusion forced to carry a near-apocalyptic weight – is really that tactful in a tribute-poem dedicated to her husband.

In a comment that encapsulates the macho qualities of this book, MacKenzie claims in his acknowledgements that he needs to write poetry "as consistently and unavoidably as a body sweats to maintain temperature." One wishes him, therefore, many healthy years of poetry-writing ahead, on the grounds that practice makes perfect.

One wonders what Billeh Nickerson would make of the none-more-camp cover of MacKenzie's book, depicting as it does the denim-clad legs of a construction worker along with the titular tool (complete with close-up). Author of a monthly column called "Hard Core Homo" for *Xtra! West* and a book on gay social mores with the wonderful title *Let Me Kiss It Better: Elixirs for the Not So Straight and Narrow*, Nickerson is more than happy to wear his heart on his sleeve. As with MacKenzie, Nickerson's poems are based on his own experiences, but his ever-present humour elevates them above self-indulgence: a poem entitled "Why I Love Wayne Gretzky – An Erotic Fantasy" ends "Because behind every great man / it feels good." This is a well-organised book too – just when Nickerson's camp wit threatens to become as wearing as MacKenzie's macho earnest-

ness, a sequence of haiku-like fragments entitled "February" comes along and leaves the reader with things to ponder further:

black women in wheelchairs
rolling through the dreams
of corporate executives

Similarly, Nickerson is adept at slipping shards of poignancy into otherwise humorous pieces: in a poem entitled "Gonorrhoea," for example, the real shame of catching the disease as a young man is in changing the "he" responsible into a "she" for the benefit of a straight-laced doctor full of "army stories."

Nickerson is apparently a big hit on the live circuit, and it is not hard to see why: these poems are invariably witty, urbane, sexy, funny, and hugely likeable. If some are overly joke-y or slight, that is probably the price to be paid for being entertaining. After MacKenzie's wilful exertions, they come as a huge relief.

Atlantic Canada Refocused

Jane L. Cook

Coalescence of Styles: The Ethnic Heritage of St. John River Valley Regional Furniture, 1763–1851.
McGill-Queen's U P \$45.95

Margaret R. Conrad and James Hiller

Atlantic Canada: A Region in the Making. Oxford U P \$36.95

Reviewed by Ian G. Lumsden

Cook's study of the furniture of the St. John River Valley furnishes a microcosmic examination of one facet of the material culture of New Brunswick whereas the Conrad and Hiller undertaking affords a macrocosmic view of the geological, social, economic, political and cultural history of the region that has come to be known as 'Atlantic Canada.' As a result, *Coalescence of Styles* is written primarily with material historians, curators of the decorative arts, and collectors in mind whereas *Atlantic Canada* is likely to appeal not only to historians of Atlantic Canada and their students but the

general public as well. Both publications represent important contributions to their respective genres.

Jane Cook's *Coalescence of Styles* constitutes the first scholarly treatment of this area of New Brunswick's material history. The bibliographic sources that have underpinned Cook's research are not extensive: Huia G. Ryder's *Antique Furniture By New Brunswick Craftsmen* (Ryerson 1965); Charles Foss's *Cabinetmakers of the Eastern Seaboard: A Study of Early Canadian Furniture* (M. F. Feheley 1977); and Donald Webster's *English Canadian Furniture of the Georgian Period* (McGraw-Hill Ryerson 1979). Added to this documentation is a handful of articles published by curators and material historians in the *Material History Bulletin* and the no longer extant *Canadian Antiques Collector*. Because of the lack of a sophisticated scholarly and theoretical context for the study of eastern Canadian artifacts, Cook has adopted an empirical approach. She began with the location of artifacts in local, regional, and national collections to which she has applied pertinent research documentation in the interpretation of the histories of these objects and their makers. She has confined her study geographically to the furniture produced in the upper and lower St. John River Valley between 1763 and 1851.

Cook provides exhaustive footnotes and an excellent bibliography comprising both published and unpublished material and to make the publication more reader-friendly, she has added a glossary of cabinetmaking terminology and an index.

A project of this nature is hampered by the dearth of documented evidence. The reliability of oral sources in reconstructing the provenance of an artifact is often open to conjecture. Because of the modest nature of the holdings of most New Brunswick households in this period, especially in the upper St. John River Valley, the practice of preparing household inventories, such as

that of the Honourable George Sproule, which the author has appended to her publication, were infrequently undertaken. The fact that so few cabinetmakers signed or labeled their pieces furnishes a tenuous foundation for making attributions. But Cook's intent is not to prepare a manual to aid connoisseurs and collectors of New Brunswick furniture in the attribution of particular artifacts to specific cabinetmakers, based on stylistic traits, uses of local and imported wood and methods of construction. Instead she has undertaken to chronicle the multiplicity of ethnic influences that have determined the character of furniture that has been produced in the upper and lower St. John River Valley over a ninety-year period, one marked by a series of external influences upon local production.

Cook offers her own revisionist perspective on the prevailing views regarding the hegemony of Loyalist influences, in their attempt to emulate the lifestyle of the British elite, upon the material culture in the southern St. John River Valley. She takes issue with the hagiographic histories of Ann Gorman Condon, *The Envy of the American States: the Loyalist Dream for New Brunswick* (New England Press, 1984), and Charles Foss. Cook rejects Condon's attempt to endow loyalist furniture with the quality of "loyalism," and emphasizes the impossibility of differentiating between loyalist and revolutionary furniture, since both exhibit "American styles and talents." Cook also takes exception to the tendency of Foss and Condon to overlook the contribution of the less exalted immigrant to the material culture of the region.

To enable the reader to appreciate the stylistic evolution of a specific type of furniture, Cook has furnished a series of comparative line drawings beginning with its prototype and then added Scottish, American, and other North American interpretations of the style, culminating

with the New Brunswick variant. Regrettably, the quality of the black and white plates is very poor, often obscuring the precise detail that makes the piece uniquely New Brunswick and that the author has painstakingly described in her text.

Atlantic Canada: A Region in the Making by Margaret A. Conrad and James K. Hiller constitutes the first of the six-volume series of *The Illustrated History of Canada*. The sub-title, *A Region in the Making*, reflects a comparatively new entity, “Atlantic Canada,” for what had previously been referred to as the old “Maritime” provinces, together with Newfoundland and Labrador. Determined to overcome their status as the have-nots within Confederation living on the margins, they are increasingly coming together to jointly improve their position within the global free market, notwithstanding resistance from certain quarters to a more formal union.

In the Introductory chapter, “A Region in the Making,” Conrad and Hiller outline their reservations and those of other historians of Atlantic Canada about treating these diverse provinces as a region, something that has been predicated by the publisher, Oxford UP, by grouping these four provinces together in one volume while awarding two volumes to Canada’s four westernmost provinces, while Ontario and Quebec each have their own. While not arguing for the concept of “a quintessential Atlantic Canadian regionalism,” the authors instead prefer to examine the issue from the perspective of “regions of the mind.”

Conrad and Hiller take the reader from the earliest geological times through the Aboriginal Peoples and the arrival of the Europeans to the period of Confederation, concluding with the present impact of globalization and the global free market. In the final chapter, “The Real Golden Age? 1949-1989”, the authors chronicle the unprecedented economic growth, legislative

changes, and social transformations that occurred in the Atlantic region following the World War II. They conclude with the realistic, if sobering, observation that

Atlantic Canadians face the prospect of responding yet again to forces centred outside the region. While reform, retrenchment, and restructuring have been the mantra of the new world order, Atlantic Canada has embraced them more out of necessity than conviction. Few can dispute that the dismantling of the interventionist state has taken a heavy toll in a region where private institutions are ill-positioned to take up the slack.

What distinguishes this publication from others in its genre is that it furnishes a comprehensive synthesis of the region’s social, economic and political histories, written in a truly engaging manner. It would constitute an excellent textbook for Atlantic Canadian Studies.

Alienations

Douglas Coupland

All Families Are Psychotic. Random House \$34.95

Jim Munroe

Everyone in Silico. No Media Kings \$20.00

Kelley Armstrong

Bitten. Random House \$34.95

Paul Glennon

How Did You Sleep? The Porcupine’s Quill \$17.95

Reviewed by Andrew Lesk

Douglas Coupland may be a fine spectator of the peculiarities of daft people; however, I am not convinced that this gathering of such observations, which wittingly (and often wittingly) profiles a dysfunctional family’s travails, constitutes a satisfyingly *whole* novel. Then again, I may be mistaken in my expectations.

“All families are psychotic,” says one character, early on. “Everybody has basically the same family—it’s just reconfigured slightly

different from one to the next.” This is not one of Coupland’s wry commentaries; rather, he uses this premise simply to undo it. No family could be as psychotic as the Drummonds. Or it’s not that they’re psychotic so much as they constitute a family to which many odd things have happened. Coupland sets up the family in a rather conventional form: Ted and Janet have three children, Sarah, Wade and Bryan, and the family hails from Vancouver. The tone is initially quite solemn, but perhaps that too is merely a ruse, as we soon find out that Ted and Janet are divorced; Sarah is an astronaut who was born with thalidomide defects and whose husband Howie is having an affair with Sarah’s boss’s wife; Wade has AIDS which he passed on to both Ted’s new wife, Nickie, and his own mother (don’t ask); and Bryan, a loser with a mullet, is engaged to an opportunistic loudmouth named Shw (yes, that’s spelled correctly).

The family has gathered to witness Sarah’s impending space mission, and, well, many wacky adventures ensue. Coupland adds some much-needed levity, mainly through Janet’s quiet observations. After her father disappeared when she was young, Janet found that her life “seemed to have been an ongoing reduction—things that had once been essential vanishing without discussion, or even worse, with too much discussion.” But rather than instill the novel with more grounding instances of such quietude, Coupland opts for an over-the-top flippancy and ends up with the novelistic form of the 1963 American movie *It’s a Mad, Mad, Mad, Mad World*. Only it’s not as ribald.

Perhaps Coupland’s aim is to comment on the shorthand of any family, how its members easily fall in, despite current antagonisms, because they have shared a history, no matter how fragile or damaged or . . . psychotic. Some of the family members ask questions of others, but they seem so out of character doing so, self-absorbed

as they are. One might find empathy, though, in the notion that Coupland’s neurotics are not really aware of their constant introspection, and so we might forgive them. *All Families are Psychotic* is little more than a romp—a finely-crafted one, but as ephemeral as a standard television sitcom.

Jim Munroe’s *Everyone in Silico* also enjoys a Vancouver locale, and Munroe proves himself to be as droll a writer as Coupland. The novel takes place in 2036, a time when technology has overpowered human will by appealing to the baser instincts of people’s consumer obsessions. Self, the dominant technological “breakthrough,” is omnipresent, though still a choice; one can easily download his or her consciousness into a common digital subsistence—subsistence, because such people no longer have any “meat” or corporal essence—and can, with enough money, fulfill desires of any sort. Since Vancouver is polluted in the extreme, those who cannot buy into Self make do or attempt to rectify nature, as it is.

One of the options on Self’s Technical Service FAQ line is number three: “If you have successfully upgraded and are having difficulties adjusting to your new reality, press three.” Munroe’s ironic twist on a standard figurative metaphor for finding one’s way in a new, sudden environment becomes literally transparent. What *have* these people bought into? Munroe is a strikingly clear and powerful writer. His sentences run apace without diversion into self-absorption or deadening similes. His delineation of his science-fiction world, though, maddeningly locks readers out; the meanings of terms such as “uplink,” “scrambleface,” and “coolhunter” should be readily apparent, but they aren’t. It may be that Munroe asks the reader to acclimatize to *this* new world, but in some ways, the reality of the novel that is *Everyone in Silico* remains distant.

Kelley Armstrong's *Bitten* is also science-fiction but more of the old-fashioned type. Elena is bitten at a young age by a werewolf and so becomes a *female* one, an apparent rarity. But she has given up that life and is trying to settle into modern day Toronto as a journalist with an achingly pleasing boyfriend. But trouble ensues when the pack to which she belonged calls her to enlist her in a struggle against rogue werewolves. Of course, comparisons to Anne Rice, the American author of *Interview with the Vampire*, are inevitable, and it seems likely that Armstrong's intentions are to create a parallel genre (there is already a sequel in the works). Yet *Bitten* is more bodice-ripper than throat-biter. Initially, the novel reads like a feminist allegory, but winds up merely in the realm of spicy Harlequin romances.

The back copy on Paul Glennon's *How Did You Sleep?* proposes that the author's style is "quirky and elusive." This is not, to my mind, a recommendation. "Quirky" is the refuge of those who substitute style for solid characterization, plot and rhythm. Glennon's stories are the monotonous monologues of various distraught or self-absorbed men, many of whom long for the elusive girl-who-got-away (or who was lucky to get away, I would think). "The Terror" is typical of these stories wherein much is left to intuition. The author's secret is so clever that we're never given a clue to find even the key, let alone the lock. I am sure Glennon knows what the "terror" is, but we never do. We are left with merely the surface of things.

Again, the back copy reads, "The world is trying to communicate something to these characters, but they cannot interpret it." Indeed. The unusual becomes commonplace, but not strikingly so. Glennon begins stories, such as "Touched," with references to "it" and "they," whose identities are unnecessarily withheld, at the cost of distortion and disinterest. Glennon, however,

is an inspired and skillful writer. His rhythm is nearly flawless, and I ended up wishing he had written these as prose poems. "Chrome" is one story that is beautifully realized: a man awakes to find that everything has a sheen of chrome. The narrator's fascination leads him inward and away from people, towards (ironically) the almost hyper-delicious nature of the visual and sensual. Sometimes the surface of things has its compensations.

The Unexpurgated Carr

Susan Crean

Opposite Contraries: The Unknown Journal of Emily Carr and Other Writings. Douglas & McIntyre \$35.00

Reviewed by Linda M. Morra

In *Opposite Contraries*, Susan Crean has departed markedly from her biographical book, *The Laughing One: A Journey to Emily Carr* (HarperCollins 2001), which was nominated for a Governor-General's Award. Rather than focussing on her life, Crean devotes her attention to Carr's writing endeavours: she has undertaken the labourious task of transcribing and making available to the public most of what had remained unpublished by Carr. Part of this task involves determining what excisions were made to her journals before they were published for the first time by Clarke, Irwin & Company in 1966, twenty-one years after Carr's death. These previously unpublished journal entries and fragments from what came to be *Hundreds and Thousands* comprise the first section of the book. For this part alone, academics and researchers will hail Crean for her contribution to the extant published record on Carr. Comparing the published journal entries to Carr's "scribblers," Crean posits that what was removed may have been done so to avoid repetition but also because some passages were likely deemed inappro-

priate at the time: those passages “detailing angst about her family,” or “her scathing remarks about people’s looks and behaviour,” or “spicy comments on the sexual politics of her day.”

The book also contains another two sections. The second part of the book contains two public lectures Carr delivered (“Lecture on Totems” and “A People’s Gallery”), her statement, titled “Autobiography,” about her own life as an artist for an exhibit of her paintings, and the parts expurgated from *Klee Wyck* after the first edition. Perhaps most important are these excerpts to *Klee Wyck*, a restored edition of which Douglas & McIntyre is also releasing shortly. Crean speculates that the excisions were made to accommodate the primary readers (school children) but were more plausibly motivated by racism: the removed stories “reflect back on Carr’s own time [. . .] but also] on the editors who came along afterward.” The restored excerpts demonstrate Carr’s sensitivity to and defence of First Nations persons: for example, she protested volubly against the Residential Schools for First Nations children. Such passages are significant because they will in effect reshape the critical perception of her life and work.

The third part of the book, “Carr’s correspondence,” is a sampling of her letters to Ira Dilworth in addition to those to Carr from Sophie and Jimmy Frank. Dilworth, Carr’s editor, was enormously influential as an advisor and support in the last year’s of Carr’s life, as the letters Crean selects demonstrate. Sophie Frank was, as Crean claims, the “only indigenous artist with whom Carr had an ongoing relationship.” That *Klee Wyck* was dedicated to Sophie and that Carr kept her letters suggests the importance of this woman’s function in her life. Carr’s previously unpublished work in conjunction with these letters show dimensions to her personality and life that readers will find engaging and revealing.

Self-Mutilation

Laura J. Cutler

Jumping Off. NeWest \$19.95

Reviewed by Adrienne Kertzer

In her second collection of short stories, *Jumping Off*, Laura J. Cutler repeatedly tells stories of women abused and abusing, women who hate their bodies and jobs, and are, at best, ambivalent about the men in their lives. The protagonists either mutilate themselves or are scarred by others. Knowing that they have “fucked up . . . bigtime,” most seem unable to act upon their self-assessment except by harming themselves, and whatever they do, their solutions rarely succeed. “*I don’t know why I do what I do . . . I cannot say I will never do it again*,” a woman admits in one story. In another, the protagonist cannot drink enough to forget the violent lover who splashed boiling water on her face. In “Piggy Paula,” a child’s obsession with food cannot protect her from incest. In “Getting to Guelph,” the protagonist never arrives.

Cutler’s style is elliptic so the reader never knows all the details that have provoked the crises. “How did this happen?” one protagonist asks, but Cutler takes for granted that this is what often happens to less than perfect women and prefers to focus on the desperation and self-loathing once it has happened. The protagonist in “On Laurel’s Nightstand” makes plans to change her life, but the difference between how women should act to protect themselves and what they really do remains. Presenting a vision of women who know that they have choices, but rarely act upon that knowledge in other than self-destructive ways, Cutler resembles her protagonist in “The Dog Park,” who writes contemporary stories that are “even funny, though heartache seems to be the prevailing theme.”

Emerging Solitudes

Elizabeth Dahab, Ed.

Voices in the Desert: An Anthology of Arabic-Canadian Women Writers. Guernica Editions
\$18.00

Reviewed by Nasrin Rahimieh

This anthology features the work of nine Arab-Canadian women writers; eight of the writers represented in this anthology live in Quebec and write in French. The Arab-francophone writers' choice of language does not necessarily reflect accidents of migration, but rather a colonial heritage that rendered French the language of education and status in countries like Algeria, Lebanon and Egypt. Dahab suggests that a multilingual writer "is chosen by the language which, for subconscious reasons, at a certain point of time, she feels closest to . . . the onset of her decision as to the choice of language, I believe to be, as a rule, spontaneous and involuntary." Nevertheless, we cannot escape realities of decisions taken at the time of immigration: "Arabic-Canadian writers [who] immigrated to Canada between 1963 and 1974 inclusively. . . . settled mostly in Quebec and Ontario in this order." In contrast, the Arab writers who immigrated to Canada at an earlier age such as Rubba Nada, the only Anglophone represented in the anthology, settled in English Canada.

There is, of course, a larger context beyond this anthology, of which Dahab speaks succinctly in the introduction. She states: "Roughly 15% of Arabic-Canadian literature is produced in Arabic, while 60% is written in French, and 25% in English." Dahab has opted to call all writers of Arab origin Arabic-Canadian rather than Arab-Canadian, although Arabic would more appropriately designate the language of literary expression, rather than the accompanying heritage and culture.

Dahab is to be congratulated for her selection of authors, who represent a diver-

sity of nationalities and religious backgrounds. They hail from Egypt, Lebanon, Algeria, and Syria and are Coptic-Orthodox, Catholic, and Moslem. They have also settled well into their new homeland and they have contributed richly to its literary and cultural life. To quote Dahab: "They write plays or documentaries for Radio-Canada or Radio-Québec; they are radio-announcers, film-script writers (Nadia Ghalem), stage directors (Mona Latif Ghattas) or write for Les Grands Ballets Canadiens (Anne-Marie Alonzo). They contribute to newspapers, literary magazines and reviews." In short, they are becoming part of the literary institution.

The poetry of Anne-Marie Alonzo, Nadine Latif, and Yamina Mouhoub has been translated capably from French and conveys the aura of the original. In each poet's work, we encounter a different manifestation of exile and cultural displacement. Alonzo's poetry is allusive, while Latif's poetry weaves together the concrete and the mythical. Mouhoub draws on all the senses to evoke some of the sharp contrasts in living two sets of memories and histories.

The prose pieces take up similar themes of exile. Sometimes an eerie sense of isolation and emptiness intrudes, as for instance in Nadia Ghalem's "Blue Night" and Mona Latif Ghattas's "The Double Tale of Exile." The sense of being out of place is equally powerfully conveyed in pieces such as Abla Farhoud's "Dounia-A-World," which depicts an older woman's anguish about a future bereft of the presence and company of the children she has raised in Canada only to find them distant and different from herself. Andrée Dahan's "Spring Can Wait" and Rubba Nada's "Daughter of Palestine" also take up cultural anxieties about the visible and invisible differences that erect barriers between Arab-Canadians and their compatriots. We glimpse the anger and the frustration experienced by young women struggling to integrate the

past and the present and to retain an identity sometimes at odds with the norms of the dominant culture.

Yolande Geadah's "Veiled Women, Unveiled Fundamentalism," the only essay in the collection, tackles one of the thorniest issues concerning the visibility of Arab-Canadians of Muslim origin. The debate over the veil has a history that has long been entangled with the history of modernity and modernization in the Arab and Islamic world. For Geadah, the central issue becomes the apparent infiltration of fundamentalist thought among young women who willingly adopt the veil. It is difficult to address this complex issue in a brief essay. As many have argued, Islamic fundamentalist movements, harmful and misinformed as they might be, are byproducts of the colonial legacy that remains the unspoken subtext of most of this anthology. Geadah's polemic is a most apt reminder of the anxieties that accompany any new immigrant group's arrival. Not unlike the Arab-Canadian women writers striving for visibility and recognition in their adopted homeland, the veiled women will continue to struggle with the boundaries between appropriate and inappropriate visibility and difference.

The Trickster Discourse of Thomas King

Arnold E. Davidson, Priscilla L. Walton, and Jennifer Andrews

Border Crossings: Thomas King's Cultural Inversions. U of Toronto P. \$38.00

Reviewed by Marlene Goldman

Border Crossings examines the notoriously tricky, and trickster-filled, works of Native writer Thomas King. As the authors explain, their goal lies in exploring the cross-cultural problems addressed by King's work while demonstrating how his works incorporate key Native issues. The authors begin

by observing how King differs from the majority of Native writers owing to his widespread popularity on both sides of the border. They argue that his acceptance as one of Canada's mainstream writers springs, in part, from the fact that he consistently uses a comic framework to deliver what is very often a hard-hitting political message. Indeed, the comic aspect of King's work is central to this scholarly text.

This timely and informative treatment of King's work begins with a brief biographical sketch of the author, which outlines why he is predisposed to border crossings of one kind or another. As the authors observe, both his personal experience—he was born in Sacramento, California, in 1943 to a Cherokee father and a German-Greek mother—and his academic training contribute to his penchant for straddling borders of all kinds. (He earned both an MA and PhD in English: his doctoral dissertation compared White images of Native peoples to the treatment of Native peoples in both oral and written works by Native writers.)

To contextualize and explicate King's prodigious output, the authors eschew a chronological approach and lengthy close readings of a single work within each chapter. Instead, the chapters focus on pertinent questions about the nature of comedy, of border crossing, and of narrating the nation. Because, like King's own works, the study does not build a single argument, the study's structure is non-linear and fragmented, more akin to a dictionary with multiple entries under the heading "border crossings" than a traditional narrative. In essence, to highlight the range of border crossings that King's work instigates and explores, the authors position King in an extremely broad context, examining not only his literary achievements, but also his work in photography, radio and television. In doing so, the authors forcibly demonstrate that King's creative endeavours repeatedly exceed discrete genres.

The opening chapter surveys the Native and non-Native approaches to comedy that best apply to King's works. In effect, the goal of the initial chapters is not so much to redefine comedy as it is to appreciate King's place within an established comedic tradition. Although the survey of traditional critical materials on comedy, including works by Freud and Bakhtin, is extremely useful, at times, the study's general approach to comedy precludes an analysis of the subtle ways in which comedy, particularly in Native literature, functions as trauma humour (a term borrowed from the Canadian critic Kristina Fagan) that sometimes, but not always, contributes to the goal of Native survival.

Chapter Two turns from a review of theories about comedy and extends and deepens the discussion of King's particular brand of humour by offering close readings of a variety of King's texts. This chapter helpfully identifies various comedic devices that King employs, including inversion and transgression, juxtaposing comic and tragic elements, code-switching and invocations of Native oral culture. Chapters Three and Four focus on the broader disciplinary, generic, and media crossings effected by King's artistic productions. The study's primary strength is demonstrated in the sections that supply crucial, yet often obscure, intertextual references for King's work. For instance, the authors note that a character in a short story bears a striking resemblance to a critic who attacked King for being "American" at a conference in 1990. Chapter Five shows how King's works engage with the politics of nationalism by troubling unified notions of race and nation. Chapter Six shifts from national to sexual politics, tracing the ways in which King's text interrogate gender roles and promote gender-crossing. The final chapter invites readers to consider how King uses his own works as intertextual references. At bottom, *Border Crossings* demonstrates the

complexity and ingenuity of King's comedic art and explores his prodigious output in an impressively broad range of artistic contexts.

Disorders and Early Sorrows

Maggie de Vries

Chance and the Butterfly. Orca \$6.95

Luanne Armstrong

Jeannie and the Gentle Giants. Ronsdale \$8.95

Diane Tullson

Edge. Stoddart \$9.95

Reviewed by Hilary Turner

These three fictional accounts of contemporary childhood remind the rueful adult reader that the years between eight and fourteen are as messy and complicated as any we will ever experience. More importantly, they counsel readers who are now living through these difficult times that they are not alone in finding the world a perplexing and disappointing place. With particular attention to questions of identity and belonging, these books suggest that we are all capable of coming to terms with our own problems and struggles—indeed, that the act of overcoming injustices and difficulties is synonymous with growing up.

Chance and the Butterfly is an absorbing book. The protagonist is an eight-year-old foster-child, riddled with anger, distrust, and self-doubt. The only thing that takes Chance out of himself is the classroom project of overseeing the process by which larvae become caterpillars, and caterpillars butterflies. De Vries handles the central metaphor of her story with understated aplomb: it is Chance himself who is metamorphosing—yet the faltering steps he takes toward a more mature state are about as evident to him as those of Matilda, his chosen caterpillar, are to her. Continually in trouble at school, and tormented at home by a "sad baby" who cries compul-

sively, and by an older foster-brother who would rather have a “real” brother than “some stray,” Chance takes at least one step backward for every two paces in the right direction. Ironically, his illicit attempt to have Matilda all to himself (though it nearly kills her) is the means by which he is reconciled with Mark, a boy whose earlier cruelties have arisen out of insecurity rather than malice. DeVries, an experienced writer and teacher, has a clear and deep understanding of children’s fears and frustrations. She never tells us: “Chance was unhappy.” Rather, she shows us Chance throwing his dinner in the wastebasket, shoving his classmates, biting pencils into bits, walking home alone. With a hopeful though by no means simplistic outcome, *Chance and the Butterfly* is a compelling portrait of a child who overcomes considerable odds in his efforts to soar above the constraints that bind him.

Another child in foster care, Jeannie of *Jeannie and the Gentle Giants*, also moves towards a surer sense of self through her understanding of animals. The daughter of a manic-depressive mother, Jeannie is removed from her home in Kelowna and sent to the farm country of the BC interior. There, in addition to her foster-parents, she encounters Arnold, a rough-hewn philosopher and horse-logger, and is taken on as an assistant. Bruised by the absence of her mother, and by her own sense of failure as a caregiver, Jeannie takes a long time to adjust to her new surroundings. These are rendered in interesting detail and depth by Armstrong, who grew up in the Kootenays and knows the complex art of horse-logging at first-hand. The gentle giants of the title are a team of draft horses whose stamina and strength inspire Jeannie to persist in her own difficult task. Arnold’s knowledge of the psychology of trust where animals are concerned, and his insight that asking too much of a horse is tantamount to a betrayal, also help her eventually to

accept both her limitations and her strengths. She wins the trust of a stray dog, rescues a rather unlovable younger child, makes friends—and begins to see that she is as valuable to others in her new life as she was to her needy mother in her old. Then, just as Jeannie cements the new bonds she has formed, her mother recovers from her bout of mental illness. The resulting conflict of loyalties is no less painful than Jeannie’s original loss, but easier to bear, given her new self-knowledge and confidence.

Marly Peters, the protagonist of *Edge*, also endures the mental instability of a parent—her father’s chronic depression has led him to abduct her younger brother, Elliott. Marly, who has just started high school and has her own troubles, is left in the keeping of her distraught mother and an oddly puckish undertaker, her mother’s sometime employer. Marly’s ruminative first-person narration nicely captures her ambivalence when she is drawn into a group of persecuted misfits. Initially the group seems to derive some strength from their refusal to conform to the tribal codes of the school. But what might have been a source of identity and confidence is undermined from within by a disturbed character named Mike, an angry boy whose only release is a secret sadism practiced on anyone who crosses his path. When Marly discovers that Mike himself is the author of several brutal assaults on members of the group, she tries to thwart his plan to disrupt the school dance with further violence. But the undercurrents that have been set in motion by Mike’s malevolence are too powerful for her to control, and the climax of *Edge* is both unpredictable and compelling. In the aftermath of a confrontation between Mike and his victims, however, Marly plays an important part in righting the wrongs that have been done. This is a well-plotted and suspenseful book that is nevertheless content to leave a few realistic loose ends. Although Elliott is

restored to his family (through some clever detective work on Marly's part), the teenage characters are mostly left to get on with the business of making sense of their lives. No intrusive didacticism mars Tullson's ironic and subtle understanding of the difficulties of fitting in to a group while still being true to oneself. There are no easy answers, as Marly discovers. No situation is entirely hopeless. A favourite teacher lends her a book with this underlined passage: "To mend your heart only this, forgiveness, an antidote for the isolated life." In the disordered state of early adolescence, it is a good place to start.

Scènes d'automne

Robert Dickson

Humains paysages en temps de paix relative. Prise de parole \$15.95

Patrice Desbiens

Hennissements. Prise de parole \$13.00

Serge Patrice Thibodeau

Le roseau. Perce-Neige \$14.95

recensés par François Paré

Si une nouvelle génération d'écrivains est apparue récemment en Acadie et en Ontario français, force est de constater que l'oeuvre des poètes de la première heure, ceux de la grande effervescence culturelle des années 70 à Sudbury, Ottawa et Moncton, continue de marquer profondément la littérature et la survie même de l'institution littéraire en milieu francophone minoritaire au Canada. Par son abondance et par la diversité de ses formes, la poésie joue un rôle stratégique au sein de cultures souvent éparpillées où le lectorat est faible et l'espace de diffusion critique restreint. Bien qu'elle soit devenue, chez les trois poètes à l'étude dans ce compte rendu, l'expression d'un sujet itinérant, souvent en rupture par rapport à son milieu, la poésie projette néanmoins une lumière exemplaire sur le sentiment d'étrangeté et d'absence dont ces cultures

se nourrissent. Autant chez Robert Dickson que chez Patrice Desbiens et Serge Patrice Thibodeau, on sent assez souvent que l'écriture s'approche de son épuisement. À prime abord, cette fragilité presque répétitive se donne à lire comme un difficile mode de survie, teinté de doute et d'ironie. Harassée, la voix est traversée par sa propre relativité, alors que le poète évoque ses « courbatures » et son « manque de concentration ».

Le dernier recueil de Robert Dickson, lauréat du Prix du Gouverneur Général 2003, est ainsi structuré par le regard de l'écrivain, arpentant humblement les lieux où se joue au quotidien le rapport entre un sujet doucement ironique et son espace de vie. Comme ailleurs chez Dickson, la poésie se refuse ici à toute grandiloquence. Elle se permet parfois des attaques en règle contre les parlements, les multinationales et les entreprises de communication. Timide, l'écrivain se tient à l'orée des villes qu'il habite. Malgré son abstention, les « humains paysages » qu'il recense de Sudbury à Ottawa et Fredericton suscitent chez lui le désir de « fendre la noirceur » par le biais de l'écriture. C'est l'imminence du passage des saisons qui inspire une « paix relative » au milieu des débris qui jonchent l'espace social comme les amas de pierres sans valeur, extraites sans raison de la terre.

Humains paysages en temps de paix relative frappe par son espèce de bienveillance incisive à l'égard des tracers du monde. Il n'y a aucune trace d'indulgence, pourtant, dans cette écriture. Le travail de Dickson ne porte pas tant sur le lexique, d'une grande simplicité, que sur la phrase poétique, faite d'enchaînements et de répétitions. À la lecture, le poème semble s'« équilibrer à l'horizontale », comme s'il tendait vers la prose sans pourtant y consentir. Chaque geste banal, celui de regarder le travail des champs « de l'autre côté de la grande côte », celui d'ouvrir la boîte de céréales le matin, celui encore de se baigner frileusement dans l'eau d'un lac, tout cela comporte sa

part d'avenir. Le dos tourné contre le soleil, le poète maintient son « refus de jouer à quitte ou double » et sa tendresse pour le règne de l'incertitude. C'est pourquoi ce recueil de Dickson est tout en demi-teintes et lueurs, comme si la poésie était le langage de l'indécidable.

Hennissements du poète franco-ontarien Patrice Desbiens constitue un *re-mix*, comme on dit dans l'industrie de la musique populaire. Il s'agit, en fait, de la reprise du premier ouvrage de Desbiens, *Les conséquences de la vie*, publié en 1977 et depuis longtemps épuisé. Cependant, ayant sans doute voulu mêler les cartes, Desbiens insère ici et là dans ce recueil de nouveaux textes, une trentaine au total, qui altèrent de manière subtile le ton particulier de l'oeuvre originale. L'écriture de Desbiens avait d'abord frappé, on s'en souviendra, par son prosaïsme à ras de terre et son refus de tout lyrisme romantique. La dérive du narrateur dans un monde dépourvu de référent ontologique était ponctuée d'hôtels et de bars de passage où se profilait à chaque fois la figure tutélaire de la femme, la « waitress de la poésie » au « smile chaud et lisse ». Impossible héros dans un monde sans autre hiérarchie que celle des rapports déshumanisants du capitalisme cannibale, simple « transcripteur » dans le « cahier comptable [. . .], acheté au Dollarama », ce narrateur ne parvenait à soutirer au réel qu'une vulgaire dénonciation.

L'ajout d'une série de poèmes plus récents, distribués ici et là dans l'ancien recueil, lui-même restructuré, impose une vision parfois plus positive de la réalité. La plupart de ces textes inédits font référence explicitement au Québec, où réside depuis plusieurs années Desbiens. Le contraste avec le pessimisme des poèmes franco-ontariens ne peut manquer de frapper. Une longue séquence de vingt textes, insérée en fin de recueil, après le poème intitulé « Gare Charlesbourg », vient ainsi rompre la continuité apparente du passé. On y

retrouve pourtant la même oscillation entre le désœuvrement chronique de l'écrivain qui « colle au sol / comme une pierre » et l'évocation enjouée d'une culture du spectacle dans laquelle la télévision occupe une place considérable. Plus encore que dans *Les conséquences de la vie*, l'insertion de phrases en anglais martèle la difficulté d'exprimer les dissociations, vécues par le personnage, dans la seule langue de sa naissance. Variation sur la répétition, *Hennissements* reprend donc, en leur imposant de légers gauchissements, les paramètres d'une écriture qui ne cesse de dénoncer « la misère des mots ».

Dans *Le roseau*, huitième ouvrage de Serge Patrice Thibodeau, le poète acadien renoue avec le mysticisme qui l'avait si bien servi dans les magnifiques recueils, parus au milieu des années 90. Nous y retrouvons, surtout en première partie, les métaphores récurrentes du déplacement et de l'errance. Toutefois, plus qu'un simple voyageur, le narrateur a partie liée, cette fois, avec la transgression et la fuite. Une certaine passion antérieure lui fait douloureusement défaut, de sorte que le pèlerinage s'appuie désormais sur la mélancolie de l'absence. Partout dans ces textes, la défection de l'amant et la nostalgie de sa présence contribuent au « bafouillement » qui caractérise aujourd'hui une voix disloquée aux « syllabes illusoire ».

Pourtant, dans *Le roseau*, l'écriture de Thibodeau est empreinte de solennité et d'amplitude. Il est clair que la poésie reste une entreprise noble, presque innocente, affranchie de l'indignité et du sarcasme, si fréquents chez les poètes franco-ontariens contemporains. Thibodeau privilégie la régularité et l'harmonie de longues suites de versets au rythme identique. Ces formes soutenues rapprochent l'oeuvre des textes orientaux dont le poète semble toujours s'inspirer, alors que la destinée du narrateur est transcendée par la binarité aporétique des grandes oppositions philosophiques

entre le Bien et le Mal, entre l'amour et la haine, entre le délaissement existentiel de l'amant et sa persistance obsessionnelle dans la mémoire.

Trois recueils de la maturité, donc, et du même souffle trois scènes d'automne. Chez ces poètes domine, en effet, une nostalgie, parfois sereine comme chez Robert Dickson, parfois plutôt angoissée comme chez Patrice Desbiens et Serge Patrice Thibodeau. L'important, c'est que l'écrivain continue d'être un « passeur », un passeur des saisons tristes, dont Thibodeau écrit qu'il est « surtout un homme à renaître de ses ruines ».

Par-delà la frontière

Jean Chapdelaine Gagnon

Vigile. Noroît \$15.95

Bertrand Laverdure

Audioguide. Noroît \$15.95

Nicole Richard

La leçon du silence. Noroît \$15.95

Compte rendu par Anne-Marie Fortier

Les recueils regroupés ici sont situés par-delà une frontière dont ils marquent le franchissement : l'au-delà des repères du monde et du sens même, pour Laverdure; l'au-delà de la vie, pour le livre de deuil de Nicole Richard; le dépassement des feintes et la foi retrouvée pour Jean Chapdelaine Gagnon. Là, les jalons tombent et règne le désarroi. La riposte sera tantôt railleuse (Laverdure), tantôt fervente (Gagnon et Richard). S'il est question de foi, ce n'est jamais que retrouvée ou réinventée.

Quatrième recueil de Bertrand Laverdure, *Audioguide* est constitué de trois suites assez narratives en apparence (« Écrire les archives pendant que nous conservons les corps »; « Le fantôme de saint Paul »; « Les volcans sous la mer »). Car il est frappant de voir le relais des citations en exergue donner un sens et une cohésion aux diverses suites et à l'ensemble des textes

composant le recueil, comme si l'engendrement du monde poétique était moins le fait du poète et de son imaginaire que d'un investissement des textes-sources. Il paraît certain que, choisissant ce titre – *Audioguide* – le poète renverse le sens de la visite : le commentaire ne portera pas sur le monde mais sur les exergues.

Au confluent du cathodique, du médical et de l'écologique, la première suite de Laverdure est écrite à la première personne du pluriel (nous), et met en scène un groupe (des vagabonds, des fuyard ou des survivants) qui se cache et vit dans ce qui paraît être le maquis du monde. Tantôt derrière des bibliothèques, tantôt au milieu des librairies, ailleurs dormant sur des concrétions rocheuses, le groupe guette l'apparition de la littérature cependant que les apparences tournent et se modifient comme dans un cauchemar. Sans axe d'abord, les poèmes vont peu à peu déployer une temporalité; apparaissent alors faiblement un passé – celui des œuvres mortes et du savoir (« Nous avons cru / à leurs exploits [...] Puis nous avons couru / sous la pluie insensible / des livres ») –, puis un futur, qui n'est jamais que la répétition du présent : « Laissés seuls / au milieu de librairies immenses, / de poulies, de vagues, / d'épinettes et de safran, / nous retenons quelques mots / déjà lus / afin de nous distraire. » L'ensemble demeure comme ébouriffé et sans orientation, outre cette surconscience du littéraire qui pourrait bien être, en effet, l'intention première du texte.

Arpentage du monde d'avant le monde ou de son au-delà, le recueil de Laverdure peine à organiser des repères (thématiques ou métriques) qui permettraient au lecteur de prendre la véritable mesure de l'œuvre.

Après *Ruptures sans mobile* (1993) et *Les marcheurs* (1998), le plus récent ouvrage de Nicole Richard, *La leçon du silence*, retravaille les thèmes qui sont le filigrane de son œuvre, et dit cette fois le deuil du père. Alternant entre le je et le tu, le recueil

donne à lire un va-et-vient entre le regard porté sur le père mourant et les réactions du poète. Structuré comme un diptyque (« L'attente », « L'arrivée ») de part et d'autre d'un point de fuite, pourrait-on dire, l'acheminement inéluctable du père vers la mort vécu par la fille forme la trame du livre.

Que la voix, chez Nicole Richard, ait été ébranlée par la mort du père, nul n'en doute – on lit, en sous-œuvre, la douleur et l'importance de la perte; on les comprend. La mort, loin de se dénouer dans l'au-delà, est une chute : « Les altitudes sont sans secours / car ce dont je parle commence au bord / du précipice. »

Quelquefois, on lira du poète son tout premier recueil pour saisir la portée du troisième, dont on peut croire que, pour s'inscrire à sa suite, il n'atteint pas le détachement corrosif et caustique de *Ruptures*, l'absence de complaisance à soi qui faisait sa force et son impact; son humour et la sidérante vérité qui faisaient sa réussite.

Plus serrée et mieux bordée, l'exploration de la mortalité, dans *Ruptures*, est sans complaisance et sans voile, ce qui ne veut pas dire sans humour : « il n'y a que moi / tournée en dérision; / j'attends coupée en deux. » Alors que *La leçon du silence* prend sa source dans l'immédiateté des émotions qui la traversent, la voix poétique de *Ruptures* paraît construite sur le fil de sa « continuité » de telle sorte que ses inflexions, ses soubresauts et ses reculs viennent à former le récit d'où naît un point de vue second, un rien moqueur, qui garde la première voix de poétiser, de s'élever et de perdre son ancrage dans le réel : « au coin de la rue je renonce / au moins quelques heures au vertige. » C'est de la prose par endroits, mais retenue par le souffle : « mon regard se tourne tandis que je glisse dans un morceau du réel et me promène ainsi dans le monde. » Le second recueil (*Les marcheurs*, 1998) cédait le pas à la

troisième personne du pluriel et à l'ellipse : « Loin de la foule perdurent / les réflexes délaissés » ; « Dans le calme plat / la dérision des rituels. » *La leçon du silence*, enfin, renoue avec le singulier sans aménager pourtant la seconde voix et la distance qui donnaient sa liberté au premier recueil : « J'accueille ta maigreur dans ce refuge/ construit par la férocité des gestes / tus. »

Le titre des trois suites du seizième recueil de Jean Chapdelaine Gagnon (*Vigile*) forme une phrase, une injonction à soi-même consacrant la foi retrouvée : « Être/ Icône/ Du mendiant ». Le recueil tout entier est, de la sorte, ce vers unique du poète qui, au terme d'une « errance de trente ans, ou quarante », dépouillé, défait de la rouille de sa passivité et des feintes qui ont été les siennes, a retrouvé en Dieu le sentier menant de l'instant à l'éternité : « Fruit de chaque instant / Mûr d'une éternité point entamée / Par une promesse et cependant / Raisin vert sous la dent. »

L'écriture de Jean Chapdelaine Gagnon, souvent intimiste, est ici décalée, un rien élargie, comme si la réflexion, qui paraît bien encore fondée dans l'intime des relations amoureuses et affectives, était cependant reversée dans un autre ensemble – le christianisme et ses références. La réussite de l'ensemble tiendrait à cela que l'homme – son parcours, ses remords, ses petites choses, ses désirs – est pensé dans un réseau symbolique qui, fondé par la voix personnelle, se redéploie tout à la fois à l'échelle d'une vie singulière et à celle de la communauté des croyants, – avec à l'horizon désormais, la promesse d'une présence. La force du recueil loge dans une manière d'égalité de ton et de maîtrise du poétique.

Adressée à Dieu lui-même, la première suite (*Être*) cherche à dire l'impensable de son existence et interroge le passage du Christ parmi les hommes, sa « macération / Dans le fût du temps » : « Blessure ta naissance / Dans le tissu du monde. » Venu parmi les hommes par la souffrance,

advenu au monde, le Christ fait paradoxalement apparaître les carences de la réalité et sa pauvreté. La deuxième suite raconte alors l'exhumation de l'icône, les étapes menant à l'inclination, à la reconnaissance de la figure de Dieu : « Fils indigne me voici /Dépouillé de la moindre fierté/ Sans biens ni qualités /Nu comme le ver. »

« Par toi sur moi quelqu'un se penche », écrit encore Chapdelaine Gagnon et, en Dieu, le monde « trouve un appui / Mais précaire. »

La fragilité de Dieu, la question qu'il est incessamment dans *Vigile* paraissent dépassées dans *La leçon du silence* tant le deuil éprouve la foi. Quant à *Audioguide*, l'outre-monde où il se déploie ne comporte de repère que littéraire et de certitude que dans le blanc (de la page) retrouvé – celui du premier jour de la Création.

Women Write Nature

Barbara T. Gates

In Nature's Name: An Anthology of Women's Writing and Illustration, 1780–1930. U of Chicago P \$27.50

J.M. Bridgeman

Here in Hope: A Natural History. Oolichan \$22.95

Reviewed by Andrea Pinto Lebowitz

These two works offer macro and micro views of women writing nature. The Gates anthology gives the reader a sweep of authors and types of writing by British women from 1780–1930, while Birdman's natural history is one woman's view of the natural and social story of Hope, British Columbia.

In Nature's Name is an anthology replete with scientific, creative and journalistic works along with many contemporary illustrations. Gates includes literary writers alongside journalistic and educational writers. These juxtapositions offer opportunities for interesting comparisons and an oppor-

tunity to meet authors previously virtually unknown as well as to be reacquainted with old friends. For both the reappearance of known writers and the introduction to new ones, Gates is to be thanked.

Perhaps, the most important questions addressed by this anthology concern the principles of selection and the mode of organization of women's writings about nature. Gates, whose previous work includes *Kindred Nature: Victorian and Edwardian Women Embrace the Living World*, initially saw *In Nature's Name* "as a supplement" to the earlier work, as a cultural study of Victorian and Edwardian women and nature. The anthology was to present the work of writers discussed in the previous book—"Like all offspring, however, it has demanded the right to grow in its own way." The metaphor is apt. The diversity of voices requires new modes of organization and presentation. Gates allows the content to create the shape of the book rather than imposing pre-determined classifications on it.

While acknowledging the helpfulness of Patrick Murphy's schema of writing about nature (*Farther Afield in the Study of Nature-Oriented Literature*), Gates has to go beyond his categories to accommodate all of the material she has gathered. She rejects Murphy's separation of nature literature from nature writing, and she vastly expands the types of genres included. She contributes to the ongoing search for ways to categorize genres and to combine them in anthologies.

Gates also suggests that gender does indeed have an impact on genre in the opening section "Speaking Out." In these selections, the authors answer the challenge to women's very ability to write about nature. These first pieces reflect the adage that the more things change, the more they remain the same. Despite gaining entry to educational and public institutions in the "long century" covered by the anthology,

women had to continue to argue the case for their own right to speak for nature. Hence, the first section frames all of the entries. At times authors justify their work by arguing their unique ability to protect and nurture nature; at others they reject the concept of difference between female and male intelligence. The feminist debate about equality and difference forms an interesting sub-text of the anthology.

Finding chronology an inadequate organizational principle, Gates nonetheless grounds the reader by including a useful "Chronology" as an appendix along with biographical notes. The time line places each anthology selection in context with other literary works, major events in British politics and history, occurrences in feminist history and politics and finally developments significant to science, technology and medicine. This is a helpful guide for the reader, and it also frees Gates to organize her material in more interesting ways.

Within seven major categories ("Speaking Out," "Protecting," "Domesticating," "Adventuring," "Appreciating," "Popularizing Science" and "Amateurs or Professionals?"), Gates finds room for a splendid variety of writers. At times this abundance does verge on the brink of chaos as when the big game hunters share space with the animal protectors. Despite this, Gates largely succeeds in her attempt "to offer new insights into women's role in redefining nature, nature study, and nature writing."

Conversely, Bridgeman does little to expand the standard format of natural history. Hope is set at the convergence and collision of geological events that shaped the western edge of British Columbia. This place offers an intriguing location and metaphor for human and natural transformation. The author tries to tell the story of the natural, human and political histories of Hope, but her ambitions far outrun the space of the text. Further problems arise when Bridgeman attempts to transform

these stories into a meditation on the transitory nature of human presence and the need for humility in the face of the "ancient story of Earth's creation and on-going transformation." Neither history nor introspection is realized, and Bridgeman fails to accomplish her goal of transforming natural history into philosophical reflection. Barbara Gates provides a diversity of material written by women concerned with nature. In addition to the individual selections, she offers interesting contributions to the study of the ways in which women use existing genres and invent their own forms of writing. She also adds to the ongoing search for ways to make anthologies. J.M. Bridgeman does not address either gender or generic issues in her story of Hope, but uses the natural history form to reflect on the effects of human presence on the natural world.

Frye and Modernity

Jan Gorak, Ed.

Collected Works of Northrop Frye, Vol. 11: Northrop Frye on Modern Culture. U Toronto P \$85

Reviewed by Graham Good

In January 1967 Northrop Frye delivered the Whidden Lectures at McMaster University on "The Modern Century." It was a central moment in Frye's writing career. It was also a key moment in Canadian intellectual history: in the country's centennial year, Frye could take part in a national debate on modernity which included George Grant's *Lament for a Nation*, Marshall McLuhan's *Understanding Media* (1964) and Harold Innis's *The Bias of Communication* (1951). Jan Gorak has wisely placed the seventy-page text of *The Modern Century* as the keynote piece of this collection, following it with a range of shorter texts grouped under two headings, "The Arts" and "Politics, History and Society," though the division sometimes

seems a little arbitrary. The pieces range in date from the early 1930s to the late 1980s, in topic from movie music to the Vietnam War, and in length from half a page to fifteen or so. Many are contributions to the *Canadian Forum* and Gorak usefully sketches in its history in his ample introduction, which also successfully places Frye in his intellectual milieu, from such Toronto colleagues as Barker Fairley and Charles Causley, to international figures such as Oswald Spengler, T.S.Eliot, and Edmund Wilson. Further, each piece is introduced by a brief sketch of its context or occasion, often involving long-forgotten controversies. The explanatory notes are useful and copious, though many reveal how assumptions about what a reader can be expected to know have changed since Frye's day. For example, French phrases once commonly cited in English (*nostalgie de la boue*, *epater le bourgeois*, etc.) are now felt to need translation. The editing of this volume is of an unusually high standard: I caught only one typo in the book's four hundred pages. It forms a fitting monument to Frye's role as a cultural critic.

What are the key features of that role? Since Frye's day, cultural criticism has split into two parts: a highly technical, theory-driven academic wing focussed on ideology, and a more popular journalistic wing concerned with reviewing current trends and events. Frye's typical manner of address lies between these two styles. He assumes an educated general public which may include academics but he does not address them exclusively. He speaks or writes as an academic, but wears his learning lightly and expresses it accessibly. Humour and self-irony are frequent, though inevitably sometimes dated, meant to evoke a quiet "chuckle." Of the many adjectives one could apply to this tone, *reasonable* seems to me the most accurate. The assumption is that as a group, audience or society, we can reason together and reach reasonable, com-

municable conclusions, though they may also be provisional. Frye's writing is orderly and well structured, he is adept at positioning ideas and tendencies in relation to each other, but this drive to schematism is countered by a colloquial style and a breadth and tolerance of attitude.

Frye's politics, like his rhetoric, is governed by balance, conceding points to the left and right but also showing the limitations of each outlook. This rather patrician liberalism, this air of being above the fray, is part of what provokes ideological critics of Frye, and leads them to try and "unmask" his bourgeois values, an unnecessary task since Frye openly and frequently proclaims his liberal humanist stance in this volume. Frye sounds *impartial*, more of an affront to "radical" criticism than the right wing allegiances of figures like Pound or Eliot. Further, he speaks from within an institution (the University) which he believes is or ought to be impartial, above political conflict, to an audience which until the late 1960s to a great degree shared this view. The dominant academic view is now that impartiality is both impossible and undesirable, a mere pretence which masks bourgeois class interest. But Frye in this volume shows that leftist critics do not have a monopoly on the critique of capitalist culture. He demonstrates that liberalism, now often dismissed as a front for capitalist ideology, offers a critique of capitalism and mass culture which in many ways is more relevant than the Marxist-inspired equivalent, since it assumes that art, education, and culture are partially autonomous spheres from the capitalist economy, and hence capable of change without overthrowing the state.

Frye's greatest strength is the capacity to see and incorporate both sides of an issue. As he writes in *The Modern Century*, "No idea is anything more than a half truth unless it contains its own opposite, and is expanded by its own denial or qualification."

This *liberal dialectic* is the key to Frye's thought and style, and in this volume it is most amply demonstrated on the question of modernity. He sees the promise of modernity's "open mythology" of freedom, as opposed to the closed mythologies of the political left and right, and of historical periods like the Christian Middle Ages. Yet he also sees the passivity, staleness, and uniformity induced by the power of the mass media and advertising, the abundant failures of Western culture to realize the ideals of critical intelligence. Yet Frye still believes in the power of appeals to that intelligence, and the power of education to foster it. Now that so many "intellectuals" have lost faith in the free intellect, it would be good to see Frye being read by students and the general public in paperback, as well as being memorialized in this imposing library edition of his collected works.

Palm Prints

John Gould

Kilter: 55 Fictions. Turnstone P \$16.95

Reviewed by Robert Amussen

Yasunari Kawabata's first palm-of-the-hand stories began to appear eighty years ago. Even though it was Kawabata's novels that brought him international recognition, he continued to compose these highly compressed, haunting narratives for the remainder of his long writing career. In *Kilter*, John Gould clearly takes his cue from Kawabata, although neither he nor the term palm-of-the-hand is mentioned in his acknowledgements. However, the cover art does feature a palm print, which readers familiar with the form may take as a gesture of homage.

The stories in *Kilter*, which was short-listed for the 2003 Giller prize, reflect preoccupations of members of a post 9/11 middle class. They feature couples, married and not, blended families, marital and generational discord, the trials of parenting, sexual anx-

ieties, and gender disconnects. The following story titles are as they appear in the text. The arbitrary placement of capital letters is presumably meant to attest to the author's postmodernist credentials as does his classifying the contents as fictions.

In "sHroud," the wife shows her husband the semen stain on their son's pajamas and asks him to consider its shape. He sees it as Jesus, while she sees it as the image of her dog when he was a pup.

In "affirmatiOn," the narrator's anxieties include her low-level job status (clerical assistant), her proximate need to have a wisdom tooth pulled, and her mother's sublimation of her anger at her husband's patriarchal bullying. The narrator finds solace reciting bromides from a spiritual self-help book her boyfriend has given her.

"suiTe" features a couple in bed. The woman finds the sounds of sexual activity in the suite above a turn on. The man is absorbed in his book. They settle on music, apparently *La Traviata*, as their aphrodisiac while, for the couple in the suite below, it appears to be Betty Carter.

"civilizEd" is a monologue addressed to the woman whom the narrator's ex-lover married. She recalls the time her then-boyfriend joined the family for dinner and was asked by her religious father to say grace. In one of several comic touches in the collection, the boy's grace includes the ritual thanks to God for the food and ends by thanking Him as well for giving him and his girlfriend a child. The woman, now married but childless (the dinnertime pregnancy obviously miscarried), is reduced to the shame of stalking her ex-boyfriend's wife and kids.

Gould's prose is fluent and informal but fails to shield his characters from his stance of condescension towards them. He also leans heavily on irony but again, often exercised at the characters' expense. There are genuinely funny bits in this collection, but for the most part the stories lack staying power.

Abelard and Hell-Louise

Barbara Gowdy

The Romantic. Harper Flamingo Canada \$38.95

Reviewed by Marta Dvorak

Recipient of the Marian Engel Award, twice a finalist for the Giller Prize and Governor-General's Award (for *The White Bone* and *Mister Sandman*), Barbara Gowdy has fascinated the public since the publication of her 1992 short story "We So Seldom Look on Love," the inspiration for *Kissed*, Lynn Stopkewich's feature film on necrophilia. Gowdy's phantasmagoric writing has operated within a powerful neogothic current on the contemporary artistic scene, interrogating gender roles and the relationship between the body and the subject. *The Romantic*, a story related by Louise, an ostensibly normal middle-class, suburban young woman, moves away from the previous modes of the quietly sinister or fantastic. Yet this story of love and longing stages, censures or celebrates the quirks, foibles, strengths and frailties of humankind in all their bizarre and splendid variety, embodied by a cast of characters endowed with rather Dickensian identifying tags. A former beauty queen, unbeatable at charades, showers her daughter with outfits in inverse proportion to the love she has to offer. A father pores over Roget's Thesaurus and speaks in strings of synonyms. A near-mute house-keeper communicates through hisses, twitches and flutters, for whom anything yellow is good luck. The German wife next door, with her malapropisms and loud clothes and voice, walks the streets at night calling her son. The boy, Abel, wise beyond his years, initiates the child Louise into the beautiful intricacies of bats and Bach.

One finds resonances with other contemporary fiction, notably Michael Cunningham's *The Hours*, Margaret Atwood's *Cat's Eye*, Alice Munro's "Before the Change" or "Comfort," or Carol Shields's *Unless*. There

is the woman who leaves her husband and child without warning, defrosting the refrigerator one day and putting a goodbye note on it the next. There is the beautiful precision of a brilliant boy's taxonomical pursuit of understanding, against a backdrop of bullying, ravines and churches. There is the female narrator's confession, aligning sequences from different spaces and times into a contrapuntal pattern alternating episodes from childhood, adolescence and adulthood. The retrospective mode allows a layering of hindsight and a depth of perception that generates meaning by superimposing subsequent awareness onto earlier experience.

When the wordplay-mad father dubs the inseparable children Abelard and Hell-Louise, a parallel is clearly suggested with the story of Abélard and Héloïse—the medieval philosopher/logician and the pupil he seduced. On an overt level, the doomed love affair of the French theologian and abbess has an anticipatory function, foreshadowing the outcome of Louise's passion. On a second, subtler level, the intertext alluding to the Scholastic consolidates the metaphysical dimension of the novel: the characters' investigation of ethics, truth, and being itself. In one of the many fine meditative passages of disarming simplicity, Abel addresses the relationship between the apprehension of things and the naming process. He celebrates the fact that everything is itself: "'The pigeons,' he says. 'They're not trees or cats or measuring cups. They're pigeons . . . They aren't right or wrong or important or unimportant or anyone's name for them. Out of oblivion came these nameless things.'" And back to oblivion is where Abel apparently wants to go. The sensitive, gifted young man makes fatal use of alcohol to attain the pure awareness that allows life "to recognize itself as a fleeting pulse of oblivion."

Like Shields's *Unless*, the novel is a fresh, even playful, representation of age-old pre-

occupations. The writing is stunningly fine. The characters are engaging; the arresting dialogues ring true, and the self-reflexive narrative voice, intelligent and authentic, is never heavy-handed, but resorts superbly to diverse modes of indirection such as irony, metaphor, echo, lexical scrambling, objective correlatives, or the rhetoric of denial or of the unsaid. Up to the last part of the novel, which unfortunately slides into mechanical sequences and inversions, the language is exhilarating, rhythmically mixing the concrete and the abstract, the colloquial and the poetic, conceptualisation and rock-bottom common sense. “‘Don’t worry,’ he’d say, when panic was the only sane response. ‘Don’t get yourself down,’ when you were scraping your soul off the pavement. Right up until the last days of his life he tried to assure me that we’d both be okay. ‘You won’t be,’ I said. ‘A dead person is not okay.’” And we understand at the end of the closing chapter, which is telescoped with the opening one, that Louise will never forget, but will be okay.

City Tensions

John MacLachlan Gray

The Fiend in Human. Random House Canada
\$34.95

Steven Galloway

Ascension. Knopf \$34.95

Reviewed by Ian Dennis

A serial killer of women in 1852 London is dubbed “Chokee Bill” or “The Fiend in Human Form” by a yellow journalist named Whitty, and although the murderer’s further outrages and eventual detection provide the framework for John MacLachlan Gray’s historical mystery, the book is as much about the newspaper world and its moral paradoxes as it is about crime and punishment. Gray’s urban world is a violent cesspool in which corruption is the norm and the innumerable undetected

murders of prostitutes or other marginals remain uninvestigated and untroubling to the authorities, while self-serving newspaper publicity constantly makes and unmakes justice in arbitrary or ironic fashion. One might speak of a Dickensian vision if the book were more fundamentally serious, but despite occasional moments of what feels like pseudo-social concern, Gray has opted for a jaunty, semi-comic approach, enlivened by crude jokes and breezy expressions of rather charmingly archaic class resentment.

In point of historical accuracy, this is sloppy but enjoyable stuff, full of texture and incongruity, but animated by language and sentiments that frequently seem anything but high Victorian. The plot moves along well, and one is amused by the mounting intractable dilemmas (and worse and worse beatings) of the journalistic protagonist. The resolution of the mystery is adequately interesting without being particularly unexpected or brilliant, but this doesn’t much matter—although it must be said that the novel does chatter on rather too long after the truth is out. The snappy style of *The Fiend in Human* might be its biggest problem, although this produces comically vivid effects at times. But it can wear, and there is quite a lot of Gray’s idea of bad nineteenth-century newspaper prose and, worse, doggerel, that one is sorely tempted to skim. The book’s feel for imagery is a little wobbly, too—at its climax, when our murderer staggers away half-blinded from a violent struggle with a prospective victim who fought back, nothing better can be said of him than that he looks “for all the world like a giant decapitated fowl.”

The Fiend in Human provides acceptable entertainment, has a bit more energy and colour than many efforts in the same genre but, obviously enough, attempts nothing very significant or memorable. The same cannot be said of the madcap juggler and

highwire artist Philippe Petit who, on the morning of August 7, 1974, illicitly walked the sky between the recently completed World Trade towers in New York. He was young, French, superbly arrogant and almost unbelievably lucky. He was also, and still is, something of a poet—frantic, aphoristic, self-absorbed, but at times gifted with a wonderfully evocative ability to tell what he has experienced and knows. In 2002, he published a hyperbolic but truly splendid book—*To Reach the Clouds* (North Point)—about his passage through a space which still exists, between two places that now are gone. It soars.

Now, however, we have also a novel, *Ascension*, by Canadian Steven Galloway, that begins with a fictional walk across the same gap by an unlucky sixty-six-year-old gypsy, who (and this gives away little as the fact is revealed at the end of the first chapter) falls off. He is a rather gloomy, despondent fellow, our Salvo Ursari, but worse, neither he nor the book is very articulate. The style of that first chapter—only too representative of the whole—ranges from the bland, “Of course he is afraid, of course he knows the danger,” to the inanely obvious, “you’re just as dead if you fall from forty feet as you are from fourteen hundred,” to the merely inane: “Salvo knows that if he falls he would stand absolutely no chance of survival,” or, in a brief, not-to-be-repeated glance at a higher power, “the last thing he wants is to have God against him.” Well ditto for us, down here on the ground. It seems that odd details come to you up there, anyway, or at least to your narrator. For example, the way hair changes colour. Salvo’s has “turned from the darkest brown to a peppery silver with the utmost dignity.” Or teeth. One imagines the wire-walker’s physiognomy at such a moment thus: “Thick, leathery lips lie on top of a set of teeth that, despite a minimal regime of oral hygiene, are almost unnaturally bright.” It’s hard to know whether to let the

imagination go with regard to that regime, or to be lost in the unnatural brightness. The Big Apple in all its grandeur, meanwhile, is something of an afterthought. Salvo feels “so far above the skyline of New York City, it seems small and insignificant from where he stands.” That is the city, we presume, not the skyline—grammar is not a strength here. It is a style much given to repetition: we are told three times in these tense nine pages that he is at fourteen hundred feet, and many other details are as bluntly rehearsed.

We will not pick on *Ascension* at great length; it might be fair but it wouldn’t be fun. Really, though, how can such promising material—gypsies and the old-world persecution of same, circuses, families falling together from wires, passionate rivalries and hatreds, sawdust, elephants and so on—be made so dull? Readers interested in what it might feel like to walk between the twin towers should instead read Phillippe Petit.

Star Girls

Margot Griffin

Dancing for Danger: a Meggy Tale. Stoddard Kids
\$8.95

Nikki Tate

Jo’s Triumph. Orca \$6.95

Cathy Beveridge

Shadows of Disaster. Ronsdale \$8.95

Norma Charles

Criss Cross, Double Cross. Sandcastle \$9.95

Beth Goodie

Who Owns Kelly Paddik? Orca \$9.95

Reviewed by J. Kieran Kealy

Margot Griffin’s *Dancing for Danger*, convincingly set in 18th-century Ireland, not only provides a sensitive examination of the problems the Irish faced keeping their culture alive under British rule of that time, but also charmingly presents a “pourquoi” tale, chronicling the origin of the “Dancing

Banshee” legend. Not surprisingly, the original banshee is the heroine of the tale, Meggy MacGillycuddy, whose ability as an Irish dancer, an activity banned by the British, is what assumes legendary proportions when the school she illegally attends is threatened. I asked my niece, Bridget Kealy, aged 12 and an avid reader well-versed in Irish dancing as well as Irish tradition, what she thought of the novel. She prudently began her response by diplomatically suggesting that the text might be more attractive to the British than the Irish, but she also said she was quite caught up in the excitement of the fast-moving plot. And perhaps most significantly, she said it made her appreciate her own education a bit more. Though the tale is only sparsely illustrated, P. John Burden’s computer-generated contributions add greatly to the overall atmosphere of this nostalgic but telling recreation of the past. And, happily, it appears that the “Dancing Banshee,” or at least other tales of Meggy, remain to be told, as Ms. Griffin promises further adventures.

Nikki Tate’s *Jo’s Triumph* also provides an extremely effective recreation of the past, annotating the adventures of its desperately unhappy heroine after her escape from The Carson City Nevada Home for Unfortunate Girls, and her subsequent job as a Pony Express rider, disguised as a boy. Though some of the plot elements are a bit predictable, the true value of Tate’s account is the meticulous accuracy with which she describes both the life of a Pony Express rider in the early 1860s and the difficulties the Paiute Indians faced during this period. Tate’s “Author’s Note” includes a list of courageous women from the past upon whom Jo’s character is modelled, suggesting that Jo’s triumph is meant to inspire even further journeys into this period by curious readers.

Cathy Beveridge’s *Shadows of Disaster* also includes Jolene, a girl disguised as a boy, and her journey into the past, but in this

tale the journey begins in the present and is accomplished as a result of Jolene’s grandfather’s ability to “go through some time crease and end up back in history somewhere.” The “somewhere” is Crow’snest Pass, British Columbia, in 1903, at the time of the disastrous Frank Slide. As in the case of *Jo’s Triumph*, *Shadows of Disaster* is meticulously researched, so much so that Monica Field, the Frank Slide Interpretive Centre Manager, praises both the accuracy of Ms. Beveridge’s account, but also its ability to make this disastrous event truly “come to life.” But, to Ms. Beveridge’s credit, the historical journey also provides a quite effective background for an absorbing tale of a young girl learning to come to terms with her own reluctance to take risks as well as, along the way, coping with many of the traditional problems that teenagers face in any age. Even Jo’s father, a somewhat staid former university mathematics professor who is rather haltingly trying to create a museum commemorating past disasters, learns from Jolene’s adventures, as she is finally able to convince him that true museums should not be like Social Studies classes, but should make the past come alive, something that, one might add, Ms. Beveridge certainly accomplishes.

Though noted British Columbian author Norma Charles’ *Criss Cross, Double Cross* is also set in the past—Maillardville, BC, in the early 1950s—her heroine need not disguise herself as a boy to assume heroic proportions, for she is not simply Sophie, awkward teenager trying to fit into the daunting social system of a new school, but Star Girl, an alter-ego she has borrowed from her favourite comic book heroine. Her antagonists, however, are not garbed super-villains, but stuck-up classmates like Elizabeth Proctor, the reigning social queen of her new school, and unfairly judged talent contests. That Star Girl will triumph over all odds is a given. (We have already witnessed her endurance and heroic sta-

mina in Charles' justly acclaimed first Star Girl book, *Runaway, Sophie Sea to Sea*). Despite a cover illustration that gives away a bit more of the plot than it should, the adventures of Sophie are thoroughly entrancing, invigorated by Charles' noted ability to make even the most commonplace events memorable. Quite effectively woven into Sophie's adventures are events connected to the strike of two Roman Catholic schools in the spring of 1951 to protest new tax regulations. But Charles' interest is not in the political nuances of this event, but in the practical effect on the students of these schools and the ability of Star Girl to overcome even governmental adversaries. One can only eagerly await her next adventure.

I save Beth Goobie's *Who Owns Kelly Paddik?* for last because it provides a significantly different approach to the traditional young adult heroine. Kelly Paddik does not live in some past era, nor does she disguise herself as a boy in her search for identity. Rather she is an inmate at an institution, sent there as a danger to herself after an attempted suicide. Though the details of Kelly's extremely sordid past are only briefly sketched (with no attempt to play upon their potential sensationalist possibilities), Kelly's first-person account of her search for an identity, her desperate attempt to establish some modicum of self-respect, is a rivetting tale. Although this book is extremely brief, less than 100 pages, one nonetheless comes to know and empathize with this extraordinarily troubled teen. Unlike the Charles text, the cover of this text provides, not a preview of the climactic event, but a wonderful insight into what both Kelly and the reader must search for. The portrait is of a hand holding a door-key. Is this the key to the prison gates, allowing Kelly the escape from this prison that she so desperately desires from the story's initial lines, or something else, something that might be found upon

learning to trust others, and, finally, oneself? Despite its potentially controversial content, Goobie's brief opus is certainly well worth owning.

Above all, the five texts suggest the vitality of the young Canadian heroine in today's mercurial Young Adult market. From dancing banshees to survivors of the Pony Express, the Frank Slide, new Maillardville schools and the seedy Winnipeg streets, all of these young women turn out, in their own unique ways, to be "Star Girls," beacons to their readers to seek their own heroic possibilities.

(Re)Construction Zones

Faye Hammill

Literary Culture and Female Authorship in Canada 1760–2000. Rodopi \$87.37

Erin Manning

Ephemeral Territories. U of Minnesota P \$69.68

Reviewed by Maria Truchan-Tataryn

Delighted to make your acquaintance, Mrs. Brooke; glad to see you again, Susanna, and you Lucy! Alright, we don't actually meet the six authors of Faye Hammill's *Literary Culture* for tea, but her text introduces us to these Canadian writers in a highly accessible manner that is both engaging and informative. By interweaving the fictional and non-fictional narratives of women writers spanning the literary history of Canada, Hammill highlights cultural shifts and continuities that reveal a creative dialogue between the authors who shape their national environment, even as their Canadian contexts inform their works and identities.

While Hammill traces a preoccupation with national identity in the work of female literary artists, Erin Manning's *Ephemeral Territories* provides a cautionary counterpoint. She reveals a more pernicious element of national discourse through a range of cultural productions that resist conventional ideologies of national identity. All of

the authors Hammill studies enjoy middle-class privilege, yet they share a sense of alienation generated by their writing as well as their gender. Manning's text explains this unease as a consequence of the antagonism towards perceived difference embedded in concepts of nationhood. The approach to questions of belonging in Canada differ radically in the two texts; nevertheless, both contribute to an understanding of "Canadian" and to the role of art in the construction of that meaning.

Through an investigation of the fiction, together with their personal correspondence, journals and critical writing of Frances Brooke, Susanna Moodie, Sara Jeanette Duncan, Lucy Maude Montgomery, Margaret Atwood, and Carol Shields, Hammill demonstrates the imbrication of autobiographical and imaginative texts. She traces the transitions from the earliest authors' negotiation of unfamiliar terrain using British sensibilities to the situation of Atwood and Shields within a tradition they choose to continue and re-create.

Each of the first six chapters focuses on one author, taking us chronologically through the developing scene of Canadian letters as perceived by some of the women involved. The seventh chapter is of particular note in its demonstration of a creative interdependence among Atwood, Shields and Moodie. Hammill delves into the complexities of Moodie's legacy specifically in terms of the literary careers of Atwood and Shields. Unpacking Atwood's ambivalence towards the pioneering writer whose iconic stature Atwood herself inscribed into Canadian mythology, Hammill contrasts the shifting perspectives of Shields and Atwood that inform each other's representations of Moodie. Lastly, the Appendix illustrates both the range of interpretations of Moodie in literature as well as her enduring presence in Canadian culture.

Hammill's text would serve as an excellent text for undergraduate courses in Canadian

literature. Less accessible, Manning's work is a difficult read not only because of her rich use of cultural theory but primarily because of her dense language and lyrical lapses that obscure more than elucidate: "The mirrors and tides deflect as they reflect the landscape, re-membering and distorting the gashes left by history." Ultimately, however, *Ephemeral Territories* is worth the effort it demands.

Unlike Hammill's interest in foregrounding continuities that suggest a cohesive national experience, Manning complicates conventional notions of nation, home, and identity contending that the inherently exclusionary discourse of national sovereignty must engage in a fluid process of political reinvention: incorporating the margins of society, adjusting, re-examining and again renegotiating the meaning of national identity in order to preclude the perpetuation of racism, disenfranchisement and bigotry. This movement is propelled by the tension rendered by an acknowledged presence of the "newcomer," the abject, the one who cannot conform. Manning's project of deconstruction is deeply ethical; she demonstrates how cultural works reposition national consciousness to encompass and value difference while rejecting totalizing impulses contained within national myths of unity.

In her second chapter, Manning confronts the discourse of security through the image of nation as home. Her analysis resonates chillingly in the current American led "war on terrorism." Contrary to the notion of home(land) as wholesome, she argues that national safety justifies its own violence as a necessity for safeguarding the home base. As the recent experience of Muslim North Americans can verify, "The quest for protection against the unknown results in a tightening of the borders of the nation, the home, the self." Manning foregrounds the sinister aspect involved in concepts of the private, closed realm of home

that are repressed in its political usage. Re-imagining the home as a space that encompasses the paradox of “heimlich” and “unheimlich” unsettles the equation of home with safety, and questions the ethics of exclusion it entails.

Manning illustrates the position of homelessness as a critical factor in refiguring the exclusions of State while integrating the self’s longing for home through Anne Michaels’s novel *Fugitive Pieces* and films by Atom Egoyan and Bruce Beresford. The question that emerges: “How can we accommodate ourselves without renouncing the very homelessness that incites us to rearticulate the political?” echoes the theme underlying the text. How can we belong if we are other? How can we be stable on ephemeral territory?

According to Manning, Canada’s much touted multiculturalism merely deflects the need to question discriminatory practices and systemic inequalities. She identifies the difference between a “pluralist” and a “pluralizing” democracy, the former demanding consensus, the latter relying on the tension generated between the dominant culture and counter discourses. One universalizes, the other honours difference. Manning doesn’t offer definitive answers to the questions she raises. Instead she invites us to re-imagine the political, to deny the binaries of us/them that lie implicit in national rhetoric and to engage in a political process of inclusion.



Land, Culture, Property

Cole Harris

Making Native Space: Colonialism, Resistance, and Reserves in British Columbia. U British Columbia P \$25.95

Miriam Clavir

Preserving What is Valued: Museums, Conservation and First Nations. U British Columbia P \$25.95

Reviewed by Sophie McCall

Debates over land and cultural property continue to play a significant role in First Nations studies, and two recent books published by UBC Press confront these contentious issues. Harris’s *Making Native Space* constructs a historical narrative of the making of British Columbia’s reserves, the size of which were calculated by hasty bureaucratic decisions. Clavir’s *Preserving What is Valued* discusses the deep divisions that can arise between museums and First Nations on how to preserve First Nations’ material culture. Each book seeks to confront the past, in which Aboriginal perspectives on land and culture were ignored, with a view towards accommodating urgent demands for change in the future.

Making Native Space begins with a Nuu-chah-nulth chief’s premonition in 1860: “they say . . . we shall be placed on a little spot.” The story of confinement is the quintessential story of colonial takeover; in Frantz Fanon’s words, colonialism creates “a world divided into compartments.” The cutting up of space in British Columbia, “a vastly one-sided colonial construction,” remains Harris’s focus. While Harris clearly demonstrates the deep inequalities embedded in the colonial encounter, he is also quick to point out that there is more to the story than “conquest.” The story of colonial subjugation is “not wrong” but “too simple.” It ignores how colonial discourse is made up of debates, disagreements and compromises, as well as sustained Native

responses of protest. Harris's book is particularly valuable in showing the great variety of opinion embedded in colonialism. The allocation of reserves was a rapid and ad hoc process, engineered by a handful of colonial officials in the second half of the nineteenth century. These individuals made choices that may have seemed practical and expedient at the time, but whose underlying theoretical assumptions became the basis of Native land policy for decades to come.

Though Harris refrains from condemning or praising land administrators who denied or recognized Native land title out of historical context, in his narrative Gilbert Sproat becomes the "hero" (in a deeply flawed way), while Peter O'Reilly becomes the "villain" (though not unequivocally). Harris dedicates the book to Sproat not for his successes as a defender of Native rights (he failed quite spectacularly), but for his sheer perseverance in "struggl[ing] to come to terms with the colonial dispossession of which he was part." Sproat became an outspoken critic of the provincial government's attempts to expropriate Native land without the "intelligent consent" of its inhabitants. In contrast to his superiors, Sproat believed that Native peoples held rights to land, water, timber and fisheries, and that the Crown had a responsibility to provide for them. His persistent criticisms of the province's land banditry were met with stony silence, outright dismissal or *ad hominem* attacks: "Sproat is wholly unfit for anything but verbose, voluminous, tiresome correspondence," complained Premier George Walkem. Eventually, Sproat resigned and many of his land allocations were overturned. His replacement, the efficient and economical Peter O'Reilly, maintained cordial relations with his bosses and dropped difficult issues the province did not find palatable. During his long career (1880-98), O'Reilly laid out hundreds of small, dispersed reserves in British Columbia and is largely responsible for the

map of the province as we know it today.

Native people used every opportunity to register their dissent about unfair practices of allocating land; alongside his analyses of the letters, memos and reports of colonial officials, Harris also examines transcribed speeches, petitions, and correspondence by Native spokespeople. Native groups rarely had the power to assert their demands, and their speeches, filtered through translations and values of the day, are not easily interpreted. Harris is realistic about these limitations; nevertheless, I do wish he could have conveyed, as he does with the colonial administrators, the potential disagreements among the Native respondents.

The last chapter, "Towards a Postcolonial Land Policy," brilliantly links the past with the present and makes a compelling case for the ethical imperative of redressing land injustices. Learning history becomes a way to make a better future: "I tell this story with current debates and opportunities in mind" so that "a new geography of Native-non-Native relations in British Columbia may be built." Harris puts the responsibility for change squarely on the shoulders of non-Native readers: "I do not know whether the settler society of British Columbia will be willing to redress some of the damage that has been a by-product of its own achievements." Change, if it comes, depends upon British Columbians' political will.

Preserving What is Valued also identifies changing settler attitudes as a first step towards improving Native-non-Native relations. Vast cultural differences about what constitutes "preservation," "use," "ownership" and "value" continue to shape, and at times impede, communication between museums and First Nations groups. Clavir realized the need for the book in the early 1980s, while she was working as a conservator at the Museum of Anthropology (MOA) at the University of British Columbia. The museum received a number of requests from First Nations groups to borrow artifacts

for use in community events. Clavir found herself caught between the code of ethics of her profession, which holds as its highest purpose to maintain the physical integrity of the objects, and her sense of moral responsibility to First Nations to whom the objects arguably “belong” (though this is a sticky point of discussion). At the same time, heated controversies over repatriating cultural materials added urgency to her self-reflection about her role as conservator. Fundamental questions about whose interests the museum was supposed to serve created, at times, deep wedges between MOA and local First Nations artists and community workers.

In Part 1 Clavir explains that museum conservation, which solidified itself as a discipline in the nineteenth century during the hey-day of “salvage” anthropology, is a profoundly Eurocentric discourse which nevertheless presumes to be a neutral “science.” This presumption of neutrality renders the discipline ill-equipped to respond to First Nations’ loan requests. Part 2 is largely made up of personal narratives from First Nations students, docents, artists, cultural practitioners, elders, and conservators who articulate their thoughts on the museum’s role. Clavir discovers some major points of divergence between museums and First Nations contributors: while museums seek to preserve inert objects from the past, decontextualized in an impartial setting, First Nations’ interviewees view the objects as living, as bridges between the past, present, and future and as points of connection between people and the environment. Though Clavir repeatedly rehearses these persistent binary oppositions, most of the First Nations contributors suggest the need to revise rigidly oppositional agendas. Clavir takes heart in Kwakwaka’wakw conservator Gloria Cranmer Webster’s gesture of collaboration: “Your job is to preserve those ‘things.’ It’s our job to preserve the culture that those ‘things’ have meaning in.”

Although Clavir describes exciting new collaborative initiatives between museums and First Nations artists, elders and teachers, the sharp contrast between Parts 1 and 2, as Clavir herself admits, potentially contributes to the oppositionality of the discourse. Though she frequently comments upon the diversity of Aboriginal peoples, many of whom are of mixed cultural descent, these disclaimers risk sounding hollow, since so much of the book dramatizes a blunt Aboriginal / non-Aboriginal cleavage. Both Harris and Clavir juxtapose long block quotations from Native spokesperson one after the other, refraining from commenting on them in detail. The writers risk attributing a false sense of unanimity to the Native voice, despite their insistent avowals to the contrary. The politics of land and cultural property remain crucial touchstones for analysing Native-non-Native relations in this country, and both books confront these difficult issues with courage and insight.

Wanted: The Author

Jill Hartman

A Painted Elephant. Coach House Books \$16.95

derek beaulieu

with wax. Coach House Books \$16.95

Kimmy Beach

Alarum Within: Theatre Poems. Turnstone P \$12.95

Reviewed by Meredith Quartermain

“The removal of the author,” writes Roland Barthes, in his famous essay, “is not only a historical fact or an act of writing: it utterly transforms the modern text. . . . [T]he modern *scriptor* is born *at the same time* as his text; he is not furnished with a being which precedes or exceeds his writing.” Challenging and playing with this Barthian dilemma, Jill Hartman introduces a painted elephant as author-persona, who makes explicit what Barthes argues is implicit in

all texts: “a fabric of quotations . . . from a thousand sources of culture.” Thus Hartman’s text is a delectable medley of 19th century chapter headings (“Describing the Magical Midnight of the MOTHS and expositating on the Peculiar Traits displayed by Large Mammals confronted with Hirsute and Papilionaceous Insects”); romance novel (in which the painted elephant pursues a Calgary landmark known as the Maytag Man); newspaper clippings (“Hitchhiking elephant confuses tourists”); art-gallery lingo (“Female Figure Supporting an Incense Burner, bronze statuette”); the voices of Roy Kiyooka, Jack Spicer, Robert Kroetsch, Lisa Robertson; the paintings of Vermeer, Delacroix, Manet; Hindu and Greco-Roman myths; and the Calgary cityscape.

Quite determined to be present in this text, Hartman’s authorial voice introduces “Myself, THE LONELY DUTCH ELEPHANT” and offers a “True Report of My Heroic Escape from the Zoo,” followed by a “Run-in with the Fearful and Fabulous Cannibal CHIMERA and the Heroic Outcome of that Historic Confabulation.” “Chimera appears incarnate,” our painted-elephant author states (in another ‘chapter heading’), “reminding me of the Fantastical Reality of the Everyday.” Within this framework, Hartman has invented a form that allows for maximum textual pleasure, where every style and voice in the gamut of myth and literature can be played against and through every other, in a sensuous and shifting landscape of the languaged world. Her poetry ranges from playful sounds (“these anachronistic etiquettes, a/ pirouette silhouetted against/ the whetting of your appetite”) to ingenious multi-layered quotations (“no zoo is an island”) – all the while wondering “who she is in an ‘exotic cosmogony” or a “lazy eternity” where “names of ranches, cows” are “homogenized with brands.” This author, while agent of considerable textual disturbance, is

nevertheless bent on escape from cages in the zoo of received texts.

“The space of writing is to be traversed, not pierced,” Barthes says, “writing constantly posits meaning, but always in order to evaporate it.” derek beaulieu’s *with wax* poses writing space and textuality as a series of caves formed like those of Lascaux, where thousands of prehistoric animal images exist in a palimpsest of moulds, leachings, and mineral deposits. Interspersed between his poems are abstract graphics entitled “calcite gours” reminiscent of calcite blotchings in the caves. Another graphics series, “mondmilch,” depicts layerings and distortions of letters. Similarly, the poems explore blurred effects in the overwriting of one discourse upon another.

“[T]here is no difference between what a book talks about and how it was made,” beaulieu offers us by way of a motto. Founder of *housepress*, he is well versed in printing technology and his poems reveal an intimate knowledge of physical production of the written word. In “the well,” for instance, we see not only the parts of a vertical platen letterpress but also hear the mechanical rhythms of one operating:

every single word set & placed into page
halves come together & transfer form after
single words set open built century
together
form the wooden you see rubber rollers
allow
the wooden feed board two for the next
cycle.

Another poem, “the fleeing horse,” suggests book-binding: “a pair of shears the motion brisk free slip a/ middle finger spread moisten splinter index/ destroy bind vase-line loosen silver thread/ press black spread fold adhere press needle.” The book’s title, too, reminds us of the wax tablets in use 2000 years ago, where writing emerged, only to melt away again, overwritten with other formations.

Like Hartman, beaulieu has read his Barthes, and comments in "Rotunda," "[T]he author is an obvious preliminary question/ following an open-ended paper." He is not only concerned with textual production but with the production of knowledge: "layout is a monitor of literature," he comments while discussing the Gutenberg bible, the first book printed with movable type. Underlying this is a critique of commercialism: "deliberately superimposed on engraved horses/ commercial colonies an expanding variety of/ bulls."

In *Alarum Within: Theatre Poems*, Kimmy Beach, a former stage-manager, poses the writing space as stage – not the stage of seamless illusions seen by the audience, but the back-stage struggle between illusion and illusion-makers. We hear, for instance, of "The Greatest/ Hypnotist In the World" whose

. . . son runs the sound board
stage right (he adjusts the level of his
dad's mic and the one held by the first-year
Psych student who thinks he's Elvis caught
in a swarm of bees).

The series "*Take, eat; this is my body*" is a hilarious tale about a manager who hears "raging from the wings stage right/ it's Matt and Karla again/ the endless brawl about who gets to/ play Jesus H. Christ for the most minutes."

In the series, "Mr Dressup," the narrator confronts that TV personality over a form letter he sent to her five-year-old self; then becomes a Mr. Dressup puppet. The series "Encephalitis," recounting her struggle with the disease, takes the stage into the narrator's delirious consciousness, haunted by ghosts of Lady Macbeth, identities she must play as wife and daughter, and a character, Mother Courage, in a play she directed. The series "*seek the deepness*," recounting the death of a beloved niece, counterpoints the humour in other sequences, and uses among other dramatic techniques a long stage direction.

Beach is inventive with form, making poems out of ads seeking actors, dramatic personae, stage directions, a pre-show checklist for *Macbeth*, and lists of props, sound cues, and light cues. The poems and poetic plays have a sharp sense of rhythm and detail, and plenty of irony.

Knowing Qu'Appelle

Norman Henderson

Rediscovering the Great Plains: Journey by Dog, Canoe, and Horse. Johns Hopkins UP \$US29.95

**Dan Ring, Trevor Herriot
and Robert Stacey**

Qu'Appelle: Tales of Two Valleys. Mendel Art Gallery \$29.95

Reviewed by Marilyn Iwama

Life writing takes a turn in Norman Henderson's *Rediscovering the Great Plains*, and he claims the biographer's techniques in his attempt to understand and communicate the "essence of the Plains." The authors of *Qu'Appelle: Tales of Two Valleys* opt for the high road of constructed realities, yet each story charts a familiar course through "the other" to "self."

While all of these writers are sold on Saskatchewan's Qu'Appelle Valley, none waxes as evangelical as Henderson. The Plains are Henderson's first love. His mission is to understand them better and to influence others to love them more. What brings Henderson to Qu'Appelle is his speculation that understanding will only come through knowledge of a particular "old and native" corner of that "vast sweep of grass from Alberta to Mexico."

Henderson's arduous route to understanding Qu'Appelle includes three journeys through the valley: two overland, accompanied first by a dog, then a horse, each pulling a travois, and one by canoe along a portion of the Qu'Appelle River. Henderson prefaces his account of each journey with a chapter that documents the

history of comparable travels and his attempts at reconstructing a passable travois and a replacement for his old canoe thwart—the latter a pragmatic alternative to the buffalo skin and willow branch bull boat favoured by the Cree and Sauteaux. These chapters also detail Henderson's excavations in the archives and his search for suitable animal companions.

Henderson admits that the "Plains" are "not an easy landscape." Still, on a train ride through the prairie, he is impatient with fellow passengers who choose bed over a night of sightseeing in the dome car. In fact, Henderson's pastoral grassland is such a utopic imaginary that the partying occupants of a neighbouring campsite seem to be "creatures from entirely different worlds." Prairie towns are a "fascinating genre . . . too much alike to be of interest as individuals." Even the cows are "an irritant." Less biography than elegy, Henderson's tale is glaringly short on the contemporary social realities of Qu'Appelle. Nonetheless, *Rediscovering the Plains* is a provocative and often pleasing tale. Evoking the journals of early explorers and animal companion tales, Henderson's account rollicks along with fine crafting and palpable enthusiasm.

Qu'Appelle: Tales of Two Valleys catalogues the process of gathering approximately 300 works of art related to the Qu'Appelle Valley for a 2002 exhibition at Saskatoon's Mendel Art Gallery. The title is a metaphor "for the way first nations and colonists, both past and present, constructed and experienced nature, spirituality, and culture through the physical reality of the Qu'Appelle." This first volume offers a collage of art works and two autobiographical essays by the show's curators, Dan Ring and Robert Stacey, as well as a third by Regina naturalist and writer Trevor Harriet. A second catalogue will feature the work of Métis artist Edward Poitras, Canada's representative to the Venice Biennial of 1995. Poitras' work encompasses

land claims, Qu'Appelle's Treaty Four, the Lebret residential school, and "the mythology of the valley."

Ring's introductory essay describes Qu'Appelle as an "irresistible" relief from the "sameness" of prairie. His personal mythology is a patchwork of "native beliefs, art, the occult and local history" centred in the valley. Ring acknowledges the cultural forces of imperialism and indigenous culture that have shaped Qu'Appelle—a "mix of conflicting memories and allegiance" that still constitutes contemporary Saskatchewan society. He perceives both the catalogue and the exhibition as ways of reproducing this conflicted reality as a foil for colonial imperialism.

As determined as Ring is to avoid romance and nostalgia, his fellow authors never quite manage to escape these colonial symbols. Herriot constructs himself as a cultural sympathizer, harsh on both the Indian agent and the missionary. He is frank on the "paternalist soul of the colonizer" and points readers to other sources for deeper treatment of, for instance, the history of residential schools in the valley. Herriot's is a democratic approach. He discusses three cultural "phases" of Qu'Appelle, weighing oral tradition and written history equally, while acknowledging the contemporaneity of aboriginal tradition. It seems a difficult posture to maintain for one who, "like everyone else, go[es] down to the Qu'Appelle because it feels good to be there. . . . Nostalgic for a time when we spoke and listened to valleys and rivers. . ." (41).

If Herriot's essay skirts nostalgia, Stacey's bathes in it. "Who Calls? A Qu'Appelle Quest" is exactly that: a bildungsroman of the adolescent who achieves maturity through daring encounters with the "geographic enigma" of the "arcadian" Qu'Appelle Valley. It is an engaging tale. Stacey is the grandson of landscape painter and illustrator C.W. Jefferys, possibly the

first non-Aboriginal artist to paint the valley.

With strong personal ties of my own to Qu'Appelle, I appreciate the (almost) irresistible pull of the valley. Whether by vehicle or on foot, travellers lose themselves to Qu'Appelle, to the thrill of sighting it, just before dropping off the edge of the prairie. For Stacey, the magnetism of Qu'Appelle develops into an artistic imperative: for the life of him, Stacey cannot fathom why, for instance, the Regina Five (Ted Godwin, Kenneth Lochhead, Arthur McKay, Douglas Moron, Rob Bloore) and their colleague, Roy Kiyooka, refused to engage with the valley.

The majority of the earliest catalogued works in the exhibition are landscapes, so human figures play a small part. People most often appear in the book's historical illustrations, in photographs of the bizarre and exploitive "Indian Pageants" of the 1920s and 30s or in Henry Metzger's and James Henderson's "Indian" portraits." Provocative differences exist between these portraits—distinguishable only by varying degree of grimness and costume—and the two of Edmund Morris's (son of Treaty Four's Governor William Morris) that are included in the book. Morris's early twentieth-century representations of Nepahpenais and Piapot impress because they appear only lightly burdened by colonial notions of "Indianness." Readers will have to wait for a deeper look at this meeting of Qu'Appelle's colonizer and colonized until publication of Poitras's work—"the other exhibition."



Compelling Fantasies

Monica Hughes

The Maze. HarperTrophy Canada \$15.99

Andrea Spalding

Dance of the Stones. Orca \$ 9.95

Edward Willett

Spirit Singer. Earthling P \$14.95

Reviewed by Lynn (J.R.) Wytenbroek

Monica Hughes's *The Maze* is an unusual fantasy. Given that the late Hughes is renowned as probably the foremost writer of SF in the world for young audiences, her occasional move into fantasy always comes as something of a surprise. However, with her usual careful skill, Hughes writes an engaging story about Andrea Austin, daughter of a cold academic father and a brow-beaten mother. In a new school, wearing the ridiculous clothes her unsympathetic father considers "ladylike," Andrea is immediately chosen to be the punching bag of The Six, a nasty gang of girls. Her initial attempt to escape the girls sends her into the warm comfort of Sofia's magical shop where Andrea is given a maze as a gift to help her find herself. When next she is attacked, the two biggest bullies are pulled into the maze, and Andrea spends much of the rest of the novel seeking to rescue the two, and, in the process, rescuing herself from both her father and the version of her that he has created.

The Maze is a strangely compelling book. Andrea is a sympathetic character from the beginning and her father is a tyrant, easy to dislike. But Crystal, the leader of the gang, is completely hateful, and it is Andrea's attempts to break through Crystal's own hatred and overwhelming anger which gives the meat to this wonderful story. Crystal's anger threatens the lives of all three girls in the maze, yet it is in Andrea's attempts to reach Crystal, who does not want to be saved, either from the maze or from her own consuming rage, that Andrea

finds the strength to confront her father, find her “missing” mother, and recreate herself at the same time. So themes of interdependence run through the novel, as does friendship, love, identity, and coping with life. Although *The Maze* initially seems a rather bleak book, the novel convincingly explores the very serious pain that some teenagers must face in their daily lives. Powerful and thought-provoking, *The Maze* is one of Hughes’s last novels, but also one of her finest.

Spalding’s *Dance of the Stones*, which follows her first novel in the *Summer of Magic* quartet, *The White Horse Talisman*, is a very different kind of fantasy from Hughes’s. Four children have heard the call of the celestial powers called the Wise Ones, who need help to recover the talismans each has entrusted to humankind. A dark power is rising and the Wise Ones need their talismans to help them restore balance to a universe that is in danger of unravelling. In *The White Horse Talisman*, the Canadian Chantal is the one in direct communication with Equus, the horse-shaped Wise One, and together, all four children are able to restore his needed talisman. In *The Dance of the Stones*, Chantal’s English cousin, Owen, is the one whom Ava, the half-bird, half-woman Wise One, contacts. The children go on another hair-raising adventure to retrieve Ava’s talisman from the stone circle at Avebury.

The setting is fascinating, for Spalding has chosen one of the most mysterious and ancient parts of England, Avebury, and the chalk Downs around it with their many sacred sites. Thus Spalding introduces us to some wonderful history, and the mystery that comes with truly ancient events from a neolithic culture.

While definitely a novel for a younger crowd than Hughes’s book, *Dance of the Stones* also works on more than one level. Trying to deal with his own rage at the imminent break-up of his parents, Adam,

Chantal’s brother, is the one who endangers the quest in both novels as he is unable to break through his own pain and therefore is the most vulnerable to the inimical forces intent on aiding the Dark. While the others are trying to help the Wise Ones, they are also trying to help Adam, but near the end of the novel, each child is called upon to face his or her own demons. They also have to face the great loss brought by death. For a young audience, this is a profound book as well as a great adventure.

Spirit Singer deserves the Saskatchewan Book Award it won. Aimed for the early to mid-teen group, *Spirit Singer* is a strong, well-written book with a great adventure and sympathetic characters. Willett’s book has fast-paced adventure, sword-play, ghostly help, kidnappings, automatons who serve pure evil, royalty and brave commoners. In this case, the hero is Amarynth, a young Spirit Singer in training, whose grandfather, her mentor, is killed by a dark shadow while singing the soul of a dead man through the shadow lands to the gate of Light. In her efforts to complete her training, Amarynth is knocked out, kidnapped, almost swallowed several times by the dark Beast, and rescued by a series of unlikely helpers. But as with the heroes of the other two novels, it is Amarynth’s courage and tenacity in the face of appalling danger, as well as her own uncertainty, that make her sympathetic to the reader.

Also providing a confrontation between good and evil (the basic mandatory plot-line for any self-respecting fantasy), *Spirit Singer* holds more than just solid characters and an exciting plot. It is about deception, both external and internal, in the eternal search for love and acceptance. It is about the need to accept oneself in order to move forward and achieve great things and the need to be wise and discerning about others.

The setting of the novel is a completely fantastic place, with high mountains full of danger, lush valleys and a largely medieval

social structure that makes any fantasy lover immediately feel at home.

These are three marvelous books, all very different and yet with the same overlay of fantasy that allows us to look at our realities from a different perspective.

All About CanLit

Eva-Marie Kröller, Ed.

The Cambridge Companion to Canadian Literature. Cambridge UP \$34.95

Reviewed by Rocío G. Davis

Eva-Marie Kröller's outstanding editorial work for *The Cambridge Companion to Canadian Literature* is to be commended. The thirteen strong essays offer comprehensive and interrelated perspectives on the concept, development, and future prospects of Canadian literature. This companion aims to introduce Canadian literature to an international public in writing that is clear, concise, and inviting. It magnificently serves the dual purpose of offering the reader a schematic introduction and more in-depth explorations of familiar issues. The thematic concerns negotiated in essays on Aboriginal writing, Francophone writing, Exploration and Travel, Nature Writing, Writing by Women, Regionalism and Urbanism—as well as genre—Drama, Poetry, Fiction, Life Writing, and Short Fiction—are intelligently framed by two essays that define and recap many of the issues critical to the creation and understanding of Canadian Literature. Kröller's introduction begins by analyzing the multi-layered controversies surrounding Spanish-born Anglophone French Canadian Yann Martel's Booker Prize for *The Life of Pi* (2001), given in a year when two other writers born outside Canada, Carol Shields and Rohinton Mistry, were also nominated. The issue of the "Canadianness" of these writers became the subject of "intense investigation," Kröller's point of departure for her

insightful discussion of the "historical complications," reception, and internationalization of the writing we call "Canadian." In particular, her analysis of the novel's reception within and outside Canada foreshadows many of the contested issues developed in subsequent chapters of the book. Issues of nationality and nationalisms, diaspora, bilingualism and multiculturalism, and the history of book publication in Canada set the stage for a well-developed introductory volume that should be required reading for students and scholars of Canadian literature. By concluding the collection with Magdalene Redekop's essay on Canadian literary criticism and the idea of a national literature, the volume neatly attests to both a growing field of creative endeavor and a sophisticated critical theory that reads it.

Kröller is also to be commended for the way in which the essays complement each other and keep overlap to a minimum. What we perceive is the literature developing organically on the one hand, as diverse writers began to focus on similar patterns—nature and the rural landscape, for example—and independently on the other, as palimpsestic histories begin to occupy an increasingly important role in writing. The vexed relationship between a colonial past and an uneasy relationship with the North American present also colours many of the arguments, as definitions of what it is to be Canadian and write "Canadian literature" resonate on diverse formal and aesthetic levels. Penny van Toorn's essay on aboriginal writing and Christoph Irmscher's on nature writing (this latter with its fascinating analysis of the interconnected evolution of writing and drawing in answer to the question "What is here?") engage particularly strongly with the intersection of history, national consciousness, and creativity. E.D. Blodgett's essay on Francophone writing also foregrounds many current concerns of Canadian literature. Though this

book unfortunately could not accommodate more on Francophone writing (as the editor explains, that would require another *Companion*), Blodgett's piece gives a clear chronological and cultural perspective of the "layers of strength" that make up this writing. By reading the history of the changing position of Francophone writing within Canada, Blodgett nuances any potentially facile conclusions and effectively invites the reader to continue learning more. The essays on drama, poetry, fiction, short fiction, and life writing are excellent outlines of the manner in which genre has developed in the Canadian context. Marta Dvorak, in her comprehensive chapter on fiction, provides effective tools for reading as she attends to literary movements and paradigms, and suggests the revitalization of writerly and aesthetic codes in the Canadian imaginary. By locating the development of this fiction in relation to that of other postcolonial countries, she highlights the emerging sense of national consciousness, and the subsequent maturity and multiple layers of the production of fiction. Susanna Egan and Gabriele Helms's essay on life writing, in particular, attends to the most current trends in both theory and practice, illustrating how much Canadian autobiography has become a site of strategic intervention in forms of self-representation as it intersects with questions of self-formation in the context of developing nationhood. Robert Thacker's reading of the history of short fiction in Canada also foregrounds the manner in which many writers used the story cycle form, which some argue is a strikingly North American phenomenon, as well as how the form developed. The essay on women's writing seemed the most dispensable in some ways because the overlap is strongest here. Though Coral Ann Howell's discussion of Munro, Laurence, and Atwood is superlative, one cannot but feel that many of these issues and writers would

have been better negotiated in another context. At this time, and after witnessing the prominence of women writers in all genres throughout the history of Canadian literature, one wonders why it is necessary to devote a separate chapter to what is already so clearly pivotal and significant.

This *Companion* is, above all, a very practical and helpful book for anyone who wants to study the changing and challenging contexts of Canadian literature. The excellent bibliographies assure us that there is more reading to be done. The diverse geographical origins of the contributors (scholars from Canada, France, the UK, Australia, and the US) attest to the increasing interest in Canadian literature around the world, as well as to vital connections and comparisons between literary developments in different countries.

Écriture et hypertextes

**Christiane Lahaie et
Nathalie Watteyne Éd.**

Lecture et écriture : une dynamique. Objets et défis de la recherche en création littéraire. Éditions Nota Bene \$22.95

**Christian Vandendorpe et
Denis Bachand Éd.**

Hypertextes. Espaces virtuels de lecture et d'écriture. Éditions Nota Bene \$25.95

Compte rendu par Guy Poirier

Un certain nombre de similitudes rapprochent les deux ouvrages : publiés aux Éditions Nota Bene, ces deux recueils d'articles sont le fruit de colloques savants et comportent tous les deux quatre sections bien définies. De plus, ces deux publications abordent à la fois des questions habituellement associées à la critique littéraire, mais également aux processus de création. La comparaison s'arrête pourtant à la facture de l'ouvrage, car les thèmes abordés, création littéraire et hypertextes, le sont de façon fort différente, du moins à première vue.

Je ne reprendrai pas, dans ce compte rendu qui se veut bref, les résumés des 39 articles que comptent ces deux publications, mais j'essaierai de souligner l'intérêt de certaines sections de ces ouvrages.

Les deux premières sections de l'ouvrage *Lecture et écriture : une dynamique* abordent la dynamique et l'expérience de l'écriture. Les perspectives des lecteurs écrivains sont abordées, de même que l'oralité, la nouvelle et le poème. Des témoignages d'écrivains s'ajoutent alors à des textes théoriques. Pour les spécialistes de la nouvelle, notons l'article « L'écriture novellière et la (non) représentation du lieu » qui offre des pistes intéressantes de réflexion à propos des questions d'espace et des processus mnémoniques qui y seraient liés.

La troisième section du même ouvrage porte sur la création vue dans une perspective pédagogique. Nous avons certainement été tous déjà confrontés à cette épineuse question de la place de la création littéraire dans nos départements d'études françaises et québécoises. J'ai quant à moi lu avec beaucoup d'intérêt les propos des auteurs sur les difficultés d'harmoniser études en création et en théorie littéraires. Les articles portant sur la pertinence du journal d'écriture, sur l'essai et sur l'atelier d'écriture à l'université du troisième âge pourront également intéresser les pédagogues. Il aurait peut-être été pertinent d'ajouter à cette section quelques témoignages de nos collègues en littérature anglaise. Ces derniers, question de tradition universitaire, semblent effectivement vivre plus naturellement cette proximité de la critique, de l'enseignement et de la création.

La dernière section de l'ouvrage a pour titre « Esthétiques et éthique ». On y aborde notamment la critique négative du poème (expression empruntée à la théologie négative) et la démarche esthétique d'un journal d'écriture; deux articles sur l'originalité et un texte portant sur l'altérité du sujet lyrique viennent clore le recueil.

La seconde publication, *Hypertextes. Espaces virtuels de lecture et d'écriture*, est de loin plus polémique que la première. En est-il ainsi parce que nous sommes au cœur de ce passage de l'imprimé au virtuel? Chose certaine, les éditeurs n'ont pas eu peur de la controverse en regroupant dans la première partie de leur ouvrage des textes empreints d'un aplomb qui ne peuvent que nous interpellier. Citons au passage : « Sur un plan politique, Internet propose un espace de communication inclusif, transparent et universel, qui est amené à renouveler profondément les conditions de la vie publique dans le sens d'une liberté et d'une responsabilité accrue des citoyens. »; ou, encore : « Ce sont deux univers opposés, l'un, celui du livre, est réducteur par rapport à l'expérience sensible (. . .) L'autre, le cyberspace, est sensible et séducteur, c'est celui de l'expérience multisensorielle, des images et des sons, de l'interactivité, de la magie, de l'ensorcellement, qui nous aspire dans ses replis fluides (. . .) ».

Après cette plongée dans le vif débat des apports et séductions de la toile, une seconde section s'ouvre sur le thème de la mutation de la lecture. Cette fois-ci, le professeur de littérature se retrouve en terrain connu. On y analyse des expériences pédagogiques sur l'enseignement consacré aux « effets des technologies de l'information et des communications sur la littérature et les études littéraires », on aborde les particularités des lectures linéaire et sur écran, on analyse les conditions de passage au monde virtuel du journal et du journal intime, et l'on étudie finalement les concepts de spatialité et de textualité dans les hypertextes. Les éditeurs nous présentent finalement deux textes : d'abord une « Esquisse d'une poétique de la littérature numérique », et un panorama des aides à la lecture apportées par des programmes ou par des expériences liés à l'intelligence artificielle. Ces deux derniers articles servent en fait de bonne transition vers les deux dernières

sections de l'ouvrage portant sur les nouvelles écritures et le récit spectacle.

C'est à ce moment, en commençant la lecture des deux dernières sections de l'ouvrage publié chez Nota Bene, que la reliure de mon livre a commencé à céder . . . Rien d'inquiétant, au début, une page qui se détache, comme ça . . . clin d'œil, pourrait-on croire, de ces travailleurs de l'hyper-texte. Mais le tout se poursuit, Monsieur ou Madame le relieur; votre ouvrage ne résisterait donc pas à la lecture linéaire? Cela ne fait certainement pas justice, si l'on en revient à notre propos, aux derniers articles de la publication. On y parle ainsi d'arts médiatiques, de sites avant-gardistes; des artistes de la toile prennent la parole et nous révèlent, parfois grâce à l'image, l'œuvre d'art se cachant au détour d'une adresse méconnue. Même le cinéma s'intègre à ce parcours, au départ avec des exemples simples de films interactifs (*Kino-Automat* de Raduz Cincera) et l'emprunt de la notion du jeu, pour terminer avec une étude de *Memento*.

Je conseille donc également à mes collègues la lecture de ce recueil d'articles, et suggère peut-être aux professeurs de littérature de commencer par la seconde section. Une bonne bibliographie se retrouve à la fin de l'ouvrage, bibliographie incluant des adresses de sites internet.

Essays from Strange Lands

Margaret Laurence.

Nora Foster Stovel, Ed.

Heart of a Stranger. U of Alberta P \$29.95

Reviewed by Wendy Roy

In the foreword to *Heart of a Stranger*, Margaret Laurence contends that a writer is "a perpetual traveller, an explorer of those inner territories, those strange lands of the heart and spirit." It is a joy to be able to reread Laurence's essays about those strange lands. This new trade paperback

edition continues efforts by editor Nora Foster Stovel and the University of Alberta Press to ensure that Laurence's lesser-known works are back in print and thus accessible to Canadian readers.

Many of the essays in *Heart of a Stranger* outline Laurence's literal travels to other countries—to Greece, Scotland, and Egypt as tourist, genealogical researcher, and travel writer, and to Somaliland and Ghana as temporary resident. Of these travel essays, the most fascinating are those that provide insight into Laurence's five books about Africa. Indeed, "The Poem and the Spear" and "The Epic Love of Elmii Bonderii" are essential reading for those studying either Laurence's Somali travel memoir, *The Prophet's Camel Bell*, or her translation of Somali poetry, *A Tree for Poverty*. "The Very Best Intentions," meanwhile, begs to be read alongside Laurence's novel *This Side Jordan* and collection of short stories *The Tomorrow-Tamer*, both set in Ghana just before independence. Laurence's representation of herself in the essay as a well-meaning but interfering liberal is reflected in her portrayals of Miranda in *This Side Jordan* and Constance in "A Fetish for Love."

Other essays in the collection touch humorously on Laurence's travels in taxis and airplanes, as well as her figurative travels through television interviews and letters. Still others place her at the centre of visits by friends to her home in England or her "shack" on the Otonabee River. The most substantial essays, however, outline Laurence's perceptions of her own place in the world. The collection begins with "A Place to Stand On," about the geographic sources of her creativity, and ends with "Where the World Began," which identifies the origin of her world as "a small prairie town," "horrible and beautiful." As Laurence eloquently states, "I did not know then that I would carry the land and town all my life within my skull, that they would

form the mainspring and source of the writing I was to do, wherever and however far away I might live.”

Stovel's introduction outlines three possible ways of reading the collection—as “travelogue,” “concealed autobiography,” and “key to her fiction”—and traces interconnections among Laurence's essays, fiction, and life. Laurence's own introduction to each essay makes these connections in a more organic way, since each provides a chronology and literary motivation, and links the essay to other published works. While errors and omissions are few in this book, the most jarring is related to Stovel's comment that Laurence wrote a preface for *Heart of a Stranger* that was never published. The foreword by Laurence that appears in the book was indeed published in earlier editions, but while Stovel includes other unpublished manuscript material, she does not include the unpublished preface. I wanted to read more of Laurence's own words, and thus was delighted to find appendices that trace emendations made in the pre-publication and publication processes, and that include the essay “Tribalism As Us Versus Them.” As Stovel points out, the pagination and format of this essay, which can be read alongside Laurence's discussions of Nigerian literature in *Long Drums and Cannons* and which was first published in Stovel's 2001 edition of that book, indicate that it was originally intended as part of *Heart of a Stranger*.



Candid Eyes

Jim Leach and Jeannette Sloniowski, Eds.

Candid Eyes: Essays on Canadian Documentaries.
U of Toronto P \$27.95

Frances W. Kaye

*Hiding the Audience: Viewing Arts & Arts
Institutions on the Prairies.* U of Alberta P \$34.95

Reviewed by Mark Harris

Although its birth spasms span more than 60 years (1903–1964), Canada now has a recognizable film tradition, made up of French and English language fiction feature industries (very distinct), a linguistically-divided documentary heritage (where the warring solitudes are sometimes similar in style, but usually different in intent), and an animation cornucopia (with very little internal animosity, at least in part because of the cosmopolitan world view of Norman McLaren, the most admired animated cartoonist of all time).

Of the three planks in this triptych, the middle is by far the most consistent. Essentially its history starts in 1939, the year when John Grierson founded the National Film Board of Canada as a means of combating fascism at home and abroad. While many other government filmmaking agencies preceded it, and a number of private operations (notably Crawley Films) ran parallel to it, the Film Board and Canadian documentaries are inextricably fused in the popular imagination.

Thus it comes as no surprise to discover that all 14 of the films under discussion in *Candid Eyes: Essays on Canadian Documentaries* were made under the auspices of the NFB. Fair enough. A somewhat more disturbing homogeneity emerges, however, when one checks the credentials of the contributing writers. Twelve of the essays are signed by Canadian academics—including co-editors Jim Leach and Jeannette Sloniowski—and two by Quebec scholars. The degree of Prairie, West Coast,

Maritime and Northern input, therefore, is literally zero.

As to the essays themselves, they are of varying quality, but 75% are worth reading and at least a third are very good. For my part, I was most impressed with Jim Leach's analysis of *On est au coton*, Denys Arcand's censored spin on the Quebec textile industry, largely because its Frankfurt School perspective dovetailed nicely with my own. By the same token, I was least convinced by Jean Bruce's critique of *Forbidden Love* because, like so many arguments predicated on queer theory, it requires the reader to make an uncomfortably large number of assumptions in order to share the author's opinion (of course, while saying this, I realize that if my life had been different, I might have found the former approach to be quaintly stodgy, and the latter imbued with admirable panache).

So, with the proviso that "objectivity" in such matters falls somewhere between the ludicrous and the utopian, the other first-rate essays in this collection include Joan Nicks's off-centre look at *Not a Love Story*, Jeannette Sloniowski's good-humoured deconstruction of *Waiting for Fidel*, Janine Marchessault's touching consideration of *Tu as crié Let Me Go*, and Richard Hancox's shrewdly historical perspective on *Paul Tomkowicz: Street-railway Switchman*.

As the book's title makes clear, all the films under discussion are informed by Candid Eye or Cinéma Direct aesthetics. Only Peter Baxter's dissection of *Volcano* incorporates meditations on traditional Voice-of-God documentaries.

If Frances M. Kaye's *Hiding the Audience: Viewing Arts and Art Institutions of the Prairies* is a less satisfying volume, the fault is more with the material than the author. Western Canadian culture does not have a recognizable shape, so every choice must necessarily be amorphous. Kaye chooses to focus primarily on a Native Canadian novel (Thomas King's *Green Grass, Running*

Water), the Banff Centre for the Arts, the Glenbow Museum, *The Spirit Sings* exhibition, the sculptural history of Louis Riel, and the thespian trajectory of *Paper Wheat*. Sadly, for non-Prairie readers, this results in portraiture even less helpful than the blind men's description of the elephant. To make matters worse, the author takes almost embarrassing pains to avoid seeming Eurocentric; employing Edward Said's *Orientalism* as her guide, Kaye does not seem to realize that this is a text that only becomes valuable *after* you realize that it contains almost as many biases and self-serving silences as the quarter-truths it seeks to supplant. But not to be too harsh: her task was literally impossible.

Dark Poems for Bedtime

Jorge Luján

Daybreak, Nightfall. Groundwood \$15.95

Jorge Argueta

Trees Are Hanging From the Sky. Groundwood \$15.95

Bill Richardson

But If They Do. Annick \$8.95

Reviewed by Kathryn Carter

The authors of three recent picture books of poems for children explore dream worlds while remembering that nightmares often wait just around the corner. Two of the authors—Argentinian-born Jorge Luján and Colombian-born Jorge Argueta—squarely face the shadows in the corner, while the third—Canadian Bill Richardson—uses a boisterous sense of humour to chase away imagined demons. All seem to be aimed at fairly young audiences (ages three to six), though older children would enjoy them too.

The beautifully illustrated *Daybreak, Nightfall* is comprised of two discrete poems, one titled "An Apple in the Orchard," and the other titled "Pale-As-Bone." In the first poem, a small boy meets

a mysterious girl in an orchard shouting “Carahooria” (to the delight of small readers who love to repeat the phrase). With dream logic, the girl “opens her mouth like a bewildered moon,” raises her hands to her lips, and erases her mouth. This strange event compels readers as would a fairy tale. And, as in fairy tales, a happy resolution ensues when the little boy says “Carahooria” to make her smiling mouth reappear. The meaning of the narrative is left oblique but poignantly suggests the power of language for the young.

Luján’s second poem is darker yet, with its dialogue between a merry-go-round and a character named Lady-as-Pale-as-a-Bone, who is depicted in illustrations as skeletal with midnight hair full of ravens. When the Lady directs her lethal attention to a small girl on the merry-go-round, the young girl is understandably startled. So is a tin pony who comes to life and whinnies. The Lady asks, “Which of these shall I carry off first?” The little girl and the merry-go-round answer that she should carry off the tin pony because it was “shaking and quaking with terror.” Death is averted (or is it?) because the Lady joins in the game, mounts the pony, and rides the merry-go-round. Again the poetic narrative—and the accompanying illustrations—suggest more possibilities than they articulate; they intimate carnivalesque chaos and the terrible treachery of childhood. The two poems in *Daybreak, Nightfall* make for compelling, if somehow disturbing, reading. Much of the delight in both poems comes from narratives that veer close to tragedy and then dart away, occupying that same mental space where dreams are just about to (but don’t quite) turn into nightmares.

Jorge Argueta more directly evokes the world of dreams in his poem *Trees Are Hanging from the Sky*. Argueta, who now makes his home in San Francisco where he is a poet laureate of the local libraries, won the Americas Award for *A Movie in My*

Pillow, his story of moving to the United States as a young boy. Although his 2003 publication does not address the same issues—it is not, for example, interested in “cultural contextualization,” named as one of the criteria for his 2001 award—the book does showcase his considerable poetic talents, suitably and imaginatively aided by illustrations from Rafael Yockteng. The poem, translated by Elisa Amado, features a little boy who climbs into bed and has what he thinks are wonderful dreams. Despite his mother’s warnings that he will have nightmares if he eats too much before bedtime and sleeps with his hands on his chest, he sails into his vibrant dream world with a self-satisfied stubbornness like Max in *Where the Wild Things Are*. In his dream world, he encounters upside down trees and pink trees with fish for leaves and snakes for roots and claims these as his own. Like Max, he returns to a child-sized world at the end of the story when he admits that, although unafraid of his surreal dream life, he is afraid of heights and likes that his bed is “nice and low.”

Whether or not readers will think these poems are appropriate for children depends on readers’ assumptions about childhood. Both books hint at violence. The title of Luján’s book emphasizes the potential danger in the everyday: day breaks and night falls. Argueta’s poem rather violently reorders the natural world. Those who agree that childhood imaginations can conjure and confront existential terror will find sympathetic and sensitive treatment of that darkness in these two books.

Bill Richardson’s poem, *But If They Do*, is violent in a comic, slapstick way and by far the most straightforwardly entertaining of the three books. The book found its genesis on Richardson’s CBC radio program when he asked people to call in with their bedtime rhymes. While many remembered the poem “Nighty night, sleep tight, don’t let the bedbugs bite,” several callers reported

that they had a family tradition of continuing the rhyme by explaining what might happen to the bad biting bug. Richardson decided to create his own version. This is not Richardson's first publication for children: His picture book, *Sally Dog Little*, was published in 2002 and *After Hamelin*, a novel for young adults, was published in 2000. Like his previous books, this one is very successful and makes young audiences laugh out loud. A young girl explains how she battles bedtime demons: her attacks include pinching "little bed bug bums" to making ghouls eat "a stinky stew of goop and rusty nails." She makes monsters go away by saying "Foey on you" because "monsters who hear 'foey' hang their heads and cry 'Boo-hoo.'" The rollicking rhyme is brought to a peaceful ending when the father tucks in his daughter. Aiding in the fun are active, humorous illustrations by Marc Mongeau.

Reading poems to a child at bedtime: the scene evokes comfort, coziness, and security. These three authors remember, however, that bedtime is also a time of separation, anxiety, and looming darkness.

Afraid of the Dark

Ann-Marie MacDonald

The Way The Crow Flies. Knopf \$37.95

Reviewed by Lothar Hönnighausen

The first part of *The Way The Crow Flies*, ironically entitled "This Land Is Your Land," presents a happy Canadian family, Jack McCarthy, his wife Mimi, and their two children, Madeleine and Mike, traveling to their new home at the airforce base Centralia (Ontario). After serving with the RCAF in Germany, Wing Commander Jack McCarthy is now (at the height of the Cold War and the Cuba Missile Crisis), taking on a new post as director of the Central Officers' School. The children, comparing Germany and Canada, introduce what later

emerges as the novel's major political and moral reference point. However, Germany is not only the venue of the McCarthys' happy remember-whens, but also the country of the seductive Pied Piper of Hamelin and Hitler's rocket factories at Peenemünde. Jack, a committed Cold War fighter, learns to his dismay from his neighbour, the Jewish scientist and concentration camp inmate Henry Froelich, how deeply compromised the Western rocket and space project is through its dependence on former Nazi scientists. Peenemünde, with its subterranean research facilities and labour camps, is not only the sinister launching pad of Wernher von Braun's grand NASA career but also the place where Froelich first encountered the scientist Oskar Fried, a defector from the East whom Jack, on behalf of NASA, has to hide and support. Jack's obligation to absolute secrecy seriously impairs his loving relationship with his wife; it also corrodes his integrity because he feels obliged to withhold evidence that would prove the innocence of Ricky Froelich, his friend's son, wrongly accused and convicted of the rape and murder of Claire McCarroll, the little daughter of Jack's American liaison in the Oskar Fried affair.

As Jack is the focus of the political sphere in this novel, his nine-year-old daughter Madeleine is the centre of the equally important theme of child abuse and its far-reaching and complex consequences, emerging in the last part of the book when her brilliant career as comedienne becomes overshadowed by her childhood trauma. Abuse was also a theme in *Fall on Your Knees*; in *The Way The Crow Flies*, she presents it very differently but equally powerfully. It is from Madeleine's perspective that we witness how Mr. March, her teacher, abuses her and the other girls in class, his phrase "the following little girls will remain after the bell" becoming the haunting leitmotif of this storyline. Madeleine's

innocent and matter-of-fact reflections are deeply moving: “Madeleine did not know you could be stabbed so hard and not die or go to the hospital, she did not know anything could get up there—that must be where the pee comes out.”

Madeleine’s problems increase because, like her father, she cannot tell her secret. The scenes in which her parents come close to finding out are excruciatingly suspenseful, showing once more what a moving and masterful storyteller MacDonald is. Her inventiveness, for instance, in the telescoping of the actual murder in the penultimate chapter is impressive because it is thematically wholly functional, showing the insidious impact of abuse in its deadly re-play by the abused. However, her greatest achievement, matching the rich postmodern Victorianism of *Fall On Your Knees*, lies in intertwining two apparently very dissimilar subjects—a revisionist historical picture of the 1960s and its reaction, the artistic and lesbian counterculture of the 1990s—with a very personal narrative of abuse and its consequences. The result is both aesthetically and morally convincing.

Global English

Tom McArthur

The Oxford Guide to World English. Oxford
US \$25.00

Reviewed by Sarah Cummins

English has become what no language has before: a universalizing language that has spread to every corner of the globe, enjoys unparalleled economic and cultural prestige, has millions more non-native than native speakers, and boasts more internal varieties—from pidgins to creoles to local dialects to regional types to standardized uses—than many entire language families. Yet most of its speakers, whether English is their first, second, or additional language, use it locally without thinking globally. In

this 2002 update, re-working, and expansion of his *Oxford Companion to the English Language*, Tom McArthur proves to be a genial, knowledgeable, and judicious guide to English in all its global guises.

The Oxford Guide to World English (OGWE) opens with an introductory chapter that discusses concepts such as *lingua franca* and *dialect*, and concludes with a chapter that looks to the future of World English, addressing issues such as standardization and the teaching of English. In between are seven chapters that comprise a continent-by-continent survey (Australasia, Oceania, and Antarctica are grouped together). Each chapter recounts the historical context of the establishment of English in that territory, discusses sociolinguistic issues and local literatures, sketches features of the local languages, and gives samples of the lexical, phonological, and grammatical features of the local varieties of English. McArthur has a gift for presenting complex information succinctly, and makes advantageous use of point summaries. His discussions of the status and development of languages, dialects, and varieties are thorough, intelligent, and witty. A map of the world, listing the 104 countries and regions whose English is described in the book, and a chronology of English from Roman times to 2000 are useful complements to the main text.

Both browsers and cover-to-cover readers will come away dazzled by the scope and diversity of English and of McArthur’s research. Some Canadians may be surprised, as I was, to discover that features of their own speech are apparently particular to Scottish English: “Many speakers use . . . *can* to ask for permission and *might* . . . for possibility. Other features of Canadian English echo Southern US English (*green beans*), Chicano English (“A tendency towards a rising sentence-final intonation for statements”), and Hong Kong English (*dragonboat* and *snakehead*).

While the *OGWE* is impressive in its macro-enterprise, certain details raise doubts. Its linguistic descriptions, pitched to general readers and perhaps underestimating their abilities, are often vague, confusing, incorrect, or incomprehensible. For example, we are told that in African-American English, the “[a]uxiliary *do* can be used in a negative statement: *It don’t all be her fault.*” The use of auxiliary *do* with negation, common to most varieties of English, is clearly not the notable feature of this example. McArthur posits rhoticity vs. non-rhoticity and stress-timed vs. syllable-timed rhythm as two variables that apply universally, but I could find no clear explanation of the latter; nor was the index of any help in finding one. McArthur’s presentation of the social aspects of linguistic variety is balanced and clear-headed, so his use of words like *corruption* and *miscegenation* to describe language change and contact is surprising and inappropriate.

The section on Canada seems not to have been updated in the last decade; we read of the Meech Lake Accord and the 1980 referendum, but not Charlottetown and the 1995 vote. Examples of particularly Canadian words date from at least the century before last: *riding*, *toboggan*, *voyageur*. What about indications of our more recent folkways, like *pogey* and *two-four*? This makes one wonder about the currency and pertinence of the sections on other parts of the world. McArthur’s fondness for the quirky and the arcane occasionally clouds his judgement, as it does with his inclusion of Klingon in the section on California English, and car names in that on Japanese English. This lack of any objective criteria for circumscribing his domain of study leads to observations such as “speakers and writers of Jewish background often replace terms that have un-Jewish (and particularly Christian) connotations with others that are more neutral or comprehensive, preferring *first name* or *given name* to *Christian*

name. . .” And the editors must have been asleep at the wheel when they let *Here’s lookin’ at you, babe* past, as one of *Casablanca’s* contributions to World English.

Despite these flaws, the *OCWE* is an entertaining and informative handbook, whose readers will be awed and delighted by the diversity it describes. McArthur demonstrates that our mongrel language and its mongrel offspring are more vibrant, adaptable, and fun than any purebred.

Picturing History and Nature

Irene Morck (Ill. Muriel Wood)
Old Bird. Fitzhenry and Whiteside \$19.95

Margriet Ruurs (Ill. Andrew Kiss)
Wild Babies. Tundra Books \$18.99

Maxine Trottier (Ill. Stella East)
The Paint Box. Fitzhenry and Whiteside \$19.95

Reviewed by Lynn (J.R.) Wytenbroek

It is always difficult to portray history in a way that will interest young readers. *The Paint Box* and *Old Bird* are two superb examples of beautifully illustrated and well-written picture books on historical subjects that do just that for the young reader. Books about nature, on the other hand, need little help to draw children, so a high-quality picture book about nature, such as Margriet Ruur’s *Wild Babies*, is a real treat.

The Paint Box is Maxine Trottier’s newest book in a long line of excellent picture books on historical subjects. Trottier’s interests are broad, and she has written picture books on subjects as far-ranging as the Russian ballet dancer Anna Pavlova, the dogs of Himalayan Tibetan monks, and pioneer families on the Canadian prairies. Each book is based on careful research. Each one opens up a new glimpse into a moment of history that Trottier makes fascinating.

Her latest book is no exception; in fact, it stands as one of Trottier's finest. Set in Venice in the 1500s, the book tells about a moment in the life of Marietta Tintoretto, the artist daughter of the Venetian artist Jacopo Tintoretto. Disguised as a boy during her youth, Marietta used to accompany her father as he worked around Venice, eventually becoming a renowned artist in her own right at a time when women lacked such freedoms.

Trottier has invented a story around Marietta's real portrait of an old man and his grandson, the true subjects of which have been lost to history. Trottier invents Piero, a slave boy whose master comes to Jacopo to sit for his portrait. Marietta befriends the boy who also loves to draw, and in the end helps him escape back to the family who had to sell him to save the other children from starvation.

The book gives the young reader a glimpse into the socio-economic realities of the time as well as depicting the gender politics. Yet all of this is done within a totally captivating story centred on two lovable characters: Marietta and Piero. Historical realism is subsumed in character portrayal, so the story of a friendship is the conscious memory one is left with after reading this cleverly written work. We know both Marietta, with her longing for freedom, and Piero, with his longing for his family, as though they were real children with whom we are acquainted. That is Trottier's magic.

Stella East's colourful and crisply executed paintings are worthy of the fine story they accompany. Portraying Venice at its height, with all its architectural beauty and the strange loveliness of the city that rests on the sea, East captures both the time and place. We, like Piero, fall in love with Venice. And yet the constraints of a city built on water mirror the constraints of Marietta's life, a life bordered with limits that she longs to overcome.

Morck's *Old Bird* is a look at more recent history, the history of the pioneers who homesteaded in Canada. The story is about an old horse, purchased by a farmer so his two young sons can ride the four miles to school. But the horse is not ready for such a sedate life yet, and cleverly she forces the family to realize that she can also pull a plow as well as the big plow horses. It is a story of the love two boys have for a clever and affectionate horse who finally worms her way into even their father's pragmatic heart. Well-written, *Old Bird* is a delightful story of love and friendship and determination, guaranteed to delight young readers.

Illustrator Muriel Wood has done a good job in capturing the times. The oil paintings use mainly blues and greys, giving a sense of the harshness of the life on a homestead farm, yet soft enough in places to also capture the joys that the life could bring. Animals are beautifully depicted throughout, especially *Old Bird*. While the humans' facial expressions are clear, they do not always seem appropriate to the context. However, on the whole the art is good, and captures pioneer life beautifully.

Wild Babies is largely illustrator Andrew Kiss's book. The text is minimal, primarily identifying the animals and some of their behaviours. However, though the text may be minimal, Ruurs has used alliteration throughout the book, making the text poetic and not too simple, stretching the vocabulary of the very young. But it is Kiss's superb illustrations that make this book excellent. A renowned wildlife artist, Kiss has worked before with Ruurs on the nature books *A Mountain Alphabet* and *When We Go Camping*. In all three books, both the animals and the backgrounds, whether rivers, lakes, mountains, meadows or forest, are stunning and realistic. The oil paintings look at first glance like photographs and yet viewed closely, they show the clever use of brush that adds depth and texture to the artwork.

The book is also a visual mystery, designed to entrance young readers even while it trains their eyes. While the baby animals mentioned in the text are always the focus of each picture, there are other animals and birds scattered throughout the pictures, with some very clever but well-hidden clues as to the animal to be depicted on the next page. Facing the painting, which always appears on the right-hand page, is a white page with the text and a pencil sketch of the mature animal, so that readers can see what both the baby and adult versions of the same animal look like. Finding the additional animals as well as the clues to the next animal in each picture will give young children much pleasure. The joy of discovery and learning to see in new ways is a large part of the fascination of this enjoyable book.

Life at High Latitudes

Farley Mowat

High Latitudes. Key Porter \$32.95

Edith Iglauer

Inuit Journey: The Co-operative Venture in Canada's North. Harbour \$21.95

Natasha Thorpe, Naikak Hakongak, Sandra Eyegetok, and the Kitikmeot Elders

Thunder on the Tundra: Inuit Quajimajatuqangit of the Bathurst Cariboo. Douglas & McIntyre \$29.95

Reviewed by Sherrill Grace

Farley Mowat is no stranger to the Arctic or his readers, while Edith Iglauer is less famous, and the creators of *Thunder on the Tundra* will almost certainly be new names for those of us living south of sixty. Nevertheless, these authors are telling stories about the North in very similar ways. I continue to be impressed with the number of books about the North published every year, and I note with interest how confessional or autobiographical they are. If I can identify any shift in the desire to write personally about the North it is this: southern

writers increasingly choose to incorporate the voices of northerners into their narratives and northerners are increasingly telling their own stories. The resulting polyphony of voices is fascinating and enriching because with each book our understanding of the North is expanded, enriched, and made more complex.

Mowat has written extensively on the North, usually in a highly personal, idiosyncratic voice, and he has often used the first person in works like *Never Cry Wolf* that straddle the line between autobiography and autobiographical fiction. In *High Latitudes* he has dropped that single, authoritative persona to include others' voices in a polyvocal memoir of his 1966 travels across the Arctic. Interspersed with his own descriptions and recollections are long passages from the first-person accounts of people he met on that journey. Some of these voices belong to white old-timers like the Oblate priests who insist on christianizing the Inuit; some belong to younger men who are in their lonely outposts for short shifts with the government or the HBC. When recalling his own memories of the trip, Mowat gives us hair-raising accounts of flying in a twin-Otter with his interpreter and a northern pilot through dense fog, failing light, rising storms, or—thankfully—brilliant sun and blue skies as they made their way from Churchill east to Baffin Island and west again across the top of the country, dropping into some of Canada's most remote and isolated communities.

For readers who follow northern lore, some of his interlocutors will be familiar—Terry Ryan in Dorset, Ernie Lyall in Spence Bay, or Mary Carpenter in Inuvik—but many of the voices recorded here seem to speak to us today, in 2003, out of some timeless reservoir of memory that would be lost if not for Mowat's recollected gathering. And the stories they tell, merging as they do with Mowat's voice, provide a texture to

life in the North that would be hard to capture except through this composite remembering. Although many events are familiar (if you have followed northern stories over the past eighty years), they are woven together in a fresh way by Mowat's method. Here again is the story of Inuit relocation and exile that precipitated the tragedy of Soosie, who was driven mad by her suffering and killed by her family to protect the tiny community, and of Judge Sissons who refused to inflict further torment by imposing white justice on those who executed her. Here too, we have the story of Inuvik's creation, one that was first captured by Herschel Hardin in his play *Esker Mike and his Wife, Agiluk*, only this time Mary Carpenter and her women friends are allowed to speak for themselves about what this coming of the whites did to them. And, of course, there is again the story of the mad trapper, Albert Johnson, whom Rudy Wiebe created as a deadly Doppelgänger for his RCMP nemesis Ernest Millen in his fictionalized account called *The Mad Trapper*. Johnson was buried in Aklavik, but stories of him haunt our collective past, as do so many other stories of starvation, government interference, and religious intolerance, as well as stories of courage, endurance, and proud independence across the North.

By remembering his own adventures in 1966 through the voices and memories of others, Mowat has admitted that he does "hardly-know-it" (as his northern nickname suggests), or, more accurately, he has confessed to his sources and brought them to life for us in a generous, eloquent, collaborative narrative. More importantly, his auto/biographical method reminds us of how we all know what we know—through collective memory and shared story-telling. In her introduction to this book, Margaret Atwood insists that time is running out for the North (and for the planet), and this is surely why Mowat has chosen to produce

this kind of book now. The North is not empty, barren, inconsequential; people live there, a history exists there that is ours to cherish, as well as an ecosystem, many ways of life, and a whole symphony of voices telling stories.

Compared with Mowat's collection of voices and insights, Iglauer's *Inuit Journey* seems one-sided. Her trips north also took place in the 1960s, when she travelled with government officials to report on the development of co-operative stores. The "Co-op" movement was meant to help make Inuit self-sufficient by providing outlets for them to prepare and market their own goods, be they fine art, crafts, or country foods. Today, the most famous of these co-ops is the Cape Dorset print shop and Inuit sculpture outlet. However, in this new edition of the essays, first published in 1979, she has done little to re-situate her original observations in the present context of Nunavut. Consequently, the book has an odd nostalgic, uncritical tone that suspends the events she describes outside of history.

Iglauer made several trips north into the Keewatin, the George River area of Ungava, and to Baffin Island in the company of Don Snowden, whom she credits with creating the co-op movement. Insofar as her book is about the co-ops and Snowden, it is a celebration of his efforts and successes, and I would have welcomed a somewhat longer view and a more critical appraisal of the 1960s in this new edition of the book. However, no story about going North is ever merely about the North. In *Inuit Journey* Iglauer tells us much about herself, her experiences of northern travel—often exhilarating, occasionally terrifying—her relationships with the whites and Inuit she meets in her travels, and her warm memories of hospitality and friendship. For me, the most moving chapter in the book is the last one, where she tells us that "in 1994" she "travelled into my past, back to the George River . . . at the invitation of Willie

Emudluk.” Willie wrote to Edith asking her to come once more because he was getting old, and Edith, realizing that she too was aging, made the effort to get there. Their reunion is a moving testimony to connection and communication across race, language, gender, and above all across time and cultures, and this surely is the most valuable insight the book offers.

Thunder on the Tundra takes the reader to the Kitikmeot area of Bathurst Inlet on the western edge of Nunavut. It also brings us forward to the present by presenting this beautiful part of Canada through the eyes and words of Qitirmiut elders. Natasha Thorpe, the principal researcher on studies of the caribou in the great Bathurst herd, functions here rather as Julie Cruikshank does in *Life Lived Like a Story* and Julie Wachowich does in *Saqijjuq*—hers is just one voice and she quickly recedes behind the voices and stories of the Inuit as they tell us about their deep cultural links with and knowledge of the Tuktu (caribou).

Thunder on the Tundra “is by and for the Kitikmeot elders and hunters involved in the Tuktu and Nogak Project” (a research project on the Bathurst area caribou), and it represents a “community-driven” effort to preserve Inuit knowledge about the Caribou. The basis of the book is the 37 interviews held with hunters and elders between 1996 and 2000, but the narrative woven from the interviews is supplemented by splendid maps, photographs, drawings, linguistic information, and extensive quotation.

The authors of the book speak with a collective voice when providing background or commenting upon the many challenges faced in undertaking this kind of work. Thus, there are sensitive reflections on what happens to oral narratives when they are frozen by writing them down or on what is lost through translation from the local language, Inuinnaqtun (a dialect of Inuktitut, which is spoken across the Canadian

Arctic), into English. Significantly, what is lost is the rich nuance of Inuinnaqtun, which has many words for caribou or where a single word like *nuna* (land) conveys the complex inter-relationship of human, spiritual, and animal life with the tundra. This is the kind of collective effort I have come to expect from contemporary research in the North, and it is a fine example of the new order of cultural study that returns information to the community that created it as well as providing others, who may never have the chance to go north, a glimpse into a remote but precious part of our shared world.

Kiyooka Collaborations

**John O’Brian, Naomi Sawada,
and Scott Watson, Eds.**

All Amazed For Roy Kiyooka. Arsenal Pulp P/
Morris and Helen Belkin Art Gallery/
Collapse \$19.95

Reviewed by Joanne Saul

All Amazed is a welcome addition to the small but growing corpus of critical writings on the poet, painter, photographer and teacher, Roy Kiyooka. Edited by the organizers of a conference on Kiyooka held in Vancouver in 1999, this volume of essays, reflections, poems, and photographs successfully conveys the collaborative spirit, multidisciplinary energy, and intimacy that characterized that unique event.

The editors’ introduction suggests that the conference came out of a desire to bring Kiyooka’s two worlds – of writing and painting – together within a context of both academic and non-academic discourses. To this end, the book, like the conference itself, is divided in two parts. The first half is made up of the transcripts of a celebration of Kiyooka, curated by Daphne Marlatt and Michael Ondaatje. Through remembrances, anecdotes, music, dance, video, and readings of Kiyooka’s poems,

participants including Michael de Courcy, Joy Kogawa, George Bowering, Gerry Shikatani, Sarah Sheard, Fumiko Kiyooka, and Roy Miki all evoke with love, humour, and, perhaps most insistently, a feeling of camaraderie, Kiyooka's originality as an artist, his sense of astonishment with the world, and his "waterslide laugh."

All Amazed also selects four of the conference papers that offer a range of perspectives both on Kiyooka's poetry as well as on his transition from painting to photography. In Roy Miki's paper, Kiyooka's friend and editor celebrates Kiyooka's refusal to succumb to the "relentless globalizing commodification of everyday life." Describing Kiyooka's "athwarted" position as being both "of it and not of it," Miki suggests that such a subject position, especially in the 1950s and 60s, was a traumatic and often lonely one to inhabit, but ultimately was the source of Kiyooka's resilient agency in the face of globalizing pressure. A former student of Kiyooka's, Henry Tsang provides a wonderfully intimate portrait of Kiyooka as collaborator, mentor, teacher, and friend. Interspersed throughout Tsang's reminiscences are excerpts from Kiyooka's gift to his graduating class, a collection of poems in which Kiyooka counsels his students on the "fine art of articulation" and encourages them to "always intuit." Sheryl Conkelton, a freelance curator, begins her essay with the confession, "I am the token stranger in this volume" and, in fact, while the other essays are deeply intimate and speak from within a sense of community, Conkelton's is more distanced and measured in tone and provides a perspective from someone not intimately familiar with the nuances of RK's life and circumstances. Conkelton links Kiyooka's photographic essays to the work of American photographers Minor White, Robert Frank, and Aaron Siskind, artists whose works she argues aspire to self-awareness as much or more than to the analysis of cultural sys-

tems. Conkelton concludes that Kiyooka's ambition was "to be present and watchful and to express the present and watching individual." Like Miki's essay, Scott McFarlane's final essay on *StoneDGloves* underscores the resilient and resistant power of Kiyooka's work in the face of the relentless onslaught of global capitalism. McFarlane argues that it is through work like that of Kiyooka – insistent as that work is on the traces of the Japanese workers who erected the site of Expo 70 in Osaka or of the hibukasha whose memories persist there – that the ghosts that haunt the project of globalization live on.

All Amazed affirms Kiyooka's resistance to cant, to commodification, to homogenization. Kiyooka's constant striving for presence and articulation in his work ensured that his positive legacy would survive him, as indeed it does in the present volume.

Frye in China

Jean O'Grady and Wang Ning, Eds.

Northrop Frye: Eastern and Western Perspectives.
U of Toronto P \$50

Reviewed by Graham Good

This is a wintry season for Frye's work in the West, to use his own cyclic metaphor. Even in his native Canada, it is not uncommon for graduate seminars on literary theory to completely ignore the greatest literary theorist and critic that Canada has produced. While the University of Toronto Press continues to issue the multi-volume *Collected Works*, the once-great repute of the Wizard of the North is now maintained only by a few Keepers of the Flame, who continue to edit and comment on his oeuvre. Perhaps the turning point was Terry Eagleton's dismissal of Frye as displaying "a deep fear of the actual social world, a distaste for history itself," in Eagleton's much-reprinted tour of critical approaches in *Literary Theory* (1982). This shallow but

influential judgment could be seen to mark the transition from Frye's period of dominance to the hegemony of Marxist-derived approaches in the 1980s and 1990s, most of which had in common the assumption that literature is reducible to ideology.

In the East, at least in China, it seems to be spring or summer for Frye, however. Where the West moved from Frye to Marx as a source for criticism, China moved in the opposite direction. Following the Cultural Revolution of 1966-76, Chinese criticism began slowly to open to non-Marxist approaches to literature, and Frye's work emerged as an important influence. According to Ye Shuxian, the interest in archetypal criticism in China "weakened the dominant position of the sociological critical mode and changed the rigid mindset of scholars." This could be seen as the reverse process to what happened in the West. As to why Frye in particular became prominent, Jean O'Grady suggests that his predilection for numbered sets of items appealed to a culture which had enshrined such sets (especially fours), from the Buddhist Four Noble Truths to the Communist Four Modernizations. Perhaps, too, Frye's universalizing schemes of classification of modes, periods, and so on, was able to rival Marxism's similar scope more effectively than other Western theories. As for Frye's "Eurocentrism," this seems to be more of a problem for some Western than for Chinese critics. Gu Mingdong, for instance, in his essay "The Universal Significance of Frye's Theory of Fictional Modes," finds Frye's categories to be eminently (though not entirely) applicable to Chinese literature. Further, Robert Denham's piece on "Frye and the East" shows from the unpublished notebooks that Frye was much more conversant with Asian religion and literature than has so far appeared.

Whatever the reason for Frye's importance in China, it was indicated in two major conferences on his work, the first in

Beijing in 1994, and the second in Hohhot, Inner Mongolia, in 1999. The present volume is based on the second conference, though it also includes a revised version of Robert Denham's paper from the first. The resultant collection, a different version of which was published in China in 2001, is structurally a little odd, in that although many of the papers were delivered in China, less than half are centrally concerned with the Chinese dimension; the others are simply essays on Frye's work. There is also a contrast between the anticipatory tone of the Chinese contributors, who tend to talk of "pushing forward the acceptance and study of archetypal criticism in China," and the tone of nostalgia for Frye's heyday more common among the Western critics.

The general standard of the contributions is high. Graham Forst reminds us of the importance of Kant throughout Frye's career, especially the idea of "disinterest" in aesthetic judgment, while Jean O'Grady explores Frye's idea of "freedom" in liberal education (both concepts spurned by ideological critics). Glen Robert Gill takes on Eagleton's dismissal of Frye, and shows that while Frye rarely replied directly to critics of his work, he still did so indirectly: "*Words with Power* represents myth criticism's engagement with its antithesis, materialist criticism." Jan Gorak illuminates the intellectual context of Frye's early theory of comedy, while Michael Dolzani shows how the happy ending of comedy is for Frye not merely wish-fulfillment, but is a symbol of "what the world looks like after the ego has disappeared." Sandra Djwa reconstructs Frye's formative role in Carl Klinck's *Literary History of Canada* (1965), while James Steele is able to use Frye's theory of narrative forms to elucidate the structure of Margaret Atwood's *Cat's Eye*. Thomas Willard shows how Frazer and Spengler both influenced Frye's view of "the primitive" in Canadian literature. Wang Ning

argues that Frye's "significant contributions" to the emergence of Cultural Studies may have been overlooked because of the dominance of Marxist influence on that field. Wu Chizhe picks up a surprising number of references to Chinese culture in Frye's work, but sees his insights as inevitably limited by not knowing the language.

Overall, this collection provides a number of new angles on Frye, and shows that his work is much broader in scope, durable in time, and global in impact than the caricature of it which passes muster in "materialist" surveys of the history of criticism. Perhaps the current sense of fatigue with narrowly ideological approaches to literature indicates that a new spring season of Frye's influence may be coming in the West as well as the East.

Chic Canadians

Alexandra Palmer

Couture and Commerce: The Transatlantic Fashion Trade in the 1950s. U of British Columbia P \$65.00

Reviewed by Maria Noëlle Ng

Fashion has become an academic subject under various disciplinary patronages. In the broadest application, fashion can be studied as social history; more specifically, fashion is an intrinsic part of gender discourse. It is also reasonable to assume that fashion should be of interest to everyone, since we all participate in continuous self-representation. Hence, it is no surprise that more and more serious publications are available on fashion as a subject, from dealing with a piece of garment such as the corset (by Valerie Steele) to an analysis of the men's suit and construction of masculinity (by David Kuchta). *Couture and Commerce* is a welcome addition to this body of work, especially when the writer, Alexandra Palmer, desires to explore the designing, marketing, and consumption of

fashion "through an examination of the Canadian position in a triangle that connected Toronto to Europe and New York in the couture trade." Any attempt to put Canada on the fashion map should be encouraged.

Alexandra Palmer is Costume Curator at the Royal Ontario Museum and Adjunct Professor in Art History at York University. She became interested in the subject of Canadian couture culture in the 1950s while "working with couture clothes themselves in the textile and costume collection" of the ROM. Palmer was intrigued by "the social history of haute couture and the lives of its consumers." Through tracing the history of specific pieces of costumes, she believes she could "begin to assess the subtle and ephemeral issues of need, value, and longevity that influenced a woman's individual couture purchases." For her data, Palmer concentrates on couture culture in post-war Toronto. The period between 1945 and 1960, Palmer writes, "circumscribes a rapid cultural, social, and economic expansion in Canada as it gained a place in global politics" and Toronto "encapsulated this era of change for English Canada."

The book is illustrated by two types of visual reproductions: those of the dresses and those of the wearers. The dresses, even in the photographs, are alluring objects, and one can easily imagine the pleasurable appeal they provide in their materiality. These early couture designs also show where current designers, even an iconoclast such as Galliano (for Dior), get their ideas. Thus, one can also understand why anyone handling these costumes would want to produce a book on them. The other set of photographs are of what Palmer calls "elite women," those who could afford to buy couture. Though Palmer believes that the approach taken by the book "challenges entrenched mythologies . . . of [couture] wearers as stereotyped symbols of conspicuous consumption," it is pretty hard to

argue away the fact that one has to be pretty damned wealthy to afford even a pair of couture knickers. These elite women seemed to have favoured rather sedate designs, and as Palmer admits, “there was an informal Canadian consensus that to be too fashionable was in fact, un-Canadian.” The Torontonians taste in the 1950s was definitely an English-Canadian taste, though Palmer claims that “Canadian taste was regulated and filtered by professionals,” including Paris *vendeuses*. It is certainly ironic that when one could afford couture, one would still prefer not to be too fashionable. One wonders what these elite women would make of couture today from fashion bad boy Alexander McQueen.

Like many works about fashion, this book does not betray a knowledge of real experience of the fashion trade. The allure of the garment is extended to the business and the wearer. The reality, then and now, is quite different from that genteel world imagined by outsiders. The buying and selling of fashion is as hard a business as selling used cars; the bottom line is to clinch the transaction. The near-feudal relationship between sales girls, as they would have been called in the 1950s, and their clients, as posited in *Couture and Commerce*, is very much idealized. There have always been at least two sides to fashion: the sheen of the design and the hard knocks of the commerce. Of all the major stores mentioned in *Couture and Commerce*, only Holt Renfrew is still flourishing as a purveyor of high fashion, and for good reason. The company has never been afraid of being too fashionable because it is good business.



Well-Versed in Signals

Elise Partridge

Fielder's Choice. Signal \$14.00

Richard Sanger

Calling Home. Signal \$14.00

John Steffler

Helix: New and Selected Poems. Signal \$16.00

Matthew Sweeney

A Picnic on Ice: Selected Poems. Signal \$16.00

Reviewed by Antje M. Rauwerda

Reading these four collections led me to theorize that contemporary poetry strives toward one of three goals: to present an incident so that its larger relevance floods the reader with insight; to present language in a new way so that words themselves become a riddle, the solution of which makes the poem's reader discover something new; or to present a narrative so that the poem's form adds to the unfolding of a very concise, compact, and linguistically rich short story.

This story-telling function I hadn't encountered in a sustained way until I read the Irish poet Matthew Sweeney's delectable, Edward Gorey-like *A Picnic on Ice*. The volume includes new poems, but also selections from ten previous collections published over the last twenty years. Two things struck me: that his poetic voice and style have remained remarkably consistent over two decades, and that all of these poems are gem-like, condensed stories. His quirky vignettes, like the prose works of Nicola Barker, are often full of dead bodies, ghosts, and peculiar investigations (like one into a man who left a note in his home—"you'll never find me"—and then killed himself in a purposely-built, underground bunker). They use details to suggest suffering and loss. (For instance, an abandoned husband knows his wife is truly gone because she has taken only the spaniel and the clock.) However, Sweeney's language is nothing special. It is comfortable, never

jarring, and an ideal vehicle for the spectacle each story presents. But Sweeney does not use it to make us think about language, or indeed to think about much beyond the stories in the poems themselves. This works, and I love it, but it seems an unusual way to use poetry.

John Steffler's technique is perhaps more familiar: personal anecdote becomes, in verse, something new that teaches us about ourselves, or about the world. In *Helix: New and Selected Poems*, early poems invoke Steffler's life as a tradesman; with him our eyes boggle at rows and rows of faucets at a tap fair. Poems excerpted from *The Grey Islands* chronicle Steffler's decision to seek out solitude on an intemperate Atlantic island: many of these are very descriptive (of his reactions to the weather, of his paranoias—fire, floods, intruders—and of how he imagines the island used to be when it was more populous). In the material from *The Grey Islands* and *The Night We Were Ravenous*, Steffler's work is uneven. There are some gorgeous pieces as well as those that feel too much like reading someone else's diary or travelogue. Steffler's work is perhaps most exciting in his new poems; his experimentation with form is also most pronounced in these, as he fuses the use of the personal with a sometimes astonishingly effective riddling in language. "Collecting, Bay of Islands, 1998" offers an exceptional use of form and play. It parodies the notes of a nineteenth-century collector, cataloguing instances in his imagination and self-perception (the two things Victorian collectors steadfastly pretended didn't exist). Steffler's imaginative leaps in "Cook's Line" (in which the speaker climbs into a geographic boundary to reshape it) are similarly unusual and effective. "Humber Arm" metaphorizes a river's geography as the arm of a luscious young woman. Not since Raleigh has landscape been so feminine and erotic: never has Canada seemed so bodacious.

Like Steffler, Elise Partridge uses the personal as a starting point in *Fielder's Choice*; like Sweeney, her poems are peppered with unexpected morbidity. Often in Partridge's work, the more cheerful the language, the more sinister its meaning: rhyme, for instance, is frequently used to emphasize shifts in tone and meaning in poems about poverty ("Pauper, Boston 1988"), drudgery ("Temp"), or caterpillar infestations in a highly metaphoric garden ("Plague"). Throughout, Partridge makes frequent allusions to literature and to Christian iconography (though these references are not obscure enough to merit the collection's explanatory endnotes). She also relies quite heavily on terms (sometimes philosophical) and names (often horticultural), which strike me as a too-easy shorthand, allowing the author to sidestep the hard work of making language evoke the things she describes; the mere naming leaves the reader with only a general impression. I want to ask: "What specifically does *your* Queen Anne's Lace look like? Pale and delicate or overblown and husky with spreading growth making the white fronds too much like cauliflower?" I like *Fielder's Choice* best in its descriptions of women and their lives or, more especially, of their houses as emblematic of their lives and histories. I think Partridge's work with interiors (of houses and women) and exteriors (the garden as liminal private/public feminine space) is especially insightful and rich.

Richard Sanger's *Calling Home* is quite masculine and very much about Sanger himself. For example, more than one poem describes Sanger's seduction of a woman (as in the explicit "oh, she relents and sinks again / And this you hear, you don't imagine: 'Richard'" or "There was a woman to be sung, / And someone called Richard—who?—Richard sang her"). Perhaps I am simply not the right reader for Sanger. I think he may be funny. Sometimes I get it: the "grecian urn" as "greasy urn" in "The

Prince Drops In” is entertaining. Sometimes I don’t: his rhyming of “Parnassus” with “the masses” in “The Mountain Muse” just makes me uncomfortable. The poems in which Sanger goes beyond his own experiences are often fabulous. “Pilgrim,” in memory of his grandmother, is a beautiful, powerful piece. “Law of the Local Rink” and “Night Drive” were written to accompany Bach’s cello suite #6 (gavotte) and James Rolph’s “Drop” (for piano and violin), respectively. The concept is lovely, and the two poems make evocative use of sound.

Overall, Sanger left me craving more that I could take out of the collection and into the world; I wanted to be able to use his language and images as a lens through which I could re-envision what I know. In Partridge’s work too, I often selfishly wanted more. The biggest difference between Sweeney on one hand and Sanger and Partridge on the other (with Steffler coming mid-way between the two sides) is that Sweeney’s poems set out to surprise a reader who is, implicitly, always there. As a reader, this attention is gratifying. It brings me, however, to the question of what poems are meant to be these days. These four collections suggest that they are about insight, language, and storytelling. But poems are also about audience. A poem can be a fabulous invitation to the author, to an individual, and to the reader. The trick—as writer or reader—is to negotiate the possibilities.



Lyrics and Larks

Robert Priest

Blue Pyramids: New and Selected Poems. ECW \$16.95

matt robinson

how we play at it: a list. ECW \$15.95

Stephen Scobie

The Spaces in Between: Selected Poems 1965–2001. NeWest P \$19.95

Reviewed by Tim Conley

Can poetry be funny? The question may at first sound idiotic, but try posing it to someone else, try addressing it to your favourite poets and poems, and you may have to reconsider: whaddyamean, *funny*? Poetry, the institution, typically assumes a sober demeanour.

Robert Priest is reportedly funny (“hilarious” say Susan Musgrave and Mike Bullard). That his songs and poems “are often played on *Sesame Street*” (as the cover copy to his collection *Blue Pyramids* attests) is not difficult to believe: a gangly-armed and dancing goofiness play in much of his work, and the rhythms and ideas may be catchy but are never complex. Priest also displays a highly physical randiness in addresses to lovers (“a night stretched for sex / taut against the meeting of our mouths / thigh to thigh / dawn to dawn”) and odes to the clitoris, sperm, the penis and – orifice of preference here – “the bum”:

due to my profound
knowledge
of the human soul
i can no longer see
even the most shapely
of bums
as anything
but a manifestation
of
duplicity

Whether that’s anything more than cheeky is a doubtful proposition, though it is fun to imagine Cookie Monster reciting it.

Blue Pyramids is sprinkled with songs, such as “Song Instead of a Kiss,” which was recorded by Alannah Myles just before her career went missing, and sequences of “Time Release Poems.” The latter are described as “slogans, sayings, corrections, koans, and connections”: they include such ponderable statements as “Thank god for the devil” and “Good lovers come in pairs” and “‘Doom’ is only ‘mood’ backwards” and “If you want to bounce / you’ve got to hit the bottom.” Unsated fans of *Forrest Gump* and novelty license plates will get the most pleasure here. Priest can be funny (in fact, his comic verse signifies his best potential), but the problem is that he keeps too tight a leash on his whimsy. He poses beside his ideas but refuses to explore or even – not quite the same thing – to test them, and his poems express, ultimately, less a sense of curiosity or beauty than of novelty.

matt robinson’s lighter touch of humour favours the awkward and incongruous. *how we play at it*, his second collection of poetry, is subtitled *a list* “because lists invite addition.” This looks to be a case of a subtitle for subtitle’s sake, for robinson hasn’t the Rabelaisian zeal, and isn’t vulgar enough to favour the index over the lyric. In fact, the overuse of titles in this book (four parts, all poems titled, one with ten subtitles) is its weakness: better a happily gluttonous list of mixed bits than a prissy, itemized program.

robinson continually reaches for what he calls “indelible passion,” though his poems are sometimes shot through with ambivalence about whether permanence exists or is even desirable. We see this dynamic in poems about packing up and moving, about the objective image of a cancer call (contra Atwood: “the difficulty, peg, is that / very little is objective”), about the hit-and-run death of a cat. X-rays provide robinson with one of his strongest conceits: the extraordinary awareness of something

(or someone) being solid but transparent. In these lights, living bodies become

respective museums, fleshy or synaptic;
broken or
discarded – adrift – in that

sticky – sometimes sweet, sharp –
human cocktail.

What is funny in robinson’s poetry is the world in which it takes place.

Stephen Scobie’s name is by now synonymous with a certain kind of formal lyric, and *The Spaces in Between* affords no laughs, but some good smiles. Scobie likes puns, including bilingual ones (but unfortunately he likes explaining them just as much), and homage by emulation: he usually achieves a wistfulness that is remarkable for its strange and steady force. “The Love Song of Alice B. Toklas” turns Stein’s style into a sentimental ditty, which really should be harder to do than Scobie makes it seem:

Alice knitted. I never did.
I never grew lonely.
Alice said something.
Alice never died.
Alice could outlast unruly servants.
I needled Alice sometimes.
Paris elicits cultural tension.
Alice could loosen everything.

This collection excludes the more ambitious book-length poems, such as *McAlmon’s Chinese Opera* (1980), and often reads as a diary of occasional verses. Scobie’s measured responses to such varied stimuli as Judy Garland, *West Side Story* and his modernist touchstones (Pound, Stein, and Djuna Barnes) are at nearly every moment staged for a third party. Pedantry has a lot to do with this need to explain. “Rain,” for example, echoes how “Apollinaire let it fall on his page / drizzling the letters in column down”: a serviceable if prosaic description of an object. Sometimes, reading poems such as these, one has that sensation of having to listen as

a cheery fellow gallery-goer at one's elbow expounds on the wonders of a given work.

An interesting, if inconsistent, exception is "Maureen: poems for the weeks of her dying," the book's finale. Here the reader often feels an intruder on another's scene, a passing witness in Victoria General Hospital who overhears: "Sometimes it seems it's been easier / to write in praise of a pile / of Parisian stones // than to remember your smile / and your total generosity." It's when Scobie speaks neither to nor for the ages but to and for an immediate human being, here his dying wife, that his poetry best achieves the sad humour he seeks, best remembers a smile.

Less Is More

Michael Redhill

Fidelity. Anchor \$25.00

Kevin Patterson

Country of Cold. Vintage \$24.00

Reviewed by Robert Amussen

The nine pleasant and well-crafted stories in Michael Redhill's *Fidelity* are varied in settings but all deal with perils and pitfalls inherent in relationships among friends, siblings, former and present marital partners, and between parent and child. Whether singly or together they justify the heavily freighted title is another matter.

"Mount Morris" concerns the latest of Tom and Lillian's annual reunions. Tom is an itinerant photographer while Lillian lives in the small town of the title in a house she shares with her aged mother. The couple, although divorced for many years, cling to these yearly trysts as some sort of ritual marital souvenir. (Lillian cooks dinner, Tom spends the night.) They divorced over the question of children—Lillian wanted them, Tom didn't. Tom cited the early death of his own father to justify his position, raising the spectre of their children growing up fatherless. However, aside

from this aversion to having children of his own, his father's untimely death seems to have left Tom otherwise unscarred. After dinner and a good deal of wine consumed by both, Tom tells Lillian he is seeing another woman and thinks it best he sleep on the sofa rather than share her bed as he had earlier promised.

The narrator of "Split" is the Tom of the first story who is now with his new lady friend, possibly married, as it is suggested she is pregnant. So much for parenthood phobia. On a whim he stops at a casino on his way home from a business trip to try his hand at the blackjack table. The other players are, predictably, an assortment of types, but the focus is on Arlene and Jonas and the ambiguous nature of their relationship—were they once married and are they now? The narrative support is a skilful account of the critical hands dealt over the course of the evening and how the several players bet their cards. The author's command of this material is impressive.

Redhill's strengths are with narrative and dialogue, and his stories are structurally sound. Despite occasional outsize rhetorical flourishes, there is a surface polish to the prose. It is the characters who inhabit these scenarios that somehow fail to come to life. Even with the careful provision of appearance, background, and temperament, they do not stay in the mind and at times seem interchangeable. The Catherine of "Long Division" could have been cast for the role of Lillian in "Mount Morris." And Kevin and Robert in "The Logic of Reduction" seem much like the narrator of "Cold." Another problem is Redhill's penchant for the sentimental, especially notable in "Orchards." This collection is probably best considered as early excursions in short fiction by a writer who hit his stride with his first novel (*Martin Sloane* won a Commonwealth Writers' Prize).

The *Country of Cold* as it takes shape in Kevin Patterson's collection of loosely

linked stories is at some remove from the largely middle-class landscape of Michael Redhill's fictions. Many of the stories are indeed set in places certifiably frigid—the Arctic, Northern Ontario, and Manitoba in winter—but Paris and Montreal also serve as backdrops. The collection's subtitle, *Stories of Love and Death*, is also apt. Kevin Patterson is a confident writer and he gets right to work. The first story begins with two spare sentences alive with action and information:

It was a Tuesday when Lester came home from work, five in the morning and the sky bled pale in the east, trailer empty. Rhonda was gone, gone, gone.

Lester tends bar at the Rushing River Bar and Grill and lives in the aforementioned trailer with his girlfriend Rhonda, a relationship beginning to show signs of wear. Rhonda thinks they should buy a house; Lester is happy with things as they are. Lester, though, is no dummy, and his shock at finding Rhonda gone is mixed with the recognition it could well have been foreseen. Food becomes his main consolation, that and heart-to-hearts with Corinne, a waitress at the bar and a friend of Rhonda's. From these we learn of Corinne's worries about what she sees as the fragile nature of her relationship with Sam, with whom Lester has begun to hang out. One night in Sam's welding workshop the two men conceive the plan to build a barrel in which Lester will attempt to ride the Rushing River Falls, the town's major tourist draw. This beautifully crafted story with its surprising, even melodramatic, conclusion shows Patterson's considerable gifts as a writer. Chief among them is his commitment to his characters, and through his characters to the shifting prisms of love. It is also through his characters that we recognize the scars of sorrow and loss, the pleasures of vocation, and the sibling bond of the comic and the tragic.

In "Interposition," a Canadian graduate student in Paris meets an American woman and her daughter Giselle at a concert. They begin an affair. When he stays over, the grad student walks Giselle to school, nods "Bonjour" to the mothers of other students and some afternoons, takes her to the Luxembourg Gardens to play. During the last of these excursions, before the grad student returns to Canada and mother and the father get back together, the grad student instructs Giselle in the art of the pitchout in baseball. In the space of ten pages, three relationships go under the microscope—mother and father, mother and lover, lover and daughter. It is the last that turns out to be the only one of substance, the only one in which both partners care enough not to trifle with each other.

Most of the characters in the stories turn out to be members of the class of 1984 from a small town high school in Manitoba. It is not necessary to know this to appreciate the stories. Indeed, I was unaware of it until I read the publisher's blurb on the back cover. The clue is meant to be the concluding sentence of every story except the last: "This was in. . ." with a different year cited in each instance. In practice it turns out to be more of a puzzle than a clue. Separating the stories are brief reflective commentaries. These elegant transitional notes provide a connecting thread stronger than the shared experience of high school.

Patterson's first book, *The Water in Between*, has been widely praised. He was trained as a doctor, a discipline that has produced a number of fine writers. With this terrific collection he takes his rightful place in that company.



Recovering Maritime Popular Fiction

Margaret Marshall Saunders

Beautiful Joe. Formac Fiction Treasures \$16.95

W. Albert Hickman

The Sacrifice of the Shannon. Formac Fiction Treasures \$16.95

Reviewed by Cecily Devereux

Although book reissues have proliferated with the expansion of internet access, and many out-of-print and past-copyright works are increasingly widely available in electronic form, paper reprints continue somewhat surprisingly to appear, indeed, to have been on the rise—in Canada, at any rate. Broadview Press has been issuing new and reprint editions of a range of texts in English for several years; Formac Publishing in Halifax has begun a new series of reprints, with Formac Fiction Treasures. The series is regional in its scope: it is “aimed at offering contemporary readers access to books that were successful, often huge bestsellers in their time, but which are now little known and often hard to find” and which are written by Maritime writers of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Two of the once-popular works republished by Formac in 2001 are Margaret Marshall Saunders’ *Beautiful Joe* and *The Sacrifice of the Shannon* by W. Albert Hickman. *Beautiful Joe* is the better-known of these two novels: Marshall Saunders’ story of a dog—told by a dog—appeared in 1894, initially submitted to a competition held by the American Humane Education Society—whose two-hundred-dollar prize it won—and subsequently becoming one of the most widely read novels by an English-Canadian writer of the nineteenth century: it is often identified, as it is in this edition, as the first English-Canadian novel “to sell more than a million copies in the author’s lifetime.”

Beautiful Joe is not plot-driven: the narrative is constructed as a series of linked vignettes, initially imagined, we are told, by the eponymous narrator, as a year-by-year account of his life following his rescue from an abusive owner, but becoming instead a loose chain of accounts of human behaviour to animals, observed by animals.

Beautiful Joe is deliberately and unself-consciously didactic: its overt purpose is to instruct people, especially children, in the importance of kindness to animals, something that the work suggests is an index of human’s behaviour to one another and thus of the well-being of societies. Saunders’ novel, although its sentimental appeal will have diminished, continues to be of interest, in part because its didacticism is suggestively comparable to the kind of instructional objective that motivates so much contemporary children’s literature, in part because its arguments for finding a balance between human and animal life are, if not exactly current, nonetheless ongoing in environmental debates.

Beautiful Joe is a case-book of a particular kind of nineteenth-century North American social reform—protecting animals, training children to be kind to one another through caring for animals, temperance, dress reform (at least, abolishing the harvesting of feathers for women’s hats and dress), anti-urban living (the city is repeatedly invoked as a site for social problems). The introduction by Gwendolyn Davies, general editor of the fiction series, is particularly useful: clear and concise, the introduction situates the novel in relation to Saunders’ own life and work. W. Albert Hickman’s only novel, *The Sacrifice of the Shannon*, first appeared in 1903, identified in the author’s preface as a story based on his own experiences on the *Minto*, an ice-breaker in the Gulf of St. Lawrence. Most of the story’s action—and there is a lot, and it is exciting—occurs on the icefields between Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island, as

the ship of the title, the *Shannon*, races to rescue a trapped steamer. This novel is a great read; it is also an interesting work in terms of its relation to early twentieth-century constructions of gender and place in popular and genre fiction: the icebreaker's race, like the yacht race that begins the story and sets up the later contest, is embedded in a love story that repeatedly draws attention to shifting ideals of masculinity and femininity and their performance. Ian Johnston's introduction is brief and useful, providing information about the little-known Hickman and about the context for the story.

Formac Fiction Treasures, thus far, is a superb series. The value and interest of these recovered Maritime works inheres not only in their drawing renewed attention to a range of popular texts produced in eastern Canada and with a broad circulation through North America, but in their potential collective focus on the construction and representation of place. There is not, it should be noted, a lot of information for scholarly readers in the texts—only a short introduction, and no textual notes—and, while it would be nice to have more by way of apparatus, such editions would not be as accessible or as affordable as these are.

Facing One's Inner Felines

Moacyr Scliar

Max & the Cats. Eloah Giacomelli, trans.

Key Porter Books \$14.95

Reviewed by Linda Morra

Although *Max and the Cats* initially attracted controversial attention when some critics believed Yann Martel had used the book as far more than a source of inspiration for the Booker Award-winning *Life of Pi*, Moacyr Scliar's book need not be overshadowed by Martel's novel: it may be regarded as outstanding on its own terms. *Max and the Cats* traces the political, emo-

tional and psychological development of its protagonist, Max Schmidt. In the first of the book's three sections, "The Tiger of the Wardrobe," Scliar demonstrates how Max develops an apparently pathological fear of felines, which is engendered by a stuffed Bengal tiger in his father's furrier store. Fascinated at first by the exotic furs that occupy the store, he becomes particularly terrified of the stuffed tiger whose "eyes glint[ed] with a fierce brightness." The day his father obliges him to go to the store on his own, and Max must confront the stuffed animal on his own for the first time, he crosses a political demonstration which turns violent: the association between violent politics and felines is thus established and maintained throughout the narrative.

In the book's second part, "The Jaguar in the Dinghy," Max finds himself obliged to flee Germany after his lover's husband betrays him to the Nazis, who are pursuing him. The ship upon which he embarks in his attempts to escape, however, sinks in the middle of the ocean, and he finds himself (or imagines himself) adrift in a dinghy with a jaguar. He is later rescued and brought to Brazil where, as explored in the third section, "The Onca on the Hilltop," he tries not altogether successfully to begin a new life. He marries an Indian woman, Jaci, has a daughter, Hildegarde, and sets up a relatively lucrative farm.

The jaguar is patently to be associated with all that threatens Max—including his own "inner demons"—and is conflated with the Nazi presence throughout the book: such references as those to Nazis "already showing their claws" and to Max's neighbour, George Backhaus (whom Max believes to be a Nazi finding refuge in Brazil), as a "beast" who needs to be lured "away from his lair" underscore this association. Until the book's final and ultimate encounter, after which time Max is finally "at peace with his felines" and even devotes "himself to raising pedigree cats," he flees

from rather than deals with that which threatens his political, psychological and physical well-being. Since Scliar infuses fantastical elements in everyday events, as is typical of magic realist writing, it is difficult to determine whether Max's sightings of the jaguar or his belief in Backhaus as a Nazi in hiding are credible. Whether these threats are real or imagined, however, are of lesser importance to the necessity of Max's confrontation with and triumph over what he most fears.

The Two Cohens

Stephen Scobie, Ed.

Intricate Preparations: Writing Leonard Cohen.
ECW Press \$19.95

**Graeme Gibson, Wayne Grady,
Dennis Lee and Priscila Uppal, Eds.**

*Uncommon Ground: A Celebration of Matt
Cohen.* Knopf \$29.95

Reviewed by Norman Ravvin

A writer's move away from the hard work of creating and revising new material, and into the netherworlds of audience adulation and commemoration dramatically changes the way he is received. Matt Cohen had a period of renewed popular attention shortly before he died, and in the past few years, he has had a downtown Toronto park named for him, as well as the edited volume, *Uncommon Ground: A Celebration of Matt Cohen* released to remember and review his career. Leonard Cohen's predicament is somewhat stranger, in that he is alive, but exists for the most part as a celebrity to be honoured, reminisced about, and in the case of *Intricate Preparations: Writing Leonard Cohen*, turned over and examined like a piece of fine jade by an international coterie of academics and fans.

Like other celebratory volumes and conferences devoted to Leonard Cohen, this one includes a brief contribution – two poems – meant to conjure the writer's real

writing life. And one can't help thinking of Cohen's old adage, that a writer must blacken the pages, in response to "Kitchen Table" and "What Baffled Me," which are mere shadows of his earlier work. They appear to be proof that there has been too little blackening of late.

Most strangely, *Intricate Preparations* begins with a two-pager by our Governor General, Adrienne Clarkson, who has, no doubt, made her mark on the national culture. But it's difficult to make sense of her opening salvo: "Everything Leonard Cohen says is a sleek embodiment of meaning coming down a corridor at you from the gilded rooms of a glittering palace you only dream about."

Stephen Scobie, a devotee, poet, and one of the first serious Canadian critics of Cohen's work, introduces *Intricate Preparations* by informing us that although Cohen produces little new work, as part of the "virtual phenomenon of the Internet," web sites dedicated to him are full of yearning after the would-be next CD, the rumoured fresh collection of poetry. But this is Elvis-land; Montgomery Clift-country. Enough about the yearners and the full-fledged reputation. Let's have some pages worthy of the blackening, or an album with the staying power of *New Skin for the Old Ceremony*.

Doug Beardsley's reminiscence of a late-1950s reading by Cohen is well described, but achingly short. Kevin Flynn recalls a meeting with an aging Irving Layton, who opined: "Leonard Cohen is a narcissist who hates himself." These are short memoiristic passages, set alongside more developed essays, such as Frank Davey's "*Beautiful Losers: Leonard Cohen's Postcolonial Novel*." Here, Davey makes the sensible claim that *Beautiful Losers* "can be read as a strong response to francophone Quebec nationalism of the 1960s," alongside the willfully bizarre statement that he "can find no evidence" that the novel's narrator is Jewish. This must be a form of post-Cohen

criticism, before the fact of the author's full evaporation from the scene, at which point we can feel free to say anything about him, as some do of such yearned-after personas as Elvis Presley. Davey's misreading of *Beautiful Losers* allows him to highlight the postcolonial prescience of the novel. But this aspect of the narrative is not contradicted by the very real and serious investigation Cohen offers of the Jewish shadow that inhabits the postcolonial project. Davey, it seems, would like to write the former out of the latter Canadian critical tableau.

There are interesting things in *Intricate Preparations*: Carmen Ellison's examination of the role of autobiography in *The Favourite Game*; and Sandra Wynands' discussion of the way *Flowers for Hitler* responds to the Holocaust. But for the most part, *Intricate Preparations* is a book of great strangeness, in which the preparations are skittish and star struck.

Uncommon Ground: A Celebration of Matt Cohen finds a more suitable tone, and a more cohesive group of contributions to both review and remember Matt Cohen and his work. Its contributors are nearly all Canadian, and this sets the two Cohens apart; though Matt Cohen did attain an international readership, the Internet is not afire with his name. Rather, we get a sense of how closely writers, editors, translators and readers of Cohen were dedicated to him and his work – a kind of old-style community, huddled together in their neighbourhoods, and camped out in coach houses, making books. *Uncommon Ground* serves to keep Matt Cohen's oeuvre, along with the provocative questions it raised regarding Canadian literature, in the air. In late career, and particularly through his memoir *Typing: A Life in 26 Keys* (2000), Cohen presented himself as an anomaly, a challenge to the mainstream tradition. It's conceivable that the discussions he initiated will be relegated to the archive, but it would

be fairer if *Typing* was widely read and recognized as one of our great personal manifestoes on the state of the country, alongside books like Norman Levine's *Canada Made Me* and *Notes from the Century Before* by the American writer Edward Hoagland. The tenor of *Typing* is eccentric, nostalgic, even bitter. Cohen viewed his own career and the overall literary culture of this country through the prism of what he called the dominant "conservative, small-town, restrained, Protestant tradition that found a tremendous echo of self-recognition across the country."

A number of the pieces in *Uncommon Ground* take up these views and place them at the centre of the discussion of Matt Cohen's contribution to Canadian letters. These include an excellent interview conducted by Mervin Butovsky in 1990, in which Cohen opens a discussion he develops in *Typing*. To Butovsky's query about the reception of his novels with Jewish themes, Cohen says: "Even after *Nadine* was published, people would say to me: 'Are you going to write about Canada again?' I would answer that most of *Nadine* takes place in Canada, and that her being Jewish doesn't mean she isn't Canadian. Then they would be offended, as if I'd made a hostile remark." David Homel, who, like Cohen, has contributed to both English and French language literature in Canada, investigates related themes.

For the scholar, or at least the bibliophile, *Uncommon Ground* includes material that addresses the unfinished novel based on the life of Joseph Roth; a detailed chronology of Cohen's life and work; and a lengthy annotated bibliography of Cohen's publications prepared by Beatrice Hausner. Among the most affecting pieces in the collection is Steven Hayward's "Bookselling and Book Writing," a novelistic essay that captures the meaning of Cohen's relationship with his Toronto neighbourhood, and the underworld of used book culture that

thrived there, which seems a perfect metaphor for the rather quirky, non-canonical and unpredictable oeuvre that Matt Cohen produced, beginning with his Coach House years, and ending with the final well-received novels. Hayward gets the tone just right as he muses about Spadina, the street that “runs through a lot of Matt’s fiction.” The neighbourhood has changed, he realizes, and “Matt, too, is gone.”

Contextualizing Bill Reid

Doris Shadbolt

Bill Reid. Douglas & McIntyre \$45.00

Reviewed by Linda M. Morra

The reprinting of Doris Shadbolt’s *Bill Reid* suggests the demand for well written, beautifully produced art history books that engage with contemporary political issues. Shadbolt’s reprinted text demonstrates Douglas & McIntyre’s commitment to producing such books. In elegant and sophisticated prose, Shadbolt sensitively delineates a portrait of this fascinating Haida artist, an identification, she notes, that is meant to link him “with the old stylistic tradition rather than merely to suggest his racial origin.” The book’s framework suggests the various contexts in which Reid has worked and which Shadbolt thus explores. In the first section, “Becoming Haida,” she examines the mingling of English and Haida traditions in Reid’s background; in “Looking Backward,” she investigates how examining a First Nations artist’s life might be complicated by the “the aura of sentiment and association in which our own need has enveloped the whole Indian past” and proceeds to establish the parameters “as an experiencer of art” within which Reid is working; in “Deep Carving,” she then focuses upon the tradition of Haida carving; in “Reid’s Bestiary,” she examines both the mythological fauna that contemporary artists continue to employ and its

function in their – and Reid’s – art; and finally, in “Beyond Art,” she looks at the various other projects in which Reid has become involved.

The story of Reid’s development as an artist might be seen as a reflection of the larger narrative of First Nations communities across Canada and how they have grown and flourished in spite of the adversity they have suffered. At first, Reid was suppressed by a father who incessantly belittled him; in addition, his mother, Sophie Gladstone, rigorously stifled knowledge and traditions of his Native ancestry. As Shadbolt notes, “he has suffered the ambivalence of drawing his real support from one culture, to which he has a legitimate claim, though having been nurtured in another.” Reid could have been completely absorbed by a predominantly white culture. Instead, as Shadbolt notes in her introduction, he has learned from and “contributed to the store of native pride and confidence which was at one time nearly depleted.” From exquisite jewellery to totem poles to such sculptures as *The Raven and the First Men* and *Killer Whale* for which he has accrued a reputation, Reid has both worked within established Native cultural practices and adapted them by introducing new techniques and materials.

As Shadbolt suggests, he also more recently became “the silver-tongued spokesperson for his ‘fabled Haida’ ancestors.” He gave interviews, spoke at special events, and wrote frequently to advocate “his forebears’ essential humanity, as individuals and as a people.” She describes, for example, his participation in the political confrontation in the fall of 1985 on Lyell Island and includes his assertions that the “Haida must have their ancient lands back unviolated to re-establish the links with their distinguished past and build a new future.” In both his artistic endeavours and elsewhere, Shadbolt shows that Reid is committed to his Haida cultural heritage.

Trauma by Analogy

Aki Shimazaki

Tsubaki. Talonbooks \$8.95

Reviewed by Thomas Lamarre

Narratives of the atomic bombs at Hiroshima and Nagasaki describe an experience at once unforgettable and unspeakable. Their structure is that of trauma, and it is almost a commonplace of atomic bomb literature that it strives to tell the untellable, and invariably fails. One way to grapple with this impossibility, this paradox of traumatic experience, is to evoke the horrors of the atomic bomb by analogy. The famous example is Marguerite Duras and Alain Renais's *Hiroshima, Mon Amour*, in which the terror of Hiroshima, impossible to represent, is evoked in relation to the experience of a French woman who suffers the death of German lover and ostracism for her crime of collaboration.

In a very different way, Aki Shimazaki's short novel *Tsubaki* also establishes a structure of analogy, one that promises to tell us something about the horrors of Nagasaki by way of another, equally horrible experience. *Tsubaki* pairs the experience of the atomic bomb with a crime—murder at ground zero—a surprising and disturbing analogy. Yet it works effectively to pose some challenging questions about how we tell the story of war.

Tsubaki opens with a survivor of Nagasaki, a grandmother on her deathbed, finally speaking to her curious grandson about the war and the atomic bomb. Her family thinks (wrongly) that she has not spoken until now because the wartime experience was too painful. Yet *Tsubaki* plays against expectations of a harrowing first-person account of atomic horror and trauma. Indeed, by the end of the first chapter, the grandmother rather mysteriously suggests that, for her, the unforgettable cruelty was neither the war nor the bomb. Rather, the

reader soon learns, she murdered her father just before the bomb dropped.

Because its narrative focus is on the murder and not on the atomic bomb experience, *Tsubaki* has the disturbing effect of making the bomb at Nagasaki appear as an inert background for deeper experiences. Talk of the war and the bomb is oddly impersonal, largely didactic. The grandmother, for instance, stresses the cruelty of both the Americans and the Japanese at war, creating a sense of ethical difficulty and uncertainty. Neither side can lay claim to justice. 'There is no justice, there is only truth,' she concludes. Her grandson, however, remains caught up in this dimension of war experience and history—proud to tell an endless tale of injustice. Are we to attribute this certainty to his youth, his generation or his gender? Or does the problem lie in a certain way of thinking of history that remains interested in superficial evaluations of right and wrong?

Tsubaki continually hints that the problem does lie in immature and superficial ways of imagining history—superficial because they are monumental and judgemental. In contrast, *Tsubaki* poses a sparsely written, suspenseful, rapidly paced story. Part of its beauty comes of the swiftness with which it moves through different layers and registers of memory. Its rapidity not only serves to surprise the reader with twists and turns but also tends to juxtapose different experiences. Using a style of coincidence and fate, the novel continually builds on personal and historical coincidences in order to suggest that historical events are not connected rationally, but fatefully.

The emphasis on coincidence and fate does not, however, result in moral or ethical indifference. *Tsubaki* stresses personal responsibility and atonement. Indeed, the grandmother's crime introduces a structure of guilt and silence that is unusual in atomic bomb literature. Rather than innocence at ground zero, the reader encounters

the complex emotions and motivations of a girl who felt compelled to murder her beloved father. And ultimately, the narrator sees the question “Did she have to kill her father?” to be no different from “Did they have to drop the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki?” She concludes, “All we can do is try to understand what motivates people to act as they do.”

Tsubaki, then, is a story of motivations and truths that demand not judgement but understanding. Therein lies the challenge of its odd and unsettling analogy.

Clueless in Cornwall

Michael V. Smith

Cumberland. Cormorant \$22.95

Reviewed by Lawrence Mathews

Here’s a paragraph chosen (honestly) at random: “What Bea needed most right now was time to herself. Or time away from Ernest. She briefly considered confiding in Amanda but reasoned that it wasn’t smart to tell anyone right now until she was sure what was going on. If only the horrible feeling would go away. Maybe fresh air would help. It wasn’t so late that she couldn’t step out for a walk. The nights were plenty warm enough lately. The air would do her good.”

Is this good writing? The case against: the banal thought processes of an uninteresting character are described in flat, bland prose. The case for: the prose is finely honed to reflect the mentality of an ordinary woman, and isn’t it one of the glories of contemporary fiction that, in it, no person, however “ordinary,” is unworthy of literary attention?

Cumberland is set in the fictional town of the same name, a surrogate for Cornwall, Ontario, Michael V. Smith’s hometown. It chronicles a brief period in the intertwined lives of five characters: Ernest the unemployed millworker, Bea the barmaid, Amanda the teenage vixen, Nick the young widower, Aaron his preadolescent son.

Nick has the simplest role, personifying a sort of stolid decency, but the others all have, in the current cant, “issues.” Ernest has compulsive sex with men he picks up in the local park. Bea has mixed feelings about her newly-launched relationship with Ernest. Amanda is determined to get something going with Nick. Aaron is discovering his sexuality via his uneasy friendship with the schoolyard bully.

All five characters are made sympathetic. All struggle with their problems in credible ways. Sometimes they are kind to one another; sometimes they move haltingly toward self-understanding or acceptance. I have no doubt that many of the “ordinary” citizens of Cornwall/Cumberland live their lives in precisely the manner described here.

And yet—*mea culpa, mea maxima culpa*—this novel is one of the most boring works of fiction I’ve read in the past year. The stench of smugness pervades the whole enterprise, from the dedication (“*To the man who’ll never read a book like this*”) to one character’s unspoken question in the novel’s closing section: “. . . she deserved more, didn’t she? Didn’t they all deserve more than this?”

The man who’ll never read a book like this lacks the education, intelligence, and imagination to allow his life to be enriched by art. And Smith gives us a world of such people—uneducated, none too bright, with no vision of how their lives might change beyond the vague aspiration to possess “more.” They know the ephemeral pleasures of alcohol and sex, and sometimes they’re even able to connect in moments of real empathy and understanding, but everything positive seems to occur haphazardly, unrepeatably. It’s all very sad.

In Cornwall—I’m going out on a limb here—there must be thoughtful, perceptive people whose lives have direction. But not in Cumberland, where no one even attempts to rebel against the prevailing malaise. This is clearly supposed to leave

the reader with no option other than to feel pity for its benighted inhabitants and to salute Smith for his ability to depict their bleak experience unflinchingly.

Unless, of course, the reader feels manipulated and wants something more—perhaps some examination of what, in the end, prevents these individuals from leading the more fulfilling lives that we know are available outside the pages of the novel. How about some intellectually engaging *context*, delivered by a narrative voice whose possessor's IQ is in triple digits? Or how about, simply, more vivid, imaginative writing, making the world of *Cumberland* a more interesting place to visit for nearly 300 pages?

But the smug response to such questions is wearily obvious: the characters themselves have no insight into the larger issues that affect their lives; the characters themselves are incapable of using language imaginatively. You, the reader, are meant to see how they interpret the world, feeling superior to them as they bore you to death in the sacred name of the ordinary. It is, in some deeply mysterious way, good for you. This is one of the gospels preached in creative writing programs throughout the land—Smith holds an MFA from UBC—but few writers of talent are buying it these days. Like all other forms of political correctness, it's a deadly enemy of art.



Short (Canadian) Fiction

Rosemary Sullivan and Mark Levene, Eds.

Short Fiction: An Anthology. Oxford. \$49.95

Reviewed by Robert Thacker

This book is an excellent one, just the thing for a majors course in short fiction or for an introductory survey, by way of more than one text, of the modes of literary expression. The editors' choices are judicious: their coverage begins in the early-nineteenth century with such stalwarts as Hawthorne and Poe, continues into the early-twentieth with a good selection of Modernists, but they dwell most pointedly on a very wide range of contemporary writers—that is, those born since 1930. This rich selection of American, Canadian, British, continental, Native, and Commonwealth figures is the anthology's greatest strength.

Throughout, individual inclusions often surprise (for instance, H. G. Wells is here, as is Beckett) and many of the stories selected avoid the cliché (the Faulkner and Hemingway choices do; Crane and Fitzgerald do not). In shaping their offerings, Sullivan and Levene break their chronological treatment twice: after an enthusiastic and effective introduction to the short story, one that uses a wide range of apt quotations to good effect, they begin with Chekov's "The Lady with the Dog" and, immediately following, Raymond Carver's Chekov-inspired story, "Errand." After each, the editors offer "reflections," responses that allow them to extend their introduction into questions of specific influence and practice. The second variance is less effective; it is the third section, "The Novella," in which that putative form is represented by Melville's "Benito Cereno" and Gallant's "The Moslem Wife."

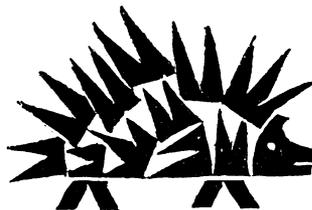
It is easy to find things to quibble about in any anthology—where, the reviewer asks, are Cather, Welty, Wilson, and Metcalf

(my list)—but such points need not be belaboured. Sullivan and Levene made their choices; they are judicious, interesting, and defensible. Fair enough. And in their biographical introductions here the editors refreshingly wear their enthusiasms on their sleeves—many of these are punchy and delightfully well-informed, even gossip (strangely, though, Michael Ondaatje seems to wander through them as some sort of lost oracle). Other introductions, though, are just perfunctory listings of accomplishments. (Guy Vanderhaeghe deserves better than he gets here, for example; probably not surprisingly, there is more than a bit of Toronto-centrism evident here.) More seriously, though, the editors also tend to quote without citation (Aritha van Herk, for instance, is quoted on Keath Fraser’s “resistance to ‘the canonical trend’ of Munro-dominated Canadian story” [696]; there are other such instances of unattributed invocation). Also, the stories are not themselves annotated.

What is most worth considering, though, is the presence of the Canadian story within an anthology titled *Short Fiction*. In 1928, Raymond Knister asserted “the fact that the short story has fared as well as or perhaps better than other forms in Canada is . . . largely owing to the nature of its appeal, which is elemental” (*Canadian Short Stories*, Macmillan: xvi). In recent years, this notion that the short story is preminent in Canada has taken on the heft of a truism, even a shibboleth, illustrated most especially by the careers of Mavis Gallant and Alice Munro and frequently asserted by the absent John Metcalf on behalf of a successor group of younger writers. Gallant and Munro, of course, have long been prominent in what Sullivan and Levene aptly call “the cultural whack of *The New Yorker*” (8), and so have helped make this case. The editors appear here to have bought utterly into this notion since Canadians make up just 20 percent of those

born before 1920 (and where the chronological approach they use somewhat incongruously sandwiches Callaghan between Hemingway and Beckett); between 1920 and 1950, though, Canadians make up over 60 percent of those included and, after that, it drops back to about 45 percent. Overall, just under 40 percent here are Canadians—Indigenous people, those born in Canada (both English-speaking and Québécois in translation), and immigrants.

My point in such counting is not to fault the editors for their inclusions—this is, after all, an anthology from a Canadian publisher presumably aimed at course adoptions in Canada. Doubtless the people at Oxford had some considerable hand in the coverage here. Rather, it is to foreground the method used—Sullivan and Levene do, as their publisher’s back-cover blurb says, “take their cue from Alice Munro’s metaphor [in her 1982 essay, “What is Real?”] of short fiction as a house with many rooms that can be navigated in many different ways: rather than impose interpretations, they open doors, encouraging critical thinking and a multiplicity of readings.” And Sullivan and Levene do, as I said, show themselves largely well-informed and enthusiastic shapers of the text they have constructed. Even so, I still wonder if this really is “Short Fiction.” Or is it “Short (Canadian) Fiction”? Or “Largely Canadian Short Fiction”? But even so again: This is an excellent book, one well-worth considering.



Just be Natural, huh?

Drew Hayden Taylor

The Buz'gem Blues. Talonbooks \$16.95

Reviewed by John Moffatt

He sports dark glasses and a Mountie jacket. Asked about his profession, the Warrior Who Never Sleeps declares, "My aboriginalism is my survival, and my heritage is my paycheck." In *The Buz'gem Blues*, the third instalment in Drew Hayden Taylor's "Blues Quartet," the erstwhile Ted Cardinal, Star Trek aficionado turned spiritual warrior, embodies his author's satirical humour. On one hand, he's a seemingly guileless cliché deployed against cultural pretension. On the other hand, the Warrior lives in a society where a choice of stereotypes passes for individual choice and personal growth.

Set at an Aboriginal Elders' Conference at an unnamed university, *The Buz'gem Blues* reacquaints us with the mother and daughter team of Martha and Marianne Kakina in *The Bootlegger Blues*, as well as with the intergenerational and cross-cultural couple Amos and Summer from *The Baby Blues*. These characters clearly have a history, but Taylor moves quickly to establish the nature of their individual relationships in the present. Mohawk elder Amos' comic patience with the 20-something Summer, an in-your-face wannabe obsessed with her "one-sixty-fourth" Native background, strikes a delicate balance of genuine affection and exasperation ("Summer, you have so much to give. Why do you always have to give it to me?"). The jibes and one-liners that Martha and Marianne exchange wouldn't be out of place in a well-written television sitcom, but the humour never strays far from the subject of cultural perception, as when Martha muses on the irony of the participating in a language workshop:

Just be natural and myself, huh? . . .
When I was young, the government tried beating the language out of us.
Now they're payin' us to speak it. I just wish them white people would make up their minds. So what do we do now?
Want me to say something in Indian?
Aabiish teg zaakimogaming? (Where's the washroom?)

Critics who saw cultural stereotyping in Taylor's *alterNatives* will not enjoy the ostensible contrast of the grounded and worldly-wise Martha, Marianne, and Amos to the neurotic Summer, Warrior Who Never Sleeps, and Thomas Savage, a white anthropologist researching Native sexuality, who keeps a framed picture of his sister's cat on his desk. *The Buz'gem Blues*, however, deftly reconfigures all the relationships which exist at the beginning of the play, creating new pairings (the Ojibway word *buz'gem* means "boyfriend or girlfriend) amongst all of the characters, who variously bond over Spam and nostalgia, Klingon, or the Alligator dance. If Summer and Warrior finally come to question their contrived identities, the play is about more than cultural identification or Native and non-Native dialogue. Taylor breaks down clichéd binaries of Native and White, Age and Youth, Experience and Education, the Elder and the Academic, the Activist and Wannabe to reveal people dealing with age, sexuality, loneliness, independence, and ultimately, with their own individuality. *The Buz'gem Blues* explores how individuals need to learn to see how they see each other, before they can begin to see themselves.



Geographical Attachment

John Terpstra

Falling into Place. Gaspereau \$25.95

Reviewed by Deborah Bowen

As Gareth Griffiths has written in an essay in *Mapping the Sacred* (2001), “Land, and its extensions into theories of the construction of space and place, has emerged . . . as one of the most important recent sites for articulating contemporary cultural concerns.” What has become known as cultural geography explores how a landscape maintains the physical marks of people and their history – how, as Sylvia Bowerbank has suggested, place may be understood not as a static thing but as a production, a category of resistance and transformation. These concerns often manifest themselves in an environmental knowledge that is also a storytelling, a narrative of historical ecology. John Terpstra’s *Falling into Place*, the first sustained prose work by an already well-regarded poet, is this kind of storytelling.

Falling into Place is a kind of bioregional love-story, expressing the love of the poet for the ground on which he stands. Love, he says, is difficult, and “[t]he practice of love is complex, contradictory and embattled.” Nevertheless, the book echoes to a constant refrain: “I am attached to a piece of geography” – even a piece of geography whose “brokenness mirrors my own.” Terpstra’s love-affair is with the Iroquois Bar, a glacial sandbar that stretches from beneath the city of Hamilton out across the westernmost tip of Lake Ontario, underlying one of the area’s busiest transportation corridors: “I am attached to how the lines are drawn here. *Geo graphis*. I am attached to what is written. Inlet, shoreline, bar, ravine.” The trick is, as Jeffery Donaldson has put it, to “discern the lines” that underwrite the paved landscape.

The result is part historical and personal narrative, part exposition of ecological and

geographical layerings, part musing on the meaning of it all. There’s something of Kathleen Norris here, or Sharon Butala, or Henry David Thoreau – that new-old tradition of “spiritual geography” – but Terpstra’s focus is on both the land as body and the body as land: not merely a shameless anthropomorphism, but also a startling geomorphism. Already in the first pages of the book the sandbar is a beached whale, a sleeping giant, a fallen hero, Gulliver’s outstretched arm. From the opening paragraph Terpstra’s words are likened to pebbles, “one for each syllable, in sequence on the sand,” and a central revelation of the book is that he feels pain for the land’s wounds because they are his wounds too: “*we’re made from this stuff*; this earth, this shale, this mud and suffering clay.”

Both geographically and historically, Terpstra has done his homework. As he scabbles up and down the Bar, dodging traffic, listening for the voices of the landscape, he describes how it relates to the Escarpment and to Niagara Falls: “[I]ike many of us who live around, beside and atop this feature of the landscape, the stuff the bar is made of comes from elsewhere.” He takes us into the lives of the first white settlers, Richard and Henrietta Beasley, of Lieutenant-Governor John Simcoe and his diarist wife Elizabeth, of Captain George Hamilton, Sir Allan MacNab, and Thomas B. McQueen and the City Beautiful movement. He explores the ramifications of the War of 1812 and the settling of United Empire Loyalists on this land previously inhabited by indigenous peoples. He tells the stories of the Cholera Stone, the Desjardins Canal, and the first “settlers of the marsh” at Cootes Paradise. One of the several poems in the book opens, “There used to be giants,” and concludes with an echo of the words of 97-year-old Margaret Brunton, moved from beside the marsh in the name of urban development: “I’m telling you, they absolutely loved /

every living minute here, // and they regretted ever having to leave.”

This is not only a beautifully written but also a beautifully produced book, as we have come to expect from Gaspereau Press, and as befits a book centrally concerned with the body of the text we live in. The paper, the typeface, the cover are aesthetically lovely; there are four fine maps, and eight pen-and-wash illustrations by Wesley Bates, himself an illustrator of repute. As with the landscape, there is here a reciprocal relationship between physical object and imaginative construct. Terpstra has the sense that the loved landscape “reveals itself to me over time in a kind of slow, affectionate undressing.” His book calls us to recognize our giant-sized steps, and, as we ride the paved highways, also to take the giant’s eye view, with love.

Quêtes féminines

Louise Turcot

Mademoiselle J.-J. Stanké \$21.,95

François Landry

Le nombril des aveugles. Triptyque \$22.,00

Laurette Lévy

Zig-Zag. Prise de parole \$17.,00

Compte rendu par Sylvain Marois

L’essentiel est peut-être invisible pour les yeux, le désir de le voir n’en demeure pas moins puissant et intrinsèquement humain. La quête de soi, sous toutes ses formes (psychothérapie, *coaching*, sports extrêmes, voyages, etc.), est une des forces motrices la plus profondément ancrée en nous. Elle prend, bien entendu, pour chacun, une couleur, un visage, une forme différente. Dans les textes présentés ici, deux sont écrits par des femmes, l’autre par un homme, mais tous mettent en scène des narratrices, des « Je » féminins qui nous dévoilent, nous présentent, du Montréal des années 1960 au Toronto d’aujourd’hui en passant par un séjour érotico-mythique en Inde, un monde

– une vision du monde –, une perspective féminine, voire féminisée.

Mademoiselle J.-J., premier roman de la comédienne Louise Turcot, nous raconte le passage à l’âge adulte d’Élise Gagné, fille unique de Jean-Jacques Gagné, dans un Québec qui sort avec peine des années 1950. Jean-Jacques, divorcé et plutôt intéressé aux affaires et aux conquêtes féminines, n’a guère de temps pour sa fille, qu’il a d’ailleurs abandonnée enfant. Il est à la fois un modèle pour l’autonomie d’Élise et un exemple du macho impénitent. Élise décide un jour de prendre sa vie en main et quitte sa mère, et leur vie dans un quartier populaire de Montréal, pour le « château dans les Laurentides » où habite son père. C’est à travers les amours pré-pubères et les questionnements existentiels de l’adolescence que Turcot nous fait découvrir un Québec qui vit, lui aussi, une crise comparable en plusieurs points à celle de la jeune héroïne.

Ce roman, où divers niveaux de langues cohabitent, peut aisément être lu comme une métaphore de la naissance du Québec moderne. En effet, la religion est omniprésente (58), le rapport au corps (44) et à l’Autre (l’Étranger) ainsi qu’un fort désir de satisfaction matérialiste (99 et 270), occupent une place centrale et ne sont pas sans correspondances avec l’évolution « nationale » du Québec des dernières décennies. Le *joual*, utilisé dans certains dialogues, ne représente qu’une infime partie du roman qui est très bien écrit. Louise Turcot possède une plume intéressante et parfois poétique : « L’obscurité est un mur de pierre dressé à deux pas de mon visage [. . .] » (19). Cela dit, les clichés sont si nombreux (le premier amour d’Élise – poète de surcroît – qui se suicide; une relation lesbienne qui se développe entre Élise, qui pose nue comme modèle à l’École des beaux-arts, et une étudiante; de (trop) nombreuses références à une culture « rive-gauche-franco-française », etc.) qu’une certaine lourdeur peut s’installer en

cours de lecture . . . Certains lecteurs, des collégiens par exemple, pourraient y trouver une foule de référents sociohistoriques qui décrivent plutôt bien une période importante du Québec et que leurs parents ont vécue un peu à la manière des personnages représentés.

François Landry, professeur de littérature au niveau collégial, offre avec *Le nombril des aveugles*, publié chez Triptyque, plusieurs défis aux lecteurs : faire oublier, dans un premier temps, qu'un homme se cache derrière Suzanne, narratrice et personnage principal, et, dans un deuxième temps, motiver le lecteur à poursuivre sa lecture malgré l'évidente provocation des scènes d'érotisme qui gagneraient à être plus subjectives qu'anatomiques, et enfin – défi ultime! – retenir l'intérêt du lecteur qui se voit confronter presque à chaque page à un lexique mythico-fantasmagorique (130) qui complique plus la lecture qu'il ne la nourrit. Ce n'est pas que ce roman manque d'intérêt. Au contraire! En fait, la fabuleuse aventure qui entraîne Karl et Suzanne à vivre, au-delà d'un imaginaire facile et prévisible, une quête des sens vécue au plus profond de leurs corps et de leurs âmes, est passionnante. Mais, malgré le talent et les vastes connaissances de l'Inde de l'auteur, les descriptions bio-mécaniques des multiples échanges sexuels peuvent entraîner des décrochages même chez le plus libidineux des lecteurs.

C'est une fable plutôt simple qui sert de prétexte à une quête de soi bien particulière. Karl et Suzanne, suite à l'arrêt de leur train au milieu du désert, sont kidnappés et enfermés dans une caverne – une sorte de palais immense dont on ne sort pas vivant – où ils vivront des expériences hallucinantes et comparables, dans leurs dimensions pharmacologiques, aux récits de Carlos Castaneda. Le roman progresse assez bien, mais on se lasse des passages d'un niveau à l'autre (« des matelas » dans le récit) qui sont, hélas, le principal moteur du récit.

Landry disparaît bien derrière ce « Je » féminin et, malgré la faiblesse de certaines phrases où l'on « fixe comme un hypnotisé » (201), où l'on subit des « contractions stomacales, à vide, » (223) et où l'on apprend « que la majeure partie des pensées humaines repose sur des croyances et des superstitions » (257), il décrit bien la lourde atmosphère chaude et visqueuse dans laquelle les personnages doivent évoluer. Il sait aussi, peut-être un peu tard dans le récit, « justifier » les nombreuses violences imposées au cœur, au corps et à l'esprit de Suzanne. On comprend enfin que cette dernière est engagée dans une complexe quête de ses origines « artificielles » et qu'elle devra reconnaître l'insignifiance de son « rôle dans l'univers » (256) pour finalement renaître, i.e., ne plus être aveugle et voir et vivre enfin son nouveau soi.

Les nouvelles de Laurette Lévy, publiées sous le titre *Zig-Zag*, sont d'un tout autre ordre. Douces, parfois naïves et souvent légères, ces courtes nouvelles – le premier recueil de Lévy publié chez Prise de parole –, sont un exemple de littérature estivale. Par leur brièveté, leurs thèmes urbains et leurs fables inoffensives, elles offrent une superbe détente littéraire à l'amateur.

Jardinage, cinéma, relations humaines et autres quotidiennetés sont teintés par les origines européennes de l'auteure. C'est en effet sa perspective de certaines manies, des Torontois en particulier, qui est la plus originale et qui contient le plus d'humour (46). Autrement, ces nouvelles mettent en scène des héroïnes en mouvement, en questionnement. Des voix de femmes donc, mais surtout la vision du monde d'une européenne sur une certaine Amérique, d'un certain Canada (anglais), bref une sorte de récit de voyage, de rapport d'enquête sur l'enfance, l'amitié, les petits plaisirs, mais aussi la violence omniprésente des grandes villes (dont les principales victimes sont les femmes) et une recherche de sens fondamentalement humaine. Laurette Lévy

ne s'engage pas dans l'universel (peut-être que oui au fond!), mais plutôt dans le local, dans le microcosme de vies plus ou moins intéressantes. Pas de surprise dans le fond ni dans la forme (on sent même parfois l'atelier d'écriture ou le cours de création littéraire . . .) [52], mais un recueil honnête.

C'est un bien étrange lien de sang qui semble couler quelque part dans ces trois œuvres. Un lien de sang féminin, court, de manière inégale, comme une métaphore de la condition féminine, dans ces pages. Cette quête folle de soi, nullement réservée aux femmes, révèle néanmoins une fine portion d'un discours, qui n'est pas qu'uniquement féminin, mais qui est ici conjugué au féminin. La recherche du père d'Élise Gagné, la longue aventure physique de Suzanne et « le voyage en Canada » des personnages de Laurette Lévy, contiennent toutes des thèmes, des mots, des actions, bref un univers, sinon féminin, certainement féminisé. Si le discours n'a rien de réquisitoire, dans le sens « péjoratif de féministe », on ne peut être indifférent aux peurs d'Alice, et à leurs conséquences quasi schizo-phréniques (Zig-Zag, 37), ou aux rapports avec les hommes (incluant son père) auxquels Élise Gagné semblerait condamnée. . . . Ces réalités féminines sont exprimées de belles manières et, par la fiction, peuvent être communiquées aux lectrices . . . et aux lecteurs.

Imagined Canadas

David Williams

Imagined Nations: Reflections on Media in Canadian Fiction. McGill-Queen's UP \$70.00

Reviewed by Kathryn Grafton

Engaging Benedict Anderson's theory of the nation as a "mediated construct," David Williams examines *imagined communities* in a Canadian context. Unlike Anderson, Williams does not privilege print; instead, emphasizing "language's power to mediate the nation," he historicizes the "variable

relations" of different modes of communication and forms of community, and presents a finely wrought, balanced view of both the positive and detrimental effects of each mode. To study the interplay between media and nations, Williams conducts close readings of contemporary Canadian novels. This site of inquiry may seem paradoxical; however, Williams argues that the novel serves as an apt "diagnostic tool" because it is formally self-conscious, embodies "social contestation," and concerns itself increasingly with other media forms. An ambitious book, *Imagined Nations* asks broad and pressing questions in a manner that is both thoughtful and thought-provoking. Williams's detailed analysis of Canadian fiction casts interesting light upon these questions, while simultaneously leaving shadows yet to be explored.

In establishing his theoretical framework, Williams demonstrates how modes of communication have affected forms of community since antiquity. Knitting together seamlessly theories from Hobsbawm, Gellner, Bakhtin, Bhabha, Innis, and Ronald Deibert, Williams begins with concepts of nationhood, next addresses the novel and nation, and then, more broadly, discusses media and nation. Anderson's theory serves as Williams's navigational guide, but ultimately, he privileges Innis's work.

Focusing first on print culture, Williams shows how the narrator from *No Great Mischief* negotiates between his clan community's orality and his national community's print mindset. He then analyzes how print favours regionalism (as Innis suggests) while radio encourages confederation in *The Colony of Unrequited Dreams*. Closing with *Prochain Épisode*, Williams argues compellingly that the novel rejects print through its ironic depiction of a narrator who is a "willing slave" to both a literary genre and a fixed view of history and politics.

Less successful is Williams's examination of film. In discussing *The Butterfly Plague* and *The Englishman's Boy*, Williams suggests in overly-simplistic terms that both novels depict the interplay between film and community: this raises the (unanswered) question as to the limitations of examining print narratives to theorize film's effect on the imagining of nations. Ending with a comparative analysis of *The English Patient* and its film adaptation, Williams argues that the novel challenges notions of empire more effectively than the film, largely because the camera is a tool of "sovereign consciousness" that drives "to contain all it surveys." Yet is an adaptation the best site to examine how film affects community?

Finally, Williams considers how the digital era's "single language of binary bits"

erases boundaries that construct "the autonomous self, territorial space, and sovereign nations." With a hint of technological determinism, he focuses on how individuals "acculturated to hypermedia environments" conceptualize the self as multiple and the nation as permeable. In an insightful return to *The English Patient*, Williams stresses the novel's drive towards a postnational future in its depiction of Almsay's fragmented self, alteration of the text of Herodotus into a metaphoric "hypertext," and attack on nationalism. Williams then contrasts this possible future to the dystopic, postnational world in *Neuromancer*. Ultimately, he urges readers to recognize how media shape our imagined Canadas and to choose the vision of *The English Patient* over that of *Neuromancer*.

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Finding Home: The Legacy of Bill Reid

Robert Bringhurst

1

Bill Reid lived 78 years, most of them painful, many of them joyful, and all of them productive. I'm going to mention pain repeatedly this evening, though I'm sure that joy is of equal or greater importance.

I'm also going to talk about several pieces of Reid's art, and I'm going to do it without any pictures. I hope that most of you have seen some or all of the works I'm going to mention. If you haven't, I hope you will take the trouble to see them, and to see them in person, whenever you can. If you've seen them already, I hope you will see them again. And again. And again. It is not very difficult to do that in Vancouver. Art is as important to a city as streets and power grids, sewers and cafés. If you replace works of art with *images* of art, the city shrivels up and blows away, and suburbs take its place. No one person makes a city or a culture, but the city of Vancouver, insofar as it is more than just a heap of rooms and windows, is largely the creation of Bill Reid.

Besides, as I said, I want to talk largely about pain—not people in pain but pain itself, and joy itself, and art itself—and there are no photographs of that.

Of course, before there was a city here there was a world: a forest ringed by beachfront villages, for which the city may

be a very poor replacement. Painful though it may be, it is good to think about that, and Reid is one of the artists who lead us to do so.

Some of the pain Bill Reid encountered in his life was the kind that is sooner or later familiar to all of us: the pain of love and rejection, friendship and loss, misjudgement and misunderstanding—all part of what it costs just to be a human being. There were, in eight decades, many women in his life, three of whom he married, one of whom stayed with him to the end. There was the absentee father he almost never saw. There was the daughter from whom he was all too quickly estranged. There was also the adopted son he never quite got close to and who died a miserable death in 1981 at the age of 25. In 1976, there was the violent death, just a few hundred metres from here, of one of his closest friends, Wilson Duff, and a few years earlier, the drug-related death of a very promising younger Haida artist whose suicidal path Bill had tried in vain to change.

In the Museum of Anthropology, also a few hundred metres from here, is a mask Bill made in Montreal in 1970. Portrait masks are a Haida tradition, and this one looks at first like a perfectly canonical work of late classical Haida art. The carving is very symmetrical and restrained; the formline painting is delicate in weight and gracefully composed, but the painting is powerfully asymmetrical, and it alludes to that ominous new gesture of late classical Haida painting known as the *black field*.

The mask is a portrait of a woman. She was originally not, I think, a Haida woman, but her womanhood is stated by purely classical Haida means: the lower lip is extended to hold a labret.

I think I know precisely whom this mask is a portrait of, and I think that scarcely matters. As with many a fine portrait by Botticelli or Piero della Francesca, it is nice to know the identity of the sitter, but the power of the character portrayed has superseded that. The identity of the sitter is now important mostly for the way it illuminates the work of art, and not the other way around. The human portrayed here has become a spirit-being—*xhaayda* has turned into *sghaana*, to use the Haida words. That same transformation is the subject of a lot of Haida literature. Whether the act of making the mask brought the spirit-being into being or the other way around I do not know. Nor do I know, in the realm of Haida literature, whether the stories create the characters, the spirits, who inhabit them or the other way around. What I think is that in art and literature alike, the relation is basically ecological. That means self-reinforcing and self-policing. In an ecological system you can never isolate any component for long as either cause or effect because every component is both of these at once. Humans, works of art and spirit-beings, it seems to me, are parts of a single ecology, one where neither humans nor their artworks have or should have pride of place.

Joy in Haida is *gudaang llaa*, “goodness of mind.” One of the ways to say “pain” in Haida is *ghuxhagang*, which literally means “burning from within.” Joy, Bill liked to say, is a well-made object, and the mask is superbly made. The fact remains that the person captured or the spirit-being created in that mask knows a lot about anguish, a lot about pain. Is it his pain projected onto her, or her pain reflected back at him? And how can there be such pain in the midst of joy, such joy in the midst of pain? Those

aren’t the kinds of questions powerful masks or portraits answer. Those are the kinds of questions they ask.

In 1983, at a panel discussion in what was then called the B.C. Provincial Museum, Bill showed his audience a photo of that mask, and then astonished some of his listeners by saying,

This is a mask, representing nothing. It's purely decorative. I haven't made very many masks, and I forget exactly why I made this one. I was in Montreal at the time. . . . I have never done masks or any other equipment for ceremonial use, because I've never been involved in ceremonies. I'm not a dancer, and my relationship to the culture of my people is in fact a very remote one. So this is a mask for the sake of being a mask, for something to hang on the wall. The face painting is merely a formal design. It represents nothing from the tradition. It was an exercise, you could say, in making a mask.¹

That’s one of the cagiest pieces of non-explanation I’ve ever encountered. At the same time, it’s an artist doing just what artists are supposed to do and very often don’t: putting the meaning into the work instead of putting it into the catalogue. Putting it into the work and then deliberately suggesting that it isn’t even there, because then you’ll have to see it for yourself or not see anything at all. It’s also an example of Bill’s sense of humour in full bloom. I can see him eyeballing the room as he said that, looking to see how many of his listeners were caught in his self-deprecating ruse.

There is a Haida myth, a traditional story, in which a group of hunters sets out, taking their dogs, evidently to kill black bears. First night out they camp, and when they wake up in the morning, they find themselves trapped at the top of a pillar or the bottom of a shaft. They escape by putting their dogs and then each other into the fire. One by one, as they’re burned alive, they reappear, at the top of the shaft or the foot of the pillar. When they have all been translated back to ground level, they go on their

way. They tell themselves that nothing's changed, but something has.

We have two superb incarnations of this story in the classical Haida language, one dictated in Skidegate in the fall of 1900 by a blind poet known as Ghandl, the other dictated at Masset in the spring of 1901 by a storyteller and carver known as Haayas. Both were transcribed by a fine linguist named John Swanton. As Haayas tells the story, these hunters paddle back where they've come from and find that their families have moved. So they follow them back to their winter village, known as Ttii.

Ttii llnagaay qanggaighalan dluu
 ll giinangghuugangghawan.
 Ll kil llghaanga ttla gudangawee ghanuu
 tlagw ll sughaawan.
 Wakkyanan gam llnagaay ghaaqasgadangan.
 Wakkyanan gam giinang-huugangaay ga
 ll qaynstlghangghaawan.²

*Once they could see the village of Ttii,
 they sang paddling songs without stopping.
 They sang out
 so the others would hear their voices.
 Nevertheless, the village gave no sign.
 Nevertheless, they continued
 their singing.*

They come right up in front of the town, and still no one hears them. One of the group goes ashore. He enters the family house, banging the doorflap, but no one takes notice.

Tajigwaa ll tawee jaaghang ahl na
 llgheegagan tluu'udaayan.
 Ghaghadeega ll ghuhldaalan.
 « Gasintlaw tlagw iittl iijing? »
 hin nang na llgheeygas jaaghang ahl guu
 suudaayan.³

*In the rear of the house sat his friends and his wife,
 with the head of the household.
 He sat down among them.
 His wife and the headman said to each other,
 "What's come over us?"*

Gasintlaw tlagw iittl iijing? literally means, "Why are we on the other shore?" What it connotes is, "Something funny's going on

here. Why do we feel so weird?" When he hears his wife and headman say this, the hunter finally understands: he and his colleagues are spirit-beings now: still quite real, and in their own way still perceptible, yet utterly invisible to normal human beings.

That's what has happened to the woman whose face and grief and anger underlie the alder mask. She's disappeared. That's the meaning of the statement, *This is a mask, representing nothing . . . a mask for the sake of being a mask*. That's the meaning of *I haven't made very many masks, and I forget exactly why I made this one*. There is something here that's perfectly transparent—first in the sense that it's perfectly obvious, second in the sense that you can't see it. It's what Rilke meant when he looked at a stone torso of Apollo in the Louvre and called it *durchsichtig*, which means "see-throughable." What's really there is not a piece of broken stone or a piece of painted alder but a presence: invisible, inaudible, unspeakable as well. In the midst of a panel discussion in a museum in Victoria in 1983, the spirit-being in this mask is a creature whose power might be felt but who cannot be discussed or even mentioned, because in the language of panel discussions, she has no name.

There is joy in that mask as well as pain, but the pain is what's portrayed. To get the joy, you have to feel the way the object fits the vision and feel the physical object being made. To get the joy, you have to enter, in a sense, into the body of the carver, which is a body trying to come to terms with its pain.

If it were a Greek instead of a Haida mask, you might expect to find its happy twin—and in a sense it has one. Its partner, its inverse mirror image, is a necklace, also made in Montreal at nearly the same time. The two works have never, so far as I know, been exhibited together. They are now in different collections; they are made of entirely different materials; and they rest on two quite different cultural traditions.

The necklace, which is known as *The Milky Way*, is a piece of jewellery, built from gold and diamonds using European techniques. Like the mask, it's a powerfully asymmetrical object built on a quite symmetrical plan. The anguish in it is the anguish of the craft, the anguish of day after day, week after week at the workbench using finicky little tools and doing finicky little tasks. What all that anguish leads to is a vessel of pure joy, a constellation of tiny stars floating over a bed of crumpled sunlight. The necklace is a slice of summer sky—night sky and day sky both at once—designed to settle on a woman's collarbones and shine in tandem with her face.

On the same day in Victoria in 1983, Bill said some very interesting things about that necklace. One of them was that it owed its inspiration to "some of the old Skidegate poles [whose] carvers never heard of the law of physics that says that two objects cannot occupy the same space at the same time. . . ."4 I keep on thinking, though, of something else he might have said, if he had chosen to torment his listeners just a little further. He might have said, for instance,

This is a necklace, representing nothing. It's purely decorative. I haven't made very many necklaces, and I forget exactly why I made this one. I was in Montreal at the time. . . . I have never done necklaces or any other equipment for ceremonial use, because I've never been involved in ceremonies. I'm not a nobleman, a magnate or a movie star, and my relationship to the culture of my people is in fact a very remote one. So this is a necklace for the sake of being a necklace, for something to wear on your neck. . . . It was an exercise, you could say, in making a necklace. . . .

2

Bill knew other kinds of pain—other kinds of *burning from within*—that most of us are spared. I am not an authority on agony, but I have served in the armies of two countries, under some not altogether pretty conditions, and I can tell you that Bill

patiently endured some of the greatest physical torment I have ever seen inflicted on any human being. That was part of the price of his advancing Parkinson's disease, an ailment he suffered more and more acutely, and always uncomplainingly, for roughly thirty years.

There is a certain facial expression, or lack of expression, that comes and goes in people who have Parkinson's disease. It occurs when the victim momentarily loses control of the facial muscles. Then the smiles, the winks, the crinkles, the microscopic liveliness of eyes and lips and cheeks—the things that bring a face alive—just all turn off. The lungs keep breathing, blood keeps flowing, and the eyes keep seeing, but the flesh around them all goes dead. And then, a while later, life returns. That face is known to the victims of Parkinson's and to their relatives and physicians as *The Mask*.

If you go to the Vancouver airport, or better yet to the Canadian Embassy in Washington, D.C., you can see one of the two incarnations of Reid's largest work of sculpture, *The Spirit of Haida Gwaii*. Bill was 70 when that work left his studio, and 71 when the first casting—the *Black Canoe*, we called it—was unveiled. His Parkinson's was well advanced by then, and he was working largely through the hands of other people, but there is nothing in that sculpture that does not bear his stamp or stem from his decisions. The canoe is full of totemic animals—wolf, eagle, raven, bear, and so on. On the starboard side, tucked in among the larger-than-life cargo, is a roughly life-size human paddler. That figure is the nearest thing you'll find to Reid's self-portrait, and the nearest he ever came to rendering *The Mask*.

In Rembrandt's self-portraits, the fusion of sitter and painter is always front and centre, so when you stand before the painting—which is where the painting wants you—it holds you in its gaze, where you

become the painter's sitter and the sitter's painter too. Mantegna's self-portraits are different from that. Mantegna's face is never front and centre. He tucks himself into a corner, where he joins you in watching what he's made. Titian's self-portraits, of which there are four at least, cover the range—and it is a wide range—between Mantegna and Rembrandt.

The most obvious of these is the one in the Prado: a side view of Titian in old age, with his brush in his hand. He isn't using the brush; he's holding it close to his body, as if it were an object of no concern to anyone but him. And he isn't looking back out of the front of the painting to see who is looking at him. Nor is he looking at himself. He's facing sideways. Try as you might, you cannot catch his gaze. He's busy looking at everything else. That's how Bill's self-portrait is positioned in the boat. You see him from the side. He's facing toward the bow, not posing for the camera, just getting on with the job.

Another of Titian's self-portraits is embedded in a painting called *The Flaying of Marsyas*, now in the Archbishop's Summer Palace in Kroměříž, Slovakia. Marsyas, or Μαρσύας, was a satyr—a spirit-being in other words—who got himself involved in a little musical competition with a more powerful spirit-being called Apollo. Marsyas lost, of course, and the price of losing was that Apollo, the gentle god of art and light and poetry and music, skinned him alive. The surviving body of classical Greek literature, like the surviving body of classical Haida literature, is reduced to a small fraction of what it once was, and we have no good Greek version of this story. If we did, I'd quote it to you, because one of the great pleasures in life, so far as I'm concerned, is setting classical Greek and classical Haida poets side by side. They frequently illuminate each other, like that necklace and that mask.

Since we don't have a text, we have to

stitch the story together from bits and pieces found here and there in the works of satirists, geographers and travelers. It's just like piecing together a lost Native American myth—one of those stories that “everybody knows” but which no great storyteller ever dictated to a linguist, in the original language, during the time when a great storyteller could. Stories in that predicament are trapped beneath the surface of literature, condemned to the hazy world we call folklore.

For a painter, that can be a godsend rather than a problem. So it happens that in Italy during the Renaissance, where the most highly developed languages of storytelling were oil paint and fresco, the story of Marsyas and Apollo was painted many times. Titian's version, so far as I know, is the only one containing a self-portrait. Titian has given his own features to one of the judges—the dissenting judge, Midas, who tried in vain to keep this grisly tale from unfolding as it does. In the painting, he sits only inches from where Apollo is working the knife, starting to peel his challenger's skin, only inches from the dogs who are lapping up the blood.

In *The Spirit of Haida Gwaii*, Bill, like Titian, is caught up in the story he portrays. His own face, his own mask, is worn by the only human paddler to be found in that canoe. The self-portrayal doesn't end there, of course. The other creatures in the boat are part of him as well: the Wolf, who was his crest, his totem animal; the Raven, who was his alter ego; the Dogfish Woman whom he loved. Every creature in that sculpture is part of his identity. Yet he is far from being the hero or the subject of the sculpture. Like Titian, he is there to pay the price of what he's seen.

When it came time to talk about *The Spirit of Haida Gwaii*, Bill was only a little less elusive than he was when he talked about the mask from Montreal. He identified the paddler wearing the Parkinsonian

mask as a “professional survivor” and gave him the name the Ancient Reluctant Conscript, a phrase that he remembered from a poem by Carl Sandburg.

*On the soup wagons of Xerxes I was a cleaner
of pans. . . .*

*Red-headed Caesar picked me for a teamster.
He said, “Go to work, you Tuscan bastard,
Rome calls for a man who can drive horses.” . . .*

*Lincoln said, “Get into the game; your nation
takes you.”*

*And I drove a wagon and team and I had my
arm shot off*

At Spotsylvania Court House.

The conscript is another of those beings whose relationship to the culture of his people “is in fact a very remote one” — but also one of those without whose help no culture is going to go anywhere.

The only way to have anything *other than* a very remote relationship to the culture of your people is to give your entire life to it. When you die, your culture takes you in, and then, if you’ve given enough, your place is near the centre. Reid has done that now, and his relationship to the culture of his people—all his people, all the people fate has brought to the Northwest Coast and all the people of the human species—is now anything but remote. But in 1988 and 1989, when the figure of the Conscript first took shape, and in 1991 when it was cast and finished and unveiled, Bill still made no claim to be at the centre of anything. Like Mantegna and Titian, he knew that he was part of something vastly larger than himself, which would not be sorted out for many generations.

Reid’s head was full of poems—full of the narrative poems of the Haida masters, Skaay and Ghandl and Xhyuu and Kilxhawgins and Kingagwaaw and Haayas, who dictated works to Swanton at Skidegate in 1900 and at Masset in 1901, and full of the poems of Homer, Isaiah and Virgil, Keats and Shelley, Frost and

Sandburg, Pound and Eliot, Purdy and Cohen. He read them all in English, not in Haida, not in Greek and Hebrew and Latin, but he read them well, and in his mind they lived together fruitfully and peacefully. Bill’s mind, in other words, was a good model for the world: a place where people and their dreams had better and more hopeful things to do than snarl at each other or blow each other up.

Another model or example for the world—one of immense importance to Reid—is the polyphonic music created in the European Renaissance, elaborated during the Baroque, and nurtured through difficult, inhospitable times by the great Neoclassical and Romantic composers. Bill loved that music—Josquin’s motets, the Bach fugues, the Haydn and Mozart quartets. That music was one of the things that brought us together. It was like a fire we used to gather around to keep warm. And he loved it with good reason. In polyphonic music, two or three or more melodic lines, independent of each other yet respectful of each other, move in the same space at the same time, sometimes contradicting one another, sometimes dancing with each other, but never giving up their independence, never falling into line and shouting slogans or marching down the street. The non-Aristotelian physics of classical Haida sculpture, where two creatures can indeed occupy the same space at the same time, is very close to polyphonic musical space. In both arts, there are discords. Things can bump against each other. But the discords pass, and because they pass, they contribute to the shapeliness and wholeness of the whole. It is hard to imagine how, in a world rich with Haida sculpture and polyphonic music, there could be such things as suicide bombers or even their comparatively harmless and equally pitiful academic and journalistic equivalents. But of course there can be, and there are. In any ecology—

an ecology of images, an ecology of melodies, an ecology of ideas—just as in the forest itself, things can and sometimes do go wrong. But a real ecology, until it is pushed to the brink of extinction, has the capacity for self-restoration and self-repair.

European polyphony was born at the edge of the forest, just like Haida sculpture. It was born when the fledgling cities of Europe were still within sight of the forest, and when the great groves of stone trees called cathedrals were sprouting on riverbanks and hills across much of the continent. It takes a lot of pride to build Notre Dame de Paris, or a Haida village with its memorial poles and frontal poles, or to build a polyphonic mass. But it takes a lot of humility too: a willingness to learn from the forest that you cut.

3

Bill Reid was a graceful, thoughtful man. Nevertheless, like all of us who live in the real world—especially those who get things done—he had his share of political and social troubles—another kind of pain, which ought maybe to be called *burning from without* instead of *burning from within*. Much of that pain—and the corresponding joy—came from his position as a member of two cultures. Please remember that those cultures were once openly at war with one another and have lived for over a century under a sullen, *de facto* truce, with one side waiting patiently for a treaty to be signed while the other side, at least through the late 1980s, seemed determined to forget that basic agreements had never been made. This goes some way toward explaining why the two sides are, on some fronts, psychologically still at war. Bill became, little by little, an *ex officio* member of both, an expert on both, a *creator* of both, and therefore inescapably a conduit between them — which in conditions of monumental mutual ignorance and mistrust cannot be an easy thing to do.

He was not, of course, unique in this regard. Millions of people are raised on the margins between cultures—Muslim and Jewish, Jewish and Christian, Croat and Serb, Bengali and English, Catholic and Protestant, Hutu and Tutsi. Some reach out to both, but many, as we know, choose to deal with cultural boundaries by turning their backs or raising their weapons. Bill was unusual not in the problem that he faced but in the grace and creativity with which he faced it.

The other difference is that most of us have such problems thrust upon us. Bill sought his out. He chose the problem of his own free will.

Many people have interpreted Bill's bicultural position in genetic terms. His first biographer, Maria Tippett, has gone to the other extreme and interpreted his position as, in essence, a charade.⁵ Both these perspectives are wrong—and worse than wrong, because both of them are deliberately, willfully shallow.

Bill taught himself the language of Haida visual art. He couldn't have learned it in the old way, by growing up in a Haida village, because by 1920, when he was born, all but three of those villages—one in Alaska, two in Canada—were empty, and the great works of art, along with a lot of the cultural fibre, had been plundered from those which remained. Bill learned the language of that art little by little from books, museum collections, and individual pieces that survived in private hands. He was able to learn it because it is a *human* language and Bill was a human being—one with unusually keen intelligence, curiosity, drive, self-confidence, and an aptitude for fusing spirit and form. He could have been of African, Chinese or Samoan descent. It happens that he was born here on this coast, raised in B.C. and Alaska, and that through his mother's Haida relatives and the Provincial Museum collections, he began to see some great as well as mediocre pieces of Haida and Tsimshian and Tlingit

art at an early and impressionable age. What he saw took root in his brain. That's how culture works, in broken societies like ours and in healthy ones as well.

There is a lot of cultural rebuilding going on in Haida Gwaii these days: a very exciting thing to see, inspiring to some and apparently terrifying to others. Bill is by no means solely responsible for that rebirth, and it is fashionable now to say that no rebirth occurred, because nothing ever died. That reminds me of the strange language I heard at my grandfather's funeral when I was ten years old. "I look upon this man," said the preacher, "not as dead but as sleeping." You call it a reawakening if you prefer. I am happy to call it a Renaissance, and I think it began, unknown to everybody, sometime in the 1930s in Victoria, British Columbia, in Bill Reid's young and well-made brain.

By his own account, Bill became a Haida artist long before he became a Haida. The consequence was a lifetime of tension between Reid and some of the Haidas of Haida Gwaii. There, for half a century, envy and suspicion of Bill Reid ran just as deep as admiration.

An artist Bill resembles in this respect is William Butler Yeats—the principal figure in what is rightly called the Irish Renaissance and the principal bridge between Irish and English literary culture. Reid, though he mastered the visual language of Haida art, never learned to speak or read or write the Haida tongue. Yeats, though he learned to make Irish poetry and drama of the highest order, never learned to do it in Gaelic. His close connections in London made him an object of deep suspicion among many Irish nationalists, at the same time that his skill, his success and his tremendous personal growth as an Irish poet made him a national hero.

Cultures don't mingle by watering each other down. They mingle by thickening the soup, infusing one another with a richer store of references and models, adding

facets and perspectives and dimensions to each other. This happens in the music of Béla Bartók as well as in the poetry of William Butler Yeats and in the sculpture of Bill Reid. But let me give you another, more recent, more concrete example.

Just a few weeks ago, the Perseverance Theater in Juneau, Alaska, mounted a production of *Macbeth*. They did the full play in Elizabethan English, but all the actors were Tlingit, and the costumes, props and stage set were all traditional Tlingit: clan houses, crest helmets, Chilkat robes and talking sticks, the works.

You see what this means. It means the world of feudal Scotland has been transposed through the lens of Shakespeare's plot and Shakespeare's English words to the pre-contact Tlingit world and then unwrapped in the postcontact, multicultural world of Juneau, so that all four worlds can illuminate each other without need for a single word of explanation.

Bill would have loved to see that play. Why? Because it exemplifies the meeting of two cultures at their best instead of their worst, so that their shared humanity shines through. Because it is full of subtle historical echoes. Because it allows two or three or four conceptions of society to occupy the same stage at the same time, and because both the spark and the balance were struck by Native people. Because it neither denigrates nor celebrates; it interrogates; it probes. Because the hostilities are *in the play*, where they belong, and not at the stage door or in the press.

When you accept Shakespeare's script, you accept the fact of human greed as well as human hunger. You accept the existence of madness and murder and theft along with sanity and honesty and honour. When you answer the script with Tlingit heraldic architecture and dress, you are implicitly asserting that the range of human character and insight and emotion evoked by Shakespeare is present in Tlingit culture as

well, and that art can contain it. In short, you're asserting that humans are humans, and that they don't all have to be homogenized by the shopping mall to prove it.

4

Reid died nearly six years ago, on March 13, 1998. I'd like now to review a few pertinent things that have happened since that day.

Ten days after his death, there was a massive public memorial at the Museum of Anthropology here at UBC: the largest memorial gathering that had ever been inspired by any Canadian artist. That tells us something about public perception of Reid's importance in contemporary Northwest Coast society—which is just about as ethnically and culturally diverse as societies can get.

Four months later, Bill's ashes were interred, with massive pageantry, at the empty village of Ttanuu in Haida Gwaii. His memorial is there, where he chose to have it, among the spirits of the old Haida world and not in the new graveyard. If the Renaissance continues, it may catch him up at last. Ttanuu may be repeopled. Such things happen in Haida myth and have happened many times in Haida history.

Bill had his own notions about the rebirth of the old villages. In 1985, when he and David Suzuki testified at one of the public hearings of the BC Wilderness Advisory Committee, Bill said this:

The Haidas never really left South Moresby or the other areas they once controlled. They only went away for a little while. And now they are coming back. . . .

The Haidas must have their ancient lands back unviolated if they are to reestablish links with their distinguished past and build on it a new future. . . .

Modern methods of logging mean not just cutting trees but murdering the forests—those wonderfully complex organisms which once gone will never return in their ancient form. And in killing the forests, you also kill forever the only authentic link the Haidas still have with their past. You mur-

der once more their symbolic ancestors. That is what I think the land claims are about.

As for what constitutes a Haida—well, Haida only means human being, and as far as I'm concerned, a human being is anyone who respects the needs of his fellow man, and the earth which nurtures and shelters us all. I think we could find room in South Moresby for quite a few Haida no matter what their ethnic background.⁶

Not all parts of that statement went down equally well with all members of the Wilderness Advisory Committee, nor with all members of the Haida nation. But some of them buried their grievances at Ttanuu, where they buried Bill Reid's voice.

In January 1999, the Bill Reid Foundation was formed, with the avowed aim of sustaining his legacy, primarily through the creation of a Bill Reid Museum, to be built here in Vancouver. The collection has already been assembled. What is missing is the building to house the collection and an endowment large enough to set it on its course. This is a vital plan, and it must go ahead.

I'll insert myself into the chronicle at this point and tell you that in April 1999 I published a thick book on classical Haida oral literature—the first of a three-volume set consisting primarily of translations of classical Haida narrative poems. That is a project Bill encouraged and supported when he was alive. The book is dedicated to him, and though he is not in any sense responsible for my opinions or translations, I think of that project as one strand of his legacy working itself out. This work, like Bill's work, has generated controversy. The praise has been more extravagant and the denunciations more vehement than any I supposed might ever be elicited by any book of mine. But that's another story.

In October 1999, that distinguished Canadian magazine *Maclean's*, famed for infallibility, published a venomous attack on Reid—but that's another story too, which should by now have run its seedy course.

In November 1999, a Bill Reid symposium was held at UBC, here in this very room. It was an interesting event in three respects. First, Martine Reid taught the rest of us a great deal about the background of Bill's jewellery making. Second, we learned that there were still, in the Haida population, some who bore Bill Reid a grudge. Third, the symposium revealed a related split in the academic community. On one side of this split is a local school of politically correct anthropologists and linguists who side on the whole with Reid's detractors and insist upon describing what has happened in the Haida world and on the Northwest Coast as cultural continuity rather than rebirth. On the other side are all the rest of us, who know that not all artisans are artists and not all artists are equally great, and who cheerfully suppose that if something looks like a Renaissance, it may turn out to be just that.

The symposium ended with a fine Haida singer and carver, Guujaaw, President of the Council of the Haida Nation, making a brief statement. "There has been some discussion," he said, "about whether or not Bill was a Haida artist. Answer: of course he was. He had no choice. Just like me."

I have wondered ever since exactly how Guujaaw meant those memorable words. If he meant that Reid was genetically preprogrammed to become a Haida artist because he was the son of a Haida mother, then with all due respect to a very capable Haida leader, he was wrong. Bill Reid had a younger brother, Robert, also now deceased, child of the same mother and father. Robert Reid was thought as a child to have greater artistic potential than Bill, and like Bill, he did become an artist. But Robert became an artist of the white, commercial kind, basing his practice in Toronto. That is proof, if any further proof were needed, that genetic predestination does not explain Bill Reid.

But perhaps what Guujaaw meant is that once the seeds of Haida art took root in Bill

Reid's brain, there was no going back, because the art is more powerful than the human beings who make it. If that was his meaning, I'm with Guujaaw. I think that's how culture works.

A year after that symposium, in the fall of 2000, Jim Hart's new pole, called *Respect to Bill Reid*, was raised in front of the Haida house above Wreck Beach, behind the Museum of Anthropology, here at UBC. To make room for the new pole, an older pole came down.

The pole that was removed was the first Haida housepole that Bill Reid ever carved: a 15 metre replica of an old pole from Ninstints, or Sghan Gwaay. That pole went up in 1959. It needed to come down, after forty years in the weather, and now it is kept inside. But this was a poignant moment, it seems to me: taking down the work of a master artist, replacing it with a memorial carved by one of his former assistants. If Canada were a country, there would have been significant reportage of this event and a discussion in the national press—comparisons of the old art and the new art, along with a recounting of Bill's role in transiting from one to the other. There was no such discussion. The *ceremony* was reported, but *art* was not discussed.

Immediately afterward, in November 2000, a book entitled *Solitary Raven: The Selected Writings of Bill Reid*, edited by me, was published in Canada and the USA. It is, if I may say so, a good and important book: some 200 pages of writing, much of it never published before, by an extremely articulate, lyrical, thoughtful, controversial and much-loved Canadian artist. In the USA, the book was greeted enthusiastically and won a major award. In Canada, it received a total of two reviews: one in a small weekly paper published in Victoria, the other in an academic journal published at UBC. If Canada were a country, such a book—a major artist's reflections on the crucial issues of race and culture in a

multiethnic land—would have been a major subject of discussion.

Two years later, October 2002, after a very long delay, Sheila Copps, who was then the federal minister of culture, responded to a letter from the Bill Reid Foundation. The Foundation had asked for federal matching funds in support of its principal project, the Bill Reid Museum. Ms Copps read the proposal in terms that proved she too could not distinguish between culture and genetics. She said that instead of a proposal floated by a bunch of Anglo-Saxons for a museum in Vancouver, she would like to see a proposal made by Native people for a museum in Haida Gwaii.

There was again an uproar. This, now, was politics, not art, so it *did* make the national papers.⁷ Ms Copps was informed of what she should have known already: that Bill Reid's admirers are found at every point on the ethnic spectrum, and that museums devoted to major artists belong in major cities. The Van Gogh Museum in Amsterdam, the Miró Foundation in Barcelona, the Picasso Museum in Paris, the Delacroix Museum also in Paris, the Keats Library on the Piazza di Spagna in Rome, are where they are for good reason. If Canada is a country, that museum will eventually be built, here in the one city in the world where it most belongs.

5

Bill Reid found home fairly early in his life. That home—the planet, seen from this particular coast—was largely in ruins and needed to be rebuilt. He spent his life doing his bit, like Sandburg's conscript, to rebuild home for himself and all the rest of us—not because he loved us all but because he enjoyed watching people watch his work. And that is reason enough. A lot of others have done their bit as well, and then moved in. Many more have pulled the blinds and changed the channel—certain, evidently, that there is no legacy, that nothing but

chromosomes and money is ever passed from one generation to the next.

Michael Ames, a former director of the Museum of Anthropology, has suggested that Bill's charisma was so great that his reputation might not long survive his death.⁸ *Charisma* is a good Greek word, from *qlric*, which means *grace*. But in Haida, *charisma* is *sghaana*: the same word that is normally used for spirit-being or power. In Haida metaphysics, death is no impediment to *sghaana*.

Bill Reid was my close friend for a number of years. He was my teacher. He was also, for a time, a kind of stand-in for the father I disowned quite early in my life. Yet what matters to me even more than the man is the art. One reason it matters is that it's beautifully made and therefore a source of joy as well as a record of pain. Another reason it matters is that it's a compass, useful for finding home—something humans often lose, despite the fact that it is everywhere humans touch the planet. The compass of his art was useful to him too. The man was great, but the art is greater; that is *why* the man was great.

This is all stated very simply in the poem of Rilke's I mentioned before: the poem about the torso of Apollo:

... denn da ist keine Stelle,
die dich nicht sieht. Du mußt dein Leben ändern.

... for here there is no place
that does not see you. You must change your life.

NOTES

This talk was first presented at the First Nations House of Learning, University of British Columbia. 6 February 2004.

- 1 Reid, *Solitary Raven: Selected Writings*, ed. by Robert Bringhurst (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 2000) 192f.
- 2 John R. Swanton, *Haida Texts: Masset Dialect* (Jesup Expedition 10.2, New York: American Museum of Natural History, 1908) 372–3. See

also Robert Bringhurst, *A Story as Sharp as a Knife* (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 1999) 349–360.

3 *Haida Texts: Masset Dialect* 373.

4 *Solitary Raven* 195.

5 Maria Tippett, *Bill Reid: The Making of an Indian* (Toronto: Random House, 2003). I find many errors in Tippett's book. Here are a few representative examples. One of the first things anthropology students must learn is how the moiety system works on the Northwest Coast. There are two Haida moieties, Eagle and Raven. Members of one must marry members of the other. Each moiety consists of several lineages or clans. Stasttaas (or Sdast'aas), for example, is the name of one of the lineages within the Eagle moiety. Tippett confuses Reid's moiety and his lineage, then misconstrues the lineage name as the personal name of one of its members, Reid's maternal grandfather, Charles Gladstone. Next, by misreading a catalogue label, she shifts the lineage name from Gladstone to an article he carved. She also trips on two of the cardinal rules. First, children belong to the moiety and lineage of the mother, not the father. Second, moieties themselves do not have leaders, anymore than genders do, though every lineage within the moiety does. The late Miles Richardson II was headman of the Qqaadasghu Qiighawaay, the Raven lineage to which Bill Reid belonged. His son, Miles Richardson III, former president of the Council of the Haida Nation, is therefore necessarily an Eagle. By asserting that Miles III is "the hereditary chief of the Raven moiety," Tippett turns the social order upside down. European social structure takes a beating too. Tippett conflates Dominique de Ménil, a devoted collector of painting and sculpture, with her daughter, photographer Adelaide de Ménil, then marries Adelaide twice: to her husband, anthropologist Edmund Carpenter, and to her father, Jean de Ménil. Even where things are easy, Tippett sometimes makes them hard. For example, she transposes and confuses Reid's three Haida names, persistently writing Kihlguulins as "Kihlguuline" and at times writing this garbled name (which, when correctly pronounced, means "the one who speaks well") with another, Yaahl Sgwaansing, (which means "Solitary Raven").

6 *Solitary Raven* 217.

7 Robert Bringhurst, "And Sheila is an honourable woman," *Globe and Mail*, 14 October 2002: A–13.

8 See Tippett 276.

Has *Survival* Survived?

Janice Fiamengo

McClelland and Stewart's reissue of *Survival* provides an occasion to reconsider Atwood's well-known book. Since its publication in 1972, *Survival* has achieved international recognition and has come to symbolize a pivotal moment in Canadian history. To many readers, the book announced the coming of age of Canadian literature and the flourishing of a vibrant and defiant nationalism. It contributed to defining the Canadian canon, placing emphasis on E.J. Pratt, Sinclair Ross, Irving Layton, Jay Macpherson, Margaret Laurence, Al Purdy, James Reaney, Dennis Lee, and—with noticeable emphasis—Graeme Gibson. It encouraged a method of reading that diagnosed the ills and aspirations of the Canadian psyche through its dominant literary images; in the process, it established the now famous victim mentality and its corresponding motifs of menacing wilderness, hunted animals, and paralyzed artists. It articulated a formula for recognizing literary patterns that some readers found useful, others perverse. To some, it became associated with thematic criticism and the dominance of the paraphrase. To others, it embodied the quest to define a national essence that was characteristic of the decade. Most of all, it encouraged a response, whether of emulation—a number of critics published works of thematic criticism that implicitly or explicitly endorsed Atwood's critical principles—or outrage.

Atwood had made it clear that she did not consider herself an academic (a disavowal that itself rankled some scholars), that she did not want readers to take her "oversimplifications as articles of dogma," and that her book was not a comprehensive survey or even an original interpretation. She was a writer producing a practical guide for non-specialists, providing a rudimentary "map

of the territory” to help Canadians learn about their culture. In the course of writing, Atwood confessed, the book had developed into an argument about the colonial condition, “a cross between a personal statement ... and a political manifesto.” With its sociological approach, emphasizing plot rather than form, it was readable and engaging, garnering a positive response from the audience Atwood had in mind—high school teachers and non-specialist readers. But literary scholars, despite Atwood’s disclaimers, did read the book as a definitive statement about Canadian literature, not without some justification, and were irritated by her style, approach, biases, and omissions.

Survival was easy to criticize. After warning against taking her generalizations as dogma, Atwood continually over-claimed, emphasizing the presence of “so many writers in such a small country, and all with the same neurosis.” The primary pattern Atwood identified seemed at once too general—were struggle, loss, and failure exclusive to the Canadian tradition? —and also too narrow to account for “the impossible sum of our traditions,” to borrow from Malcolm Ross. Not surprisingly, scholars from across the critical spectrum took Atwood to task for falsely homogenizing a diverse literature. For Robin Mathews (*Canadian Literature*, 1978), the book’s single-minded focus on narratives of failure promoted the very colonial mentality it claimed to describe by ignoring the literature of class struggle and anti-colonial resistance Canadians had produced. By selecting “a literature of surrender,” Atwood “prepare[d] the consciousness” for colonial defeat. In a more moderate assessment, W.J. Keith (*An Independent Stance*, 1991) made a similar point about the narrowness of the tradition Atwood designated. The comic strain was almost completely excised by her decision to ignore canonical texts by Thomas Chandler Haliburton, Sara

Jeannette Duncan, Stephen Leacock, Robertson Davies, and Robert Kroetsch. It was disingenuous to delete their contributions and then to declare that “Canadian literature is undeniably sombre and negative.” Furthermore, the justice of some of Atwood’s observations was weakened by what Keith termed “sloppy critical habits” of over-simplification. From a different perspective, Frank Davey (*Margaret Atwood*, 1984) objected to the book’s falsely unifying, Eastern-Canadian national vision, which was oblivious to regional or aesthetic distinctions among writers. Atwood’s refusal to discuss matters of style or technique, he commented, made literature seem a matter of statement rather than aesthetic structure.

Re-reading the book now, one notices some of these weaknesses—the tendency to exaggeration, the flippant tone. I was particularly struck by the relentless progressivism of Atwood’s approach, in which Canadian literature is seen as steadily accomplishing its own liberation, freeing itself from its condition of colonial servitude by naming the source of its oppression and imagining avenues of resistance. Near the end of the study, she cites recent work by Bill Bissett and Dennis Lee to make her point that “English Canadian writers are beginning to voice their own predicament consciously,” a voicing that “would have been unimaginable twenty years ago.” The implication, that earlier writers were too colonized to recognize their situation, is inaccurate. Has Atwood forgotten the impassioned yet hard-headed depiction of precisely the Canadian predicament in Sara Jeannette Duncan’s *The Imperialist* (1904)? Or even further back, the satirical assessment of Americanism in Haliburton’s *The Clockmaker* (1836)? And surely direct engagement with social and political realities is powerfully accomplished in the writing of Margaret Laurence and Mordecai Richler, to name only two. Yet despite these objections to some of Atwood’s statements,

equally striking is how well the book's argument has survived its more than three decades in print: the observations remain acute, the generalizations relevant, and many of the judgements bold and critically mature. I am still delighted by Atwood's marvellous aphorisms, as in the assertion that "Canadians are forever taking the national pulse like doctors at a sickbed: the aim is not to see whether the patient will live well but whether he will live at all." Exactly so. And who can forget or dispute her observation that Canadians may "have a will to lose which is as strong and pervasive as the Americans' will to win." A preoccupation, in Atwood's memorable phrase, with "frozen corpses, dead gophers, snow, dead children, and the ever-present feeling of menace" is not the whole story of Canadian literature (what is ever the whole story?), but it remains an engaging, witty chapter.

Individual sections of the study also remain incisive. The chapter on animal victims, in which Atwood was one of the first to identify the animal story as a genre of Canadian literature, remains compelling and unsurpassed, particularly in tracing how the pathos of animal death in the stories of Charles G.D. Roberts and Ernest Thompson Seton develops into the more sobering catastrophe of species extinction in the work of Fred Bodsworth and Farley Mowat almost a century later. Noting that animal stories are always an expression of human concerns and perceptions, Atwood concludes that animals "are always symbols" for human experience and thus links literary depictions of animal death to Canadian fears of cultural annihilation. It is a punchy and memorable argument, but I find the focus on animals exclusively as symbols a limitation in what is otherwise an astute analysis, for it does not begin to account even for Atwood's own sensitive and haunting animal portrayals in fiction and poetry.

Long before Terry Goldie's *Fear and Temptation*, and before the majority of

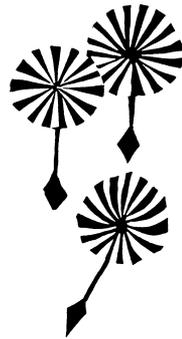
white intellectuals concerned themselves with First Nations' issues and representations, Atwood's attention to the figure of the Indian in Canadian literature confirmed her critical acuteness. Addressing the role of Native peoples in white literature, her observations anticipate many insights of post-colonial theory: "The Indians and Eskimos have rarely been considered in and for themselves," she notes: "they are usually made into projections of something in the white Canadian psyche, a fear or a wish." She is clear-eyed about the ethical implications of white writing that elegizes Native peoples, noting its dependence on a conquered, passive or dead population. Speaking of Purdy's poems of lament, she observes that "Eskimos in the flesh Purdy finds alien and difficult to communicate or identify with ... It is natives who are dead or extinct that really say something to him, give him a meaningful reflection of himself." Commenting on Laurence's portrayals of the Métis in *A Bird in the House* and *The Fire Dwellers*, Atwood perceptively notes whites' sense of the emotional barrier created by Native suffering: "The Indians are, finally, a yardstick of suffering against which the whites can measure their own and find it lacking." Her analysis of the complex patterns of identification and displacement in white representations of Natives remains cogent, and Atwood's matter of fact prose highlights her conviction and lack of squeamishness. Much present post-colonial theorizing will, one suspects, age less well.

The discussion seems to bog down in some of the middle chapters, as for example in "Family Portrait," in which Atwood explores families in Canadian literature as sites of stifling entrapment and guilty repression. Atwood's enumeration of the typical configuration of the three-generation family is functional but flat, and she fails to demonstrate the complex connections between the family motif and the

national psyche that make her other chapters provocative. Nonetheless, valuable critical insights pepper the pages, from Atwood's summation of the meaning of Canada in immigrant literature—in which the country “seems to offer newcomers a chance to exploit her; but this promise is seldom kept,”—to her analysis of Canadian ambivalence toward state authority. Speaking of representations of rebellious heroes, she notes that such narratives “suffer from a confusion about the nature and moral position of authority which is in fact a confusion in the Canadian psyche itself.... Canadians—and not only Canadian Prime Ministers—are terrified of having authority undermined, monolithic federalism shaken.” One may agree or disagree with specifics in Atwood's argument, but her ability to identify core elements of our popular myths is, in my opinion, inarguable. The text is fascinating too, as Davey has noted, for the way it illuminates Atwood's own literary preoccupations; her insistence on self-imposed victimization—on how “the obsession with surviving can become the will *not* to survive”—reminds us of her rigorous fictional examinations of complicity, political passivity, and active self-destruction.

Though much recent scholarship has rejected a theme-based, nationalist approach, there are certain continuities between *Survival* and more recent criticism. Post-structuralism has influenced our critical vocabularies, yet the sociological and ideological focus of *Survival* is not so different from that of much feminist and post-colonial criticism; moreover, the ubiquity of current concerns with marginality, power relations, and anti-colonial resistance suggests that Atwood's focus on colonial victimization remains central to Canadian cultural concerns. Recent studies of colonialism focus much more fully on the experience of Aboriginal peoples and people of colour than Atwood did;

nonetheless, Canadians' combined sense of vulnerability and moral superiority to the United States is at least as potent a force in our collective identity as it was at the time of *Survival*, and the victor-victim dynamic remains, arguably, *the* defining feature of Canadian cultural politics. Though few scholars would speak now of literature as a “mirror” of society, most of us still conceive of an intimate connection between social organization and the stories we tell. Atwood ended *Survival* by asking “Have we survived? If so, what happens after *Survival*?” Considering that we don't seem to have reached that “after” yet, Atwood might wish us to ask what purposes are served by our long-standing investment in victimhood.



Naval Rank: Baby

Eva-Marie Kröller

Although the name of the publisher should have told me otherwise, the title of Suzanne Stark's *Female Tars: Women Aboard Ship in the Age of Sail* (Naval Institute P) led me to believe I was delving into a tale of scandal and romance. However, this slim volume turns out to be a well written, solidly researched and occasionally wry account of ways in which women's lives were affected by seafaring, both on and off the ship, and it provides superb background reading for a volume like *Undelivered Letters to Hudson's Bay Company Men on the North West Coast of America 1830–57*, ed. Judith Beattie and Helen Buss (UBC P), a book previously reviewed in *Canadian Literature* and offering a rare and intimate glimpse into the tribulations of the families left behind by HBC men.

For example, Stark's chapter on "Prostitutes and Seamen's Wives on Board in Port" describes just how many people could be jostling for a seaman's pay, and just how serious the situation could be for anyone left out. Stark talks about the prostitutes who were rowed out to ships often anchored far from shore to prevent men who had been pressed into service from deserting, and she points out that contrary to popular caricature that portrayed the women as coarse and feisty, they were often underage and undernourished. But there was also the destitution of seamen's families who were left behind. "[Portsmouth and Plymouth] were inundated with indigent seamen's wives and children," Stark writes, adding that they represented a severe drain on the "towns' relief funds." Some families did accompany their men on

their journeys, but no provisions were made for even their most basic comfort.

Stark tackles all aspects associated with such an existence; she explains for example that women might find themselves giving birth in the middle of a battle, with "only some canvas draped across [two guns] to provide a modicum of privacy." This situation occurred apparently often enough to generate the phrase "son of a gun," an expression denoting illegitimacy. The author is also forthright when she describes transvestism: some women got away with their disguise because "they attached a short tube to their underclothing to use in urinating" and because menstrual blood could easily be disguised as the symptom of "venereal disease, a common complaint of seamen." Stark's feminism is impressive. She lets the facts speak for themselves, but her anger is often palpable. The section "Women deprived of the general service medal," for example, talks about a medal awarded in 1847 "to all the still living survivors of the major battles fought between 1793 and 1840." Although there was protest against this decision, the women were left out, possibly at the instigation of Queen Victoria herself. An infant by the inimitable name of Daniel Tremendous McKenzie was awarded the medal because he was born in mid-battle: "His rank is listed in the medal roll as 'baby.' His mother . . . could not receive the medal."

John Peck's *Maritime Fiction: Sailors and the Sea in British and American Novels, 1719–1917* (Palgrave) surveys fiction from Defoe, Austen and Dickens to Cooper, Melville, Stevenson and Conrad. A clearer rationale for the choice of American literature to go with British writing rather than (for example) Australian or Canadian texts would have been helpful, as would a more

rigorously formulated purpose to the volume beyond presenting a somewhat casual collection of literary references to sea-faring. It is good to be reminded of some of the titles included in this discussion, however, and Peck makes some genuinely intriguing observations regarding “the treatment of the body encountered at sea” (in cannibalism, press gangs, injuries and illnesses, physical punishment, and the practise of tattooing) even if they are not pursued as thoroughly as one would wish.

Like Stark’s volume, Reuben Ellis’s *Vertical Margins: Mountaineering and the Landscapes of Neoimperialism* (U of Wisconsin P) is a book with a somewhat misleading title: I eyed it with suspicion for some time because I feared deconstructionist formula, and then was made doubly nervous by the “Dedicatory Preface” which muses about a climb when “[t]ime was a weird alchemy of physical exposure and the deep aloneness and personal *dispersion* that happens in the wilderness.” However, much of the book is excellent and, like *Female Tars*, I couldn’t put it down. Particularly good is Ellis’s documentation of the historical circumstances and political ideologies that impinged on mountaineering between the late nineteenth century and the period between the two world wars, and he has illuminating things to say about “the metaphorical conjunction of war and exploration,” including the prominent role of mountaineering in Italian and German fascism. He looks at the rhetoric of geographical journals and guides such as the Royal Geographical Society’s *Hints to Travellers* and the ways they organized experience “with nearly classic RGS-style stoicism.” He draws out connections between wartime locations and popular knowledge of geography; for example, the circulation of *National Geographic* increased by seven times during WW I because “the magazine geared its editorial mix to wartime, concentrating on the geography of the war-torn regions of Europe.” He talks about the particular difficulties faced by

women mountaineers and the famously ambiguous roles they played as both pioneers and imperialists. Researchers interested in the complex relationship between women explorers and their guides will find rich material here. There is a good chapter on the photographer John Baptist Noel, which would have been even better had there been some illustrations to go with it. Canada appears only once in the index (with reference to the *Canadian Geographical Journal*), but it hovers on the horizon throughout the book: the cover photo is courtesy of the “Whyte Museum of the Canadian Rockies”; there is a section on John Grierson and another on Robert Flaherty; Mount Logan is mentioned, as is John Muir’s “Canadian Arctic exploration.” Even Linda Hutcheon makes an appearance.

If title and preface of *Vertical Margins* lead one to expect a lesser book than it turns out to be, then a book from the *doyenne* of autobiographical criticism, Sidonie Smith’s *Moving Lives: 20th Century Women’s Travel Writing* (U of Minnesota P) does the opposite. Most of the chapters in the book (arranged by mode of transport) were previously published separately and it shows. The framing material designed to bring these individual items together (the Introduction and a chapter on “The Logic of Travel and Technologies of Motion”) is too *déjà vu* to be of great interest to a researcher in the area, and the language too often seems to take off on a self-absorbed spin, as in the chapter “In the Air,” where Smith writes: “As women reimagine themselves as aerial subjects, this thoroughly modern arena of exceptionalist individualism vanishes. The vacuumization of flight disrupts the logic of aerial heroism.” There are some unusual items about which, in light of Stark’s and Ellis’s observations, one would have liked more information, but they are insufficiently developed. For example, Smith touches on the subject of female hoboes who “could not escape the stereotypes linking women in transit with sexual availability.”

It would have been good to have more precise documentation here of the kind Stark so persuasively provides. There are, however, interesting titles and nuggets of information in *Moving Lives* that are worth following up on, and the section on Daphne Marlatt's and Betsy Warland's collaborative travelogue *Double Negative* (1988) will be of particular interest to the Canadian reader. Selection of the illustrations in Smith's book seems to be guided by the same haphazardness as the chapters, but the ones in Barbara Hodgson's *No Place for a Lady: Tales of Adventurous Women Travellers* (Greystone Books) are splendid indeed, and the entire book is as beautifully designed as one would expect from a collaborator with Nick Bantock (together with Karen Elizabeth Gordon, Hodgson and Bantock wrote *Paris Out of Hand*, a fictional guidebook). Anyone looking for a good cover for a study of travel will find more than enough possibilities here. Although Hodgson's sources are scrupulously documented, however, this is not a scholarly study nor does it pretend to say anything new. On occasion, the parade of eccentric travellers becomes monotonous and superficial, but overall this is a delightful volume to browse through and give as a present. Andrew Zimmermann's *Anthropology and Antihumanism in Imperial Germany* (U of Chicago P) is addressed to an entirely different readership. The book displays heavy-duty and frequently original scholarship, including over a hundred pages of notes and bibliographical entries. As German complements to Roslyn Poignant's *Professional Savages: Captive Lives and Western Spectacle* (Yale UP) and similar books, Zimmermann's chapters on "Exotic Spectacles and the Global Context of Germany Anthropology" and "Measuring Skulls: The Social Role of the Anthumanist" document the display of indigenous peoples from around the world at colonial exhibitions (and, frequently, of their bones in anthropological museums if they did not survive the European climate) in Berlin and

elsewhere, but he also reads significant resistance in their refusal to be photographed in "authentic" costume. Zimmermann cautions that Bismarck (Kwelle Ndumbe) Bell's insistence on wearing black tie and medals for his portrait could be understood as "cooperation with European colonists" or as a display of his "membership in the comprador classes of Cameroon," but he still makes too much of the possibility that "[b]y wearing trousers, Bell disrupted the binary oppositions that underwrote anthropology, colonialism, and, indeed, the very idea of Europe." Particularly noteworthy is Zimmermann's documentation of indigenous peoples who used colonial exhibitions for diplomatic missions in their own interest, such as "Friedrich Maharero, eldest son of Samuel Maharero, king of the Herero" who attended the 1896 Colonial Exhibition in Berlin in order to arrange a meeting with the Kaiser. As far as I can tell, *Anthropology and Antihumanism* does not cite any writing by these visitors, but *Travellers in Egypt*, ed. Paul Starkey and Janet Starkey (Tauris), a collection of papers based on a conference at the University of Durham's Oriental Museum, does include the reverse perspective, with an essay by Paul Starkey on "Egyptian Travellers in Europe." Once again exhibitions play a major role. Journalist and novelist Muhammad al-Muwaylihi's *Hadith 'Isā ibn Hishām* describes the author's mortification at the 1900 World Exhibition in Paris where Egypt is represented by pornographic displays of belly-dancing and physical deformity ("an armless girl spinning with her feet") as well as a *tableau* mocking Islamic education, "with a schoolmaster drumming Qur'anic verses into the pupils while beating them with palm leaves." Inquiring how this shameful display came into being, the visitor is told that "a group of European 'Orientalists' resident in Egypt" in collaboration with profiteering Egyptians arranged for it, following Egypt's refusal to participate officially.

Articles

Anne **Compton** is a Research Associate in the School of Graduate Studies, UNB Fredericton, and Director of the Lorenzo Reading Series, UNB Saint John. Her books and numerous published articles contribute to critical discussions on 19th-century and early 20th-century aesthetics, 17th-century Metaphysical poetry, Canadian literature, and Maritime literature.

Maggie **de Vries** is a writer, editor, and teacher who lives in Vancouver. She was awarded the George Ryga Award for Social Awareness in Canadian Literature for 2004. Her book *Missing Sarah* was nominated for a Governor General's Literary Award.

Susan **Fisher** teaches Canadian literature at the University College of the Fraser Valley. She has published essays on modern Japanese literature, contemporary British fiction, and Canadian poetry.

Lise **Gauvin** est l'auteure de plusieurs ouvrages sur les rapports entre la langue et la littérature, spécialiste de la francophonie, nouvelliste, et professeure à l'Université de Montréal. Ses recherches interdisciplinaires sur le sujet qui constitue la matière de cet essai font autorité non seulement au pays mais sont largement connus, commentés et cités à l'étranger.

Elisabeth **Harvor** was honoured in 2000 with the Alden Nowlan Award for outstanding achievement in literature. She won the Marian Engel Award for 2003, and the *Malahat* Novella Prize for 2004. Her work has been anthologized in Canada, the US, and Europe. She has taught in writing programs at Concordia University, York University, and The Humber School for Writers, and she has been Writer-in-Residence at universities and libraries across Canada. Her latest novel, *All Times Have Been Modern*, was published by Viking Canada in 2004.

Frances **Itani** is the winner of the 2004 Commonwealth Writers Prize Best Book Award for *Deafening*, and the Governor General's Award for fiction, 2004. She has also published poetry and a children's book and has written features for CBC Radio.

John **Moffatt** teaches English at the University College of the Fraser Valley.

Valerie **Raoul** is a Professor of French and Women's Studies at UBC, and Director of the SAGA Centre (Studies in Autobiography, Gender, and Age). Her current research is on women's diaries and oral life histories, in France, Quebec, and BC.

Sandy **Tait** is currently the Production Manager in the Theatre department at the University College of the Fraser Valley. At the time of the interview, she was the Coordinator of the Aboriginal Resource Centre at the college. Sandy is also involved in independent filmmaking; her special interest is documentary filmmaking.

Drew Hayden **Taylor**'s plays, such as *Someday* (Fifth House, 1993), *Only Drunks and Children Tell the Truth* (Talonbooks, 1998), *alterNatives* (Talonbooks, 2000), and most recently, *The Buz'gem Blues* (Talonbooks, 2002) are widely produced in Canada and abroad. His collections of essays, in the series *Futile Observations of a Blue-Eyed Ojibway: Funny, You Don't Look Like One* are published by Theytus Books. He is also the author of the short-story collection *Fearless Warriors* (Talonbooks, 1998), and has worked in television and film.

Opinions & Notes

Robert **Bringhurst** is the author of *The Black Canoe: Bill Reid and the Spirit of Haida* and *A Story as Sharp as a Knife: an Introduction to Classical Haida Literature*. He lives on Quadra Island, British Columbia.

Janice **Fiamengo** is an assistant professor of English at the University of Ottawa, with a special interest in late-nineteenth-century Canadian women's writing and culture. She has published articles on nineteenth-century and contemporary Canadian literature, and is currently writing a monograph on the strategies of rhetoric and self-presentation of Canadian writers, reformers, and activists in the period 1870-1920.

Eva-Marie **Kröller** has most recently published the *Cambridge Companion to Canadian Literature* (2003).

Poems

Jane **Munro** lives in Sooke, British Columbia; John **Donlan** in Ontario; Michael **deBeyer** in New Brunswick; Shane **Rhodes** in Ottawa; Hendrik **Slegtenhorst** in Vancouver.

Reviews

Robert **Amussen** lives in Sooke. Brenda **Austin-Smith** teaches at the University of Manitoba. Charles **Barbour**, Bryan N.S. **Gooch**, Graham **Good**, Sherrill **Grace**, Kathryn **Grafton**, Mark **Harris**, John Kieran **Kealy** and Linda **Morra** teach at the University of British Columbia; Jes **Battis** and Sophie **McCall** at Simon Fraser University. Deborah C. **Bowen** teaches at Redeemer College, Kathryn **Carter** at Laurier Brantford, Tim **Conley** at Queen's University. Sarah **Cummins** and Anne-Marie **Fortier** teach at Université Laval. Roćio **Davis** teaches at the University of Navarre in Spain. Charles **Dawson** lives in Wellington, New Zealand. Ian **Dennis** and Janice **Fiamengo** teach at the University of Ottawa; Cecily **Devereux**, Kristjana **Gunnars**, and Nasrin **Rahimieh** at the University of Alberta. Marta **Dvorak** teaches at l'Université Paris III-Nouvelle Sorbonne; Marlene **Goldman** at the University of Toronto at Scarborough; Lothar **Hönnighausen** at Universität Bonn in Germany; Coral Ann **Howells** at the University of Reading in England; Marilyn **Iwama** at Dalhousie University; Adrienne **Kertzer** and Roderick F. **McGillis** teach at the University of Calgary. Thomas **Lamarre** teaches at McGill University. Andrea Pinto **Lebowitz**, Laurie **McNeill**, Meredith **Quartermain**, and R.W. **Stedingh** live in Vancouver. Andrew **Lesk** teaches at l'Université de Montréal. Ian G. **Lumsden** lives in Fredericton; Sylvain **Marois** in Québec. Lawrence **Mathews** teaches at the Memorial University of Newfoundland, John **Moffatt** at the University College of the Fraser Valley, Jane **Moss** at Colby College, Maria Noëlle **Ng** at the University of Lethbridge. François **Paré** and Guy **Poirier** teach at the University of Waterloo. Antje M. **Rauwerda** teaches at St. Mary's University, Norman **Ravvin** at Concordia University, Montreal. Wendy **Roy** lives in Saskatoon, Joanne **Saul** in Toronto. Robert **Stanton** teaches at the University of Leeds, Robert **Thacker** at St Lawrence University, Maria **Truchan-Tataryn** at the University of Saskatchewan, Hilary **Turner** at the University College of the Fraser Valley, Lynn **Wytenbroek** at Malaspina University College. Greg **Yavorsky** lives in Banff.

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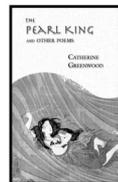
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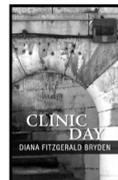
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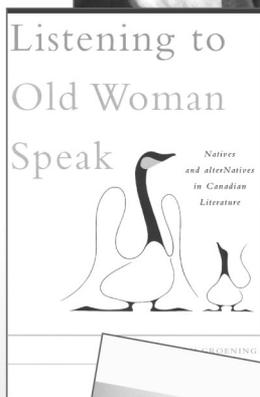
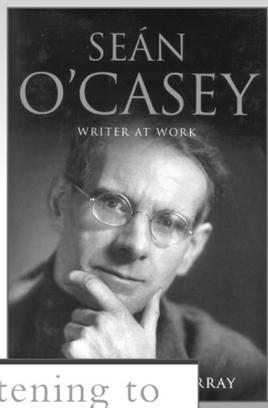
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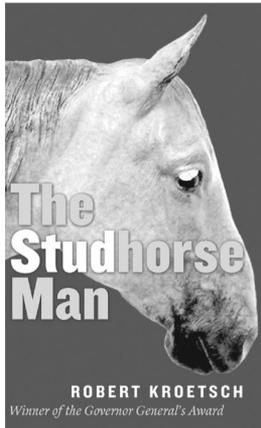
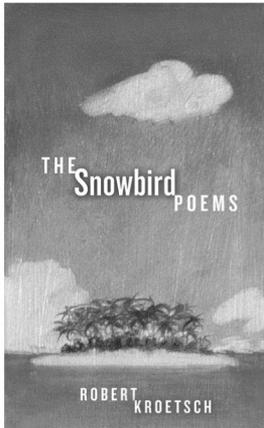
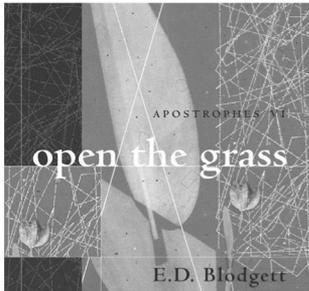
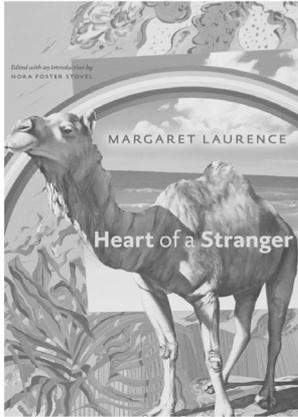


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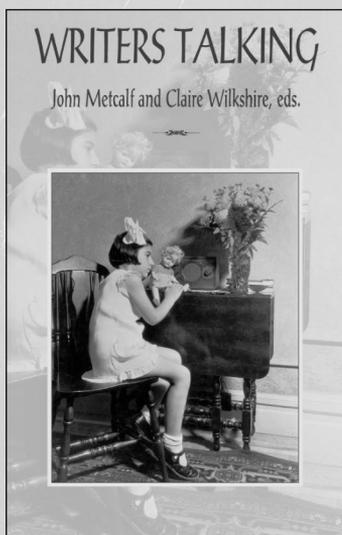
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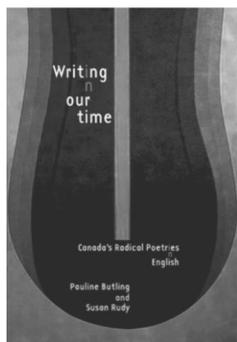
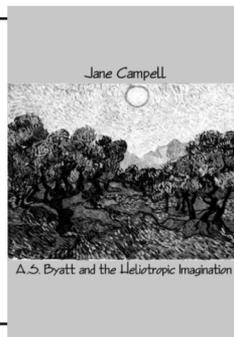
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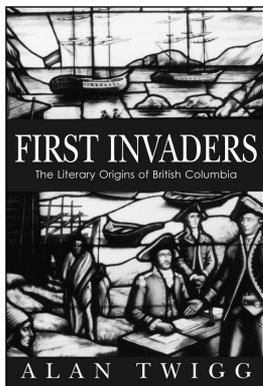


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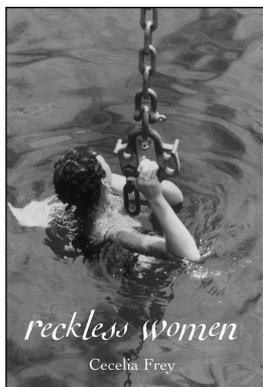
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