

# Canadian Literature / Littérature canadienne

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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.

Les manuscrits, d'une longueur approximative de 6500 mots, doivent être soumis en trois exemplaires (dont deux anonymisés), adressés à l'Éditeur de *Canadian Literature*, The University of British Columbia, Buchanan E158, 1866 Main Mall, Vancouver, C.-B., Canada V6T 1Z1, et accompagnés d'une note biographique (100 mots) et d'une enveloppe de retour pré-adressée et pré-affranchie (timbrée ou munie de coupons-réponse internationaux), sans quoi ils ne pourront être retournés à leurs auteurs.

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# Convince Me in Couplets

Laurie Ricou

Each poem is another way  
to say: *convince me*.  
—Sue Goyette “And After”

- Rigorous scansion aside, *selfish* rhymes with *shellfish*. That realization is sufficient for a poem. The poet will approach that blurred and accidental echo with absolute conviction: the aural connection surely also contains an emotional and intellectual connection. I learned from Ricardo Sternberg’s *Bamboo Church* (McGill-Queens UP \$16.95) this essence: that selfish is just another way of hiding, of moving, of breathing underwater. And Sternberg learned it from trying a sestina. Arranging words according to strict rules brings unruly surprises.

Stated in the baldest possible way, the distinction is this: the purpose of prose is to be useful, to serve something, whereas the purpose of poetry is to be of no use, to serve nothing. Prose is an instrument; poetry is an end in itself. (Charles B. Wheeler, *The Design of Poetry*).

- This is not an editorial. Or its editorial opinion is bland. Poetry is valuable. Pay attention. That’s it.
- Pay attention to Lien Chao’s *More Than Skin Deep* (TSAR Publications \$16.95). Chao describes herself as a part-time “housewife . . . property manager . . . teacher . . . writer.” Or, at least the “I” in one of her poems “A Chinese Housewife, Eh?” outlines this biography. Another poem tells us about an “I” classified as a “third world woman” who no longer attends the MLA. These are wry, teasing and yet polemical poems. Chao is bemused more often than she’s angry: her poetry depends on recounting an incident, then reversing perspective on it; call it an anecdotal chiasmus. Chao explains that she wrote these poems in English, then translated them into

Chinese—the poems are presented in a facing bilingual format. I wish she had told us more about the “adaptations . . . that bring the two fundamentally different languages closer.” But the poems teach adaptation. In a fundamental way, the purpose of Chao’s poems is to be useful.

- In this issue of *Canadian Literature* we publish five articles. None is on poetry.
- One of Hannah Main-van der Kamp’s poems is titled “Was Blind but Now I Shimmee.” I have not quite figured out what “shimnee” means, but I want to find out. Although I am not sure about shimnee, I am convinced that bad puns and extravagant neologisms might make good poetry. See bp Nichol; see Gerard Manley Hopkins. Given that the title of Main-van der Kamp’s fourth book is *According to Loon Bay* (St. Thomas Poetry Series 383 Huron Str. Toronto M5S 2G5 \$20.00), *shimnee* might be one of the sounds gurgling in the call of a large loon. This poetry dances the shimmy—(what was that?). For a moment some swaying is noticeable; and then it dissipates. Both syntax and diction vibrate a bit off center, often delightfully shaking the reader’s perception. The poet inserts a verbal shim here and there to level things off. And poetry shimmers. Main-van der Kamp writes a lot of bird-watching poems, and flights into Biblical mythology. Amazing and graceful.
- Bravo to McGill-Queens University Press for committing to a poetry series. It has created a fine set of 5 x 7 elegantly designed volumes (small enough to hide). Ricardo Sternberg writes as zestily on “duplexity” as on mules in Greece: his is the oldest subject—the intellectual kinetics of love. When there’s “said not a word,” Sternberg says a word. This fine series, in delicious irony, is named for a novelist: The Hugh MacLennan Poetry Series.

A poem is what happens when a poet rediscovers. . . . In making [the poem], the poet learns what it is that he has rediscovered . . . Thus a child, when it begins to speak, learns what it is that it knows. And as a child will talk to itself, with no one around to hear, so in the poem the poet, it might be said, is talking to himself.  
(John Hall Wheelock *What is Poetry?*)
- Jean Greenberg’s *Turning Dirt into Jewels* (Wolsak and Wynn \$15.00) is worth having just for the second poem in the book, “Dale Chihuly.” Greenberg muses on the audacious, absurd project of transporting Alaskan glaciers to build an ice wall in the Negev desert. As sculptures, the icebergs express the peaceful cooling of overheated animosities, their melting is spontaneous, environmentally improvisational performance art. Greenberg marvels at the ancient integrity of art work, at the “kinetic” knowing of the utterly useless.

Somewhere suppressed in the restrained accounting of growing a glass mountain lies a teasing questioning of how artist relates to signature. How is it that a host of glass blowers, publicists and copyright monitors combine to build artworks and be Chihuly. It's a question, slightly tilted, that Greenberg asks of her own words (*Turning Dirt* is her first book, at age 61): what is their origin? whose are they? did I plan them? where did the patterns come from? Joe Rosenblatt's skittish pen and ink drawings flit through the book, appropriately evoking both irony and delight in otherness.

- If you imagine yourself to be apolitical, it's difficult to come up with an opinion piece every three months. Few literary journals even try. The only subject I have strong views on today is that we have too many books of poetry on our review shelves—too many dedicated word-people published by more dedicated word-people often in elegantly designed artefacts—that are not getting noticed. So, if I pick a few titles, more or less by chance, and feature them, up-front, in the journal that should review all of them, maybe those few glimpses will be an argument to pay attention.
- I was startled to see, in the material accompanying the Public Lending Rights payout (February 2005), that a special formula is required for poetry. So few public libraries buy so few books of poetry, that the program's mandate to "protect Canada's cultural identity" requires an adjusted poetry-factor. Write a book on prairie fiction, and you still get \$301.70 a year 35 years after publication. Write a book of prairie poems and the PLR needs to add a "hit" for your title to provide you with even a token share of the "rights" budget.
- Among the 47 current Ph.D. students in English at UBC, five are doing theses on poetry. I assume comparable proportions exist across the country.
- In manuscript form, Steve McOrmond's *Lean Days* (Wolsak and Wynn \$15.00) won the Alfred G. Bailey Prize from the Writers' Federation of New Brunswick. The final section of the book, a 20-poem sequence "The Discography of Silence (Poems about Glenn Gould)," makes deft use of abstractions to perform the word-worker's aspiration "to understand the inner workings / of a piece of music." In humming anaphora McOrmond creates a poetics of waiting: "Glenn Gould is a slow-moving disturbance. . . . Glenn Gould is the condition of remove—"
- Sue Goyette's poems are an extended homage to all the poets. To Rilke and Neruda especially. And to ee cummings and John Thompson—to Elizabeth Bishop and Georgia O'Keefe and Charles Schultz's Snoopy. "O how we



believed” she sings in half-ironic tribute, “in every one of the songs // we heard the word love in.” Convincing us of the “family” of word, of song.

- Ricardo Sternberg might be defining poetry in his “Kinetic Study”: “subtle undulations, / microscopic curlicues, / eddies of movement.” Poetry shimmies.
- The Poetry in Transit program, in many cities, puts poems on the move. You can’t put an oblong novel up on an overhead poster. It won’t travel. But when you’re trying to stay upright in a bus, you must read and read and read those few lines. You read advertisements for language: they convince us in couplets.
- Sue Goyette’s *Undone* (Brick Books \$16.00) reminds me of Carol Shields’ *Unless*. Many of her poems pause over a single un-word, and in hesitating emphasis, often in italics, an apparently unpoetic word emerges as a “hinge of being.” Convince me, she demands, as if to convince herself that the poem must be something more than an undoing. She wants to believe that the poem supersedes the word undone: “let me speak directly, / let me step from these line breaks and unbutton / the metaphors.” The line breaks. Undone. The poem is in hiding:

Convince me, convince me in couplets,  
in sonnets, in trees, in forests, in plaid shirts with the blue paint  
of bedroom on the sleeves.

Goyette’s “con” is tricky: it’s together, and against, and with. It resists the need for convincing.



Canadian Literature *mourns the loss of a contributor, colleague, and friend of the journal. Gabriele Helms’ work on auto/biography, collaborative processes, genre, food, and contemporary fiction has been an important contribution to the field of Canadian Literature for over a decade. She was a generous, funny, and passionate advocate of Canadian writing. Her book Challenging Canada: Dialogism and Narrative Techniques in Canadian Novels is reviewed in this issue. Gabi died in Vancouver, December 2004.*

## Late Show

You imagine him pausing on a dark upper landing, carefully reassuming the pose of half-person, grateful she's past stirring. Unspent resentment aches across their latest choices as his tacit feet retrace an intimate routine. Walking that untripped wire, another fine line between unfinished and inferred, just left hanging. Or does she even sense this ghost who lost her long before shame embarrassed largesse? After all it's only good manners not to ask too much, too often, too soon.

*Even when with her he missed her. Even when with her he missed you. Even when with you he missed her. Even when with you he missed you.* And once upon an appetite or two their patterns overlapped, became a tartan of passion. But now that tablecloth is white. Another crystal weather sifting softly out there, slowly adding itself up. Shaping, shading, shovelling, shaving, smoothing over and cooling off the drifts, those sheets, their meals, all the plated details of that counterpane

pantomime. And each of us probably always has someone else to blame instead of us. So now he refuses to make friends with himself because he suspects another betrayal. And he might be grieving for someone nobody's ever met. Not that you're any distance from anything. Yet you finally choose to believe him as he leaves later than any other offhand explanation, sleepily waving to the camera at your lobby door. . . .

# Calling Out the McLean Boys

## George Bowering's *Shoot* and the Autobiography of British Columbia History

Where historians try to come to grips with a period which has left surviving eyewitnesses, two quite different concepts of history clash, or, in the best of cases, supplement each other: the scholarly and the existential, archive and personal memory. For everyone is a historian of his or her own consciously lived lifetime *inasmuch as he or she comes to terms with it in the mind*.  
—Hobsbawm, 4–5, emphasis added.

When I was a boy in the Okanagan Valley I looked around a lot. Never knew what I was looking for. . . . I was scared of McLeans from the rumours I had heard, and I kept an eye out for them. Kenny McLean wasn't in my school anymore. I started to wonder whether he was a ghost that came and sat in my classroom for part of a winter.  
—George Bowering, "Parashoot!: Diary of a Novel," 166.

### **The Autobiographical I/Eye**

About one-third of the way into his 1994 novel *Shoot*, George Bowering tells us that "all through my childhood and whatever it is that comes later, I spent a lot of time alone in the [Okanagan] Valley and especially the hills" (105). The scene he goes on to describe is important, but overtly it has nothing to do with shooting or with "The Wild McLean Boys" (42). In this scene an adult Bowering remembers playing in a shale slide as a boy and uncovering bones and a human skull. This uncovering reveals that someone was here before him, that he is not really alone, that this valley exists in time as well as space, that it has layers of time/space—an archeology. He is/was an eye-witness to that evidence.

When I ask myself why I respond so keenly to *Shoot*, it is Bowering's autobiographical voice I return to, his voice and his uncovering of bones. As Bowering calls Canadian history to account by calling out the McLean Boys,

it is *his* voice and story I attend to, his autobiographical I/eye that guides me into my own feelings about the history and landscape of British Columbia and about the three McLean brothers—Allan, Charlie, and Archie—and their tough young companion, Alex Hare. This first-person voice makes a claim on my attention that a third-person voice would not because I know that Bowering did grow up in the BC interior and is, therefore, speaking from personal experience. Rightly or wrongly, that personal experience, his right to say “I,” and my expectation that he will tell me about something he has actually experienced lend an urgency and an authority to his narrative that, as a reader, I have learned to accept and trust. Before reading *Shoot*, I knew next to nothing about the McLean Gang, but Bowering’s “I” leads me to think he will tell me the truth. Such is the power of that autobiographical “I.”<sup>1</sup>

According to Bowering, these four young men were, indeed, bad news—violent, resentful, ignorant, destructive. They robbed and assaulted people, destroyed property, broke out of the Kamloops jail, and finally



Allen McLean



Charlie McLean

committed an extremely violent murder of an unarmed man who tried to talk them into surrendering before they went too far. All four were “half-breeds” (in the terminology of the day): half Scots or French and half Indian, Shuswap to be precise. Lacking in education, property of their own, steady employment, or a recognized place in 1870s British Columbia society, they chose to terrorize that society in Kamloops and the Nicola Valley. And yet, in *Shoot* Bowering makes me care about the “Boys”; he asks me to understand and sympathize with them; he presents me with a larger picture than one shoot-out, one murder, or one theft; he urges me to shift some of the blame for what happened in the winter of 1879 to other people and forces me to acknowledge a host of lived complexities; he insists that hanging the “Boys” was barbarous, political revenge far in excess of anything they did singly or together. By calling out the history of the McLean Boys, George (like Conrad’s Marlow) makes me *see* a heart of darkness in the BC interior of the 1870s.



Archie McLean



Alex Hare

But how does he do this without lecturing me? How does he elicit my sympathy without embellishing or suppressing the ugly facts or asking me to accept the notion that boys will be boys? What and whose story is he telling in *Shoot*? For some answers to these questions, I have turned to literary theory, history, cartography, and archives. I have also drawn upon my personal knowledge of the Cariboo and, thus, on aspects of my own autobiographical response to place and text. I have tried, in short, to combine what Hobsbawm calls the scholarly and the existential. For the scholarly—or, at least, for my theoretical—approach to this text, I have drawn upon the concepts of contact zone and transculturation developed by Mary Louise Pratt in *Imperial Eyes* and upon recent theory in autobiography studies, most importantly the work of Paul John Eakin, Leigh Gilmore, and Philippe Lejeune. For the existential (as Hobsbawm calls it), I turn to Bowering's comments in "Parashoot!" his personal "diary" of this novel and to my own reading of BC texts and landscape. What these scholarly and existential approaches tell me is what I so often sense when I reflect upon BC history and what I see represented in *Shoot*—that BC is not so much *post*-colonial as a contact zone of on-going colonization and, potentially, of transculturation, whether I am looking at Vancouver, in the south-west corner of the province (as Bowering does in *Burning Water*, for example), or at the central interior area known as the Cariboo, where *Shoot* takes place.<sup>2</sup>

Describing the phenomenon of transculturation in *Imperial Eyes*, Pratt explains that a "contact zone," the site par excellence of transculturation, is "the space in which peoples geographically and historically separated come into contact with each other and establish on-going relations, usually involving conditions of coercion, radical inequality, and intractable conflict" (6). Moreover, she explicitly distinguishes the concept of contact zone from that of colonial frontier. The latter, more familiar term implies not only a hierarchy of colonizer (European and political centre of power) over colonized (non-European and marginal) but, more importantly, a one-way process of influence in which the colonizer remains immune from any contact with the colonized. The actual experience of a contact zone, according to Pratt, is two-way, uncontrollable, and mutually informing.<sup>3</sup> For Pratt—I would argue, for Bowering in *Shoot*—the contact zone foregrounds, situates, and facilitates transculturation: that process of "interactive, improvisational" (Pratt 7) colonial encounter in which relations between colonized and colonizer threaten to transform both parties (to some degree) unless the racial, ethnic, linguistic, legal, political, and territorial boundaries and hier-

archies that protect the colonizer from contamination are reasserted. On one level, of course, the actual racial mixing—the miscegenation producing “half-breeds”—that created the McLean brothers makes them biological contact zones and sites of transculturation that the white authorities of the day felt obliged to repudiate. Bowering’s task is to unearth them from the shale/history of their time/space, and allow them (and those who tried to contain them) to bear witness to an actual process of transculturation that the dominant culture (in BC, in Canada, in history books) still tries to deny.

To address this phenomenon of transculturation, Bowering adopts an autobiographical position: he confesses his personal interest in the Valley (*Shoot* 105) and in the story hidden in its hills. By making his personal stake in the story clear—from boyhood he has been haunted by the absence of the McLeans, while sensing their influence all around him—he authorizes himself to tell their story, to show how, as Eakin might phrase it, their/his/our lives become stories *through* relations of self with other in the contact zone of transculturation. In other words, by telling their story, Bowering tells (aspects of) his own; by recreating the McLeans as fictional selves, he can also recreate himself. In *Autobiographics*, Leigh Gilmore approaches the problem of “making selves” (Eakin) from a different angle than does Eakin, but her conclusion is remarkably similar. Gilmore defines “autobiographics” as the practice of articulating and thereby producing an identity that emerges from interruptions in the apparently seamless continuity of self-representation; it emerges from the resistance to and contradiction of conventional, externally imposed definitions of identity (42). Thus, in his autobiographics of George Bowering and the McLeans, Bowering produces fragmentary, multiple (and often contradictory) perspectives on a past that has not only shaped himself and the region known as the Cariboo, but also has conditioned through settlement, development, laws, maps, and history that larger contact zone of transculturation we call British Columbia.

Indeed, why stop at the BC border? *Shoot* is exemplary of many Canadian (and only Canadian?) texts that use an autobiographical sextant to map similar contact zones and to locate similar sites of transculturation—*Kiss of the Fur Queen*, for example, or *A Discovery of Strangers* to name just two (see Grace 189–90, 253–60). As with these novels, I find it less useful to think of *Shoot* as a postmodern, metafictional, or even a historical novel than to think of it as a hybrid text, a mongrel novel, a mixture of true story and legend (“slu-hai-yum or s-chip-tak-wi-la,” 44).<sup>4</sup> It mixes autobiography, I/eye-witness testimony, history lesson, legend, myth, western tall-tale, and

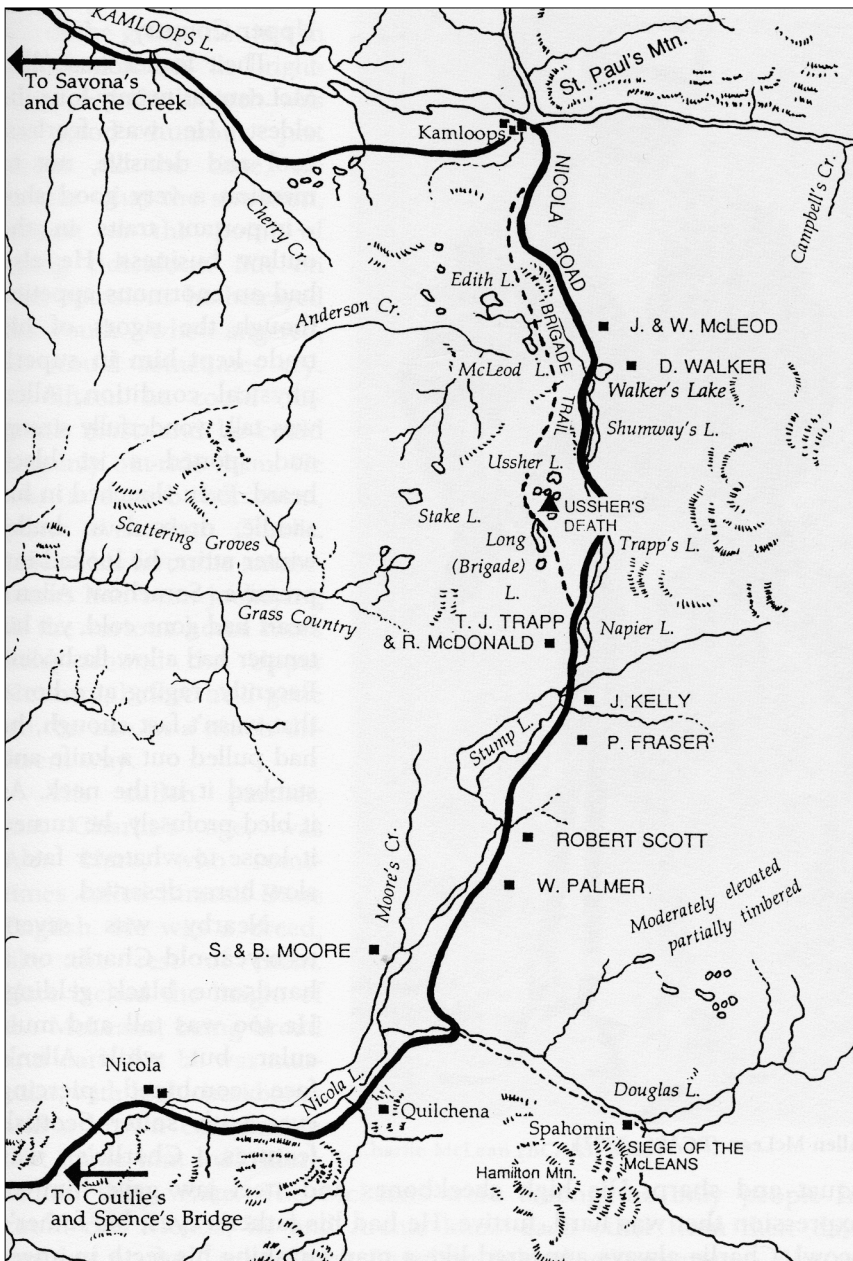
regional realism, all of which are sedimented in layers of time and place, with an almost impossible ethical intention of making *us* (by which I mean the majority of his readers who will be white, middle-class, Euro-Canadians) recognize our own autobiographical position in a contact zone where we too face Hobsbawm's "existential" challenge to transculturation and our responsibility for "personal memory" in a shared past (4–5).

### **Shooting History as Geography**

*Shoot* is about the so-called McLean Gang who terrorized the country around Kamloops in the late 1870s, stole a black stallion from a rancher named Palmer, vowed revenge on another man named Mara for seducing and dishonouring (Allan calls it rape) their kid sister Annie, murdered the local lawman called Johnny Ussher, who was leading a posse to reclaim the stolen horse—murdered and then pulverized him and then boasted about it—raided every farm and ranch they passed for booze, weapons and ammunition, and finally fetched up, circa 9 December 1879 at the reserve of Chief Chillitnetza (Allan McLean's father-in-law) hoping to raise an army of Indian warriors to drive the whites off Indian land. The chief said no. The Gang was trapped in a log cabin on the reserve by a large posse of white men determined to bring them in dead or alive, but preferably alive. The posse laid siege to the cabin for several days, slowly starving the Gang into submission. When the Gang surrendered, they were shackled, stripped (notably of their boots), and taken to Kamloops for their first hearing on 15 December. Ten days later, after a rough trip through the worst winter the region had seen, the Gang was delivered to the penitentiary in New Westminster on Christmas day 1879.

The landscape of *Shoot* will not be found on contemporary maps in tourist guidebooks. Nowhere in such books are the McLeans or their disgraceful, violent acts mentioned; even the key place names associated with the story are missing or emptied of their story. But the traces are there if you look closely. In one map you can find Cache Creek, Ashcroft, in tiny print a place called Hat Creek, and to the southeast, the Okanagan Valley, where young George Bowering spent so much time alone. A more detailed map of the country between Merritt and Kamloops would show Nicola, at the southern end of the Nicola Valley; to the east Quilchena and Douglas Lake; and, to the north, Mara Lake, just south of Shuswap Lake. But the sedimented layers of history only surface fully in Mel Rothenburger's special map for *The Wild McLeans* (facing page). Here, readers have all the 1870s





geography needed to place the story of the Gang and *Shoot*: places named for nineteenth-century white settlers and ranchers on the final posse—McLeod, Walker, Shumway, Ussher, Trapp, McDonald, Kelly, Fraser, Scott, and Palmer; and places identified with the McLeans, such as Spahomin, home of Allan's father-in-law and wife, and the spot where the siege took place.

Bowering insists that the McLeans were written out of BC history, and judging from the official record that is true.<sup>5</sup> But if you look hard enough you can find a few traces. There are a few popular accounts by descendants of the McLeans such as Mel Rothenburger; there are also accounts by Spinks, Macpherson, and Paterson in such books as *Tales of the British Columbia Frontier*, *Outlaws of Western Canada*, and *Outlaws of the Canadian West*. The history goes something like this: In 1834 a young Scot from Tobermory came to the so-called frontier to work for the Hudson's Bay Company. His name was Donald McLean (1805–64); he had dark red hair, a fierce temper, a profound dislike for Indians, and a very cruel streak.<sup>6</sup> He worked at several HBC forts from Colville below the line to Babine and St. James to the north. By 1855, he had become Chief Trader of the HBC fort at Kamloops, a position he held until 1861. When he retired from the Company, he was given land at Hat Creek, where he created, with the help of his Indian wife, Sophie Grant, a successful ranch and roadhouse.

In 1864, McLean was executed at Soda Creek during the Chilcotin Uprising, by an Indian seeking revenge for atrocities McLean had committed against the Indians. McLean's death left Sophie a widow with two daughters and three sons to raise. One of the daughters was Annie, who fourteen years later would be raped and made pregnant by John Mara; the three sons were Allan, Charlie, and Archie, who in the winter of 1879 were 23, 17, and 14 years respectively. Five years after McLean was shot, Sophie McLean was pushed off her Hat Creek ranch and left with a meagre pension on which to support her family. She did the best she could under the circumstances, and, according to Bowering, she always reminded her boys that they were McLeans. But they were something *other* than pure McLean; they were also Indian, and in the eyes of 1870s BC they were "halfbreeds"—lesser breeds without the law.

Although all these facts, the bare bones of the story, are present in *Shoot*, Bowering does not tell the story in chronological sequence, nor does he use a single narrator or a stable narrative focalization to control the telling. The facts, documentation, accurate names of people and places, quotations from newspapers and court records, and rehearsal of events are interwoven with Bowering's autobiographical reflections. This narrative mix is further complicated by dizzying shifts in time from the present of his story-telling to the past of 1879, to the still earlier past of Donald McLean's life, to Bowering's memory of Kenny McLean, a classmate who became a hero in World War II, to the intense "presents" of the December shoot-out and of

the moments in 1881 just before the hangings, to the distant past of native oral history and myth. The narrative circles. It begins in New Westminister penitentiary with the Warden's wife, Mary Anne Moresby, who sings for the boys, and it returns to her singing at the end. In between, we have plenty of time to try to understand what made the McLean Boys and their side-kick Alex Hare into the "wild" or the "evil" McLean Gang.

Bowering gives us several narrative voices, and no recognizable pattern or cue that I can find signals when we will be presented with which voice and storyteller. These voices include native Elders discussing the affairs of men; two ancient native groups arguing over how geese whistle; three mythic brothers explaining the origins of the world; the Gang members and other characters from history (at least, their voices are the ones George Bowering creates); Bowering's friends (three of whom are mentioned in the dedication); and, significantly, a nameless chronicler, who can give us the history not there in the official history books. This chronicler (a colloquial, third-person narrator) carries an important focalizing and ethical burden within the larger narrative framework of the story. He does all the conventional things a reader expects from such a presence; he also disappears behind or merges with a still more personal voice that I identify as "George Bowering." As a conventional chronicler, he fills in missing history and provides facts, temporal perspective, a crucial textual matrix for all the other voices, and several degrees of interiority. This interiority creates an illusion of subjectivity for the characters, whose thoughts, feelings, and perceptions no one can actually have access to but that readers accept as produced by the pact they agree to when reading a novel. To mention a pact, however, by which I mean that tacit agreement or unwritten contract I sign with a writer to believe what he or she tells me, brings another pact immediately to mind—that far more demanding and ostensibly overt pact I enter into when I read a work that claims to be autobiographical.<sup>7</sup> To enter into what Philippe Lejeune calls an autobiographical pact is to believe that the author and the narrator are one and the same and are, therefore, telling the truth about a *real* life.

Much has been said about the truth claims of autobiography, so I will not rehearse the analyses here. But I want to stress the degree to which Bowering merges chronicler and autobiographer in *Shoot* and the impact on this reader (and, I think, on most other readers) of this merger. The history proper of the McLeans begins, not in the opening paragraphs of the book, but a bit further on when we read (and *hear*, for this is the voice of oral

history, of storytelling) that “Archie McLean was fifteen years old, he figured, and he was sitting in a jail cell, waiting to get hanged. . . . He was famous” (2). As a reader, I will come to recognize and trust this chronicling voice as the thread I can hold on to in the shifting registers of the telling. However, another very similar voice surfaces repeatedly throughout the telling (as in the passage, for example, that appears at the beginning of this essay [105]) until it slips out from behind the chronicler’s voice to get the last words:

Archie’s eyes looked at nothing, at the chopped hair in front of him, at the hoof-prints of the horses in the snow, looked out of the photograph in the tray. I see them in the dark. You see them. The squinting eyes of little Archie McLean. (297)

With this careful and, through the course of the text, gradual, cumulative slide into the autobiographer’s “I” that directly addresses the reader’s “you,” Bowering intensifies his claim to be taken at his personal word for the truth of this story and, by virtue of this personal commitment, for his still larger ethical appeal to my conscience and emotions. Again, in Hobsbawm’s formulation (with which I preface this study), Bowering makes himself “a historian of his . . . own consciously lived lifetime” by “com[ing] to terms with it in the mind.” And that mind, in this final passage from *Shoot*, is Bowering’s mind’s I/eye or, at least, what I accept as the identity of this I/eye with the name on the title page: George Bowering. While this is by no means the only way in which Bowering combines “archive and personal memory” (Hobsbawm) to make me care about the McLeans, it is central to building my trust in the storyteller’s testimony to the complexity of the boys’ transcultural condition and the injustice of their fate.

Almost the only female voice we hear is Mrs Moresby’s, and her voice and perspective carry enormous moral weight.<sup>8</sup> Clearly, she feels concern and compassion for these boys. The eldest, Allan, with an infant son of his own, is about her age; the others are boys, not much more than children in her eyes. So when I ask myself *why* I care about this book and *how* Bowering makes me see some of the complex multiplicities surrounding the McLean Boys and feel some sadness and regret, if not shame and guilt, for their fates, I realize that the female voice and perspective (like that autobiographical voice) are also crucial. But it is not just the female voices we hear that count (Mary Anne’s, Martha the provincial educator’s wife’s, Jane Palmer’s). There are two extremely important women whose voices we do not hear, whose stories Bowering relates indirectly through the men, whose pain, betrayal, pride, and role in *history* we must imagine from the feelings of their men folk and the blank spaces in the story.

These women are Sophie Grant and Annie McLean. Bowering may not have felt able to give them voices of their own (although he does dedicate *Bowering's B.C.* to Sophie Grant); or he may have strategically withheld their voices. Whatever the reason, by not including the female narrative voices, Bowering both stresses their silencing and provokes my empathy. He leaves me wanting to know more. What happened to Sophie? How did she fight back against her eviction from Hat Creek? What did she feel about her husband? What did she think of the way the law treated her three sons, or did she believe they got what they deserved? And Annie? She was only a teenager when she worked for John Mara and was taken advantage of. Did she try to resist this man? How was she treated by the Kamloops community, who apparently knew that Mara was the father of her child (see *Bowering's B.C.*, 190–92)? How did her mother and her mother's people see her? What became of her and the child? What does she have to say to this *history* that silences her in its combined racism and sexism? Surely she too would have questions: Why did Mara go on to make money, receive high position in government, have a lake named for him, and make it into the history books? He was married when he seduced or raped Annie, so how did he get away with it? By making me see Annie exclusively through the lovelorn eyes of Alex Hare and the male perspective of her brothers, Bowering reminds me of how she was most probably constructed in late 1870s BC society—as fair game, a beautiful plaything to be discarded when used.<sup>9</sup>

### **Returning the Gaze**

Bowering makes me see and care in many other ways. He does not represent all the white settlers as violent and bad; they too have their human weaknesses, misgivings, and fears. And he does not whitewash the Gang; he allows us to see them behave with drunken violence and act with raw aggression, just as much as he allows us to see the aggression perpetrated against them. Although the novel moves in circles as it digs deeper into the shale of history, the narrative ends where it began—at the end of the story and on the surface of the record, with the two trials that actually took place and were covered by the newspapers, and in the New Westminster penitentiary, where the Gang was taken on Christmas day 1879, was photographed, and finally hanged on 31 January 1881.

This closing emphasis on the public record and the jail is a powerful reminder of the system that contextualizes the McLean Gang, a system that has been called out at many points during the narrative but is revealed in its

full social and symbolic power in the courts, prison, and media. That system was imperialist; it gave legitimacy to an aggressive internal colonization. It is and was a system that attempted to control the cultural encounters between Indian and non-Indian, between ruling class and lesser breeds, and between men and women in a “contact zone” (Pratt 6–7). That system shaped British Columbian and Canadian identity; it was forced upon an already inhabited place for economic and political gain. Moreover, until very recently, only the winners got to write the history books, map the terrain, report in the media, act in the courts, create the novels, and supply the photos of the archives. (Do photographs exist of Sophie or Annie?)

Finally, Bowering makes me see and care by speaking in his own voice, by re-writing history with compassion and anger, by placing himself in that landscape as an accidental boy archeologist who grows into a committed I/eye-witness. By speaking directly to me from his own autobiographical position, he asks me to look with him into the “squinting eyes of little Archie McLean,” to return Archie’s gaze and, thereby, acknowledge him as a fellow human being. Bowering invites me to meet him on that ground of personal memory supplemented, as Hobsbawm puts it, by the archive. He encourages me to become, like him, a historian of my “own consciously lived lifetime” by “com[ing] to terms with it in the mind.” To do that in my mind, I must connect *Shoot* with what I see as its companion BC stories—*The Double Hook*, *Tay John*, and more recently *Slash* and *Sisters of Grass*, all novels of “transculturation” in a “contact zone” (Pratt 6).<sup>10</sup> To do that in my heart, I must travel through the Cariboo landscape with new eyes and with the desire to understand.

*Shoot*, like its subject, is appropriately hybrid. It is a half-breed text, an archeological romance. It is dialogical, if not fully polyphonic (and it may be that too). It is a regional novel in which the Nicola Valley Interior becomes a chronotopic stage for enacting BC identities. It is also a novel with a history—personal and archival. By stepping outside *Shoot* to “Parashoot! Diary of a Novel,” we can read George telling us that, when he was a boy—

I knew that the James gang and the Daltons were buried deep in history. But I kept my eyes out for the McLeans. I kept my eyes open for McLeans whether they were a gang of gunslingers on the vengeance trail, or peaceful men living out their lives in the hayfields, or ghosts. I did not believe in ghosts [he tells us], but I believed in God. Still, if there was a God, there was a book about him, and in that book there were a lot of stories about things that can happen even if they are hard to believe. You have to want to believe such things, I had somehow learned.

I still want to believe some things that are hard to believe. There are no grave-stones for the Wild McLeans, so you had to wonder whether they were dead, or whether they had ever lived. The field where they were buried no longer exists. Who would hang a fifteen-year-old boy? (167)

Who would? Well, possibly those who refuse to put *all* the McLeans in the history books or on the maps. Or those who deny that *transculturation* happens in a contact zone. Or those who reject the very idea that 1870s British Columbia, not to say the Nicola Valley, was a contact zone. By calling out the McLean Boys in the autobiographer's voice, Bowering does not so much lay to rest the ghosts of his personal and our collective pasts, as bring them back to life so we can believe in them, as he does, through the personal archive of a consciously lived life.

#### NOTES

- 1 The claims to truth and authority made by biographers and autobiographers have been extensively debated and theorized by scholars of auto/biography. Smith and Watson sum up the issues well when they say that "autobiographical narration is so written that it cannot be read as either factual truth or simple facts" (13); for further analysis of these claims see Egan, Gilmore, and Lejeune.
- 2 Critical and theoretical debates about postcolonialism in general and in the Canadian context, like those about postmodernism, have been and continue to be fierce; for a recent consideration of the Canadian content, see Moss. I do not wish to enter these debates here, but I do want to note that Pratt's concepts of "contact zone" and "transculturation" are especially useful. Her theories owe much to the broader field of postcolonial theory to which she contributes in *Imperial Eyes*.
- 3 One of the most fascinating descriptions of transculturation in a contact zone within the Canadian context is Gontran de Poncins' autobiographical book *Kabloona*. De Poncins describes his gradual indigenization as a consequence of his life with the Inuit, even as he describes their assimilation and transformation by the non-Inuit, European culture that he represents. I have discussed this book and a number of similar texts in "Canada and the Autobiography of North."
- 4 This article was first presented as a paper on a panel at the 2001 interdisciplinary B.C. Studies conference, *Beyond Hope*, at the University College of the Cariboo in Kamloops. My thanks to the organizers for the opportunity to explore B.C. history and geography in the context of literature. I distinguish *Shoot* from postmodernist, metafictional, or historical novels by pointing to the apolitical stance of much postmodern fiction, the ethical neutrality and aesthetic abstraction of most metafiction, and the romance plots and characterization of many historical novels, especially those involving family sagas and male heroes who die young. In another study, I might compare *Shoot* with Kroetsch's *The Studhorse Man*, with Vanderhaeghe's *The Englishman's Boy*, or with the novels of Calvino, Eco, and Marqu ez, or even with Bowering's *Burning Water* to explore these distinctions.

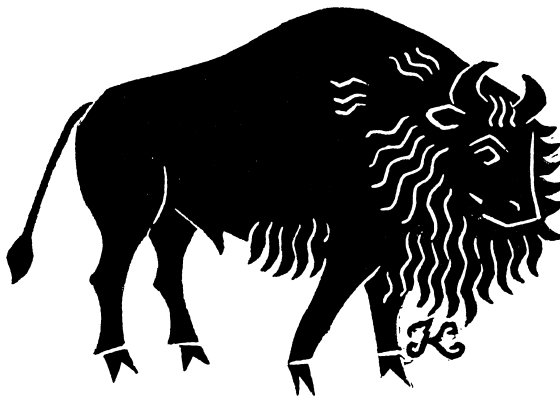
- 5 The following historians make no mention of, or only the merest passing reference to, Donald McLean and his sons: Barman, Begg, Howey, Kerr, Loo, Morice, Ormsby, Shewchuk, and Skelton. The *Encyclopedia of British Columbia* (see Francis) has entries on Donald McLean, the McLean Gang, and Mara (1840–1920), who is described as an “Overlander” turned successful Kamloops businessman and Conservative MP; nothing links Mara with the McLeans. For an analysis of the newspaper coverage of the Gang and attitudes of the day, see Keranen.
- 6 For facts and dates, see Rothenburger’s *The Wild McLeans*. McLean was supposed to have been buried near where he fell at Soda Creek, but his grave has never been found.
- 7 In *The Autobiographical Pact* (19–21), Lejeune describes the necessary acceptance of identity between the name on the title page and the first-person narrator in the text; as readers, we trust that the author and the narrator are one; as a consequence, we trust that we are being told the truth.
- 8 Bowering invents a conversation between two contemporaries of the McLeans, Robert and Martha. He has the pompous, authoritarian husband defend the impending execution of the Gang, while his wife protests that they are boys, children even, close in age to their own daughter (*Shoot* 260–62).
- 9 On the treatment of “country wives” by many HBC men, see Van Kirk, Brown, and Thompson.
- 10 *Tay John* is specifically invoked by Bowering (*Shoot*, 30–31).

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# Hunted

Being hunted is surprisingly easy.  
You would think you would lose  
Your concentration on what you want  
To think about. Not so. Or that  
The sound of the wind in the high fir tops  
Would come to signify only  
Fear. No. That wind blows straight  
To wherever the pleasure in wind  
Reaches, the sound of hardship  
And of solitude when neither  
Is pressing—evocation  
Rather than experience. Evocation  
Overcomes experience. Experience  
Is less experience, sometimes,  
Than the notion of another life—  
One you've never had, or did have  
So long ago you were someone else. Birds  
Likewise. They fly in and among  
The pains of persecution  
And dispel those pains. What  
Pains? And gradually it doesn't  
Matter to you that you are hunted  
And known in the main by the hunter's  
Wrong emphases. How well the hunter  
Scrutinizes field-marks, but field-marks  
Have nothing to do with evocation:  
The scars of experience, they're simply  
Those. Perhaps if the hunter aims  
At experience and its field-marks  
He will miss, and you—you may  
Escape, being a creature of evocation  
And thus not subject to the hunt.

# D'un tableau l'autre

## Le parcours de l'ekphrasis dans *Volkswagen Blues* de Jacques Poulin<sup>1</sup>

La peinture peut trouver sa place dans l'œuvre littéraire, parfois même une place de choix. Les modalités de sa présence au texte ont été recensées par Roland Bourneuf dans *Littérature et peinture*: « dédicaces, hommages désignant des peintres », « personnages de peintres . . . mis en scène », « procédés empruntés à la peinture », « descriptions de tableaux », etc. (157). Nous nous proposons d'étudier cette dernière modalité dans *Volkswagen Blues*<sup>2</sup> de Jacques Poulin.

Les descriptions de tableaux jalonnent le texte dans l'ordre suivant: au chapitre 8, celle d'une peinture murale de Diego Rivera, *Detroit Industry*,<sup>3</sup> (93); au chapitre 10, celle d'un tableau de Pierre Auguste Renoir, *Sur la terrasse, 1881*,<sup>4</sup> (105–106); enfin, au chapitre 30, celle de la *Cène*<sup>5</sup> de Léonard de Vinci (267).

Ces trois œuvres donnent lieu à « ekphrasis »—une notion difficile à cerner et qui, pour autant, intéresse vivement les chercheurs, surtout depuis les années soixante. La bibliographie en ligne de la *Modern Language Association* recense la bagatelle de 404 articles et livres sur le sujet. En 2004, les éditions d'art Somogy ont publié, sous la direction d'Olivier Bonfait, une somme intitulée *La Description de l'œuvre d'art. De la tradition classique aux variations contemporaines*.<sup>6</sup>

Jean-Michel Adam nous explique en ces termes l'émergence de la notion d'*ekphrasis*:

Avec le rhéteur alexandrin Aélius Théon, au I<sup>er</sup> siècle apr. J.-C., et surtout avec Hermogène, à travers l'*ekphrasis*, le concept de « description » s'élabore progressivement. À l'époque, il ne s'agit encore que d'une « exposition détaillée », d'un « énoncé détaillé ». L'*ekphrasis*, conformément à tout ce qui vient d'être rappelé,

se définit par le fait qu'elle place avec *évidence*, sous le regard, l'objet montré par le langage. Le sens premier d'*ekphrasis* n'est donc pas du tout celui de « morceau descriptif » qui tendra à s'imposer ensuite. Le verbe *ekphraso* signifie « exposer », « montrer en détail ». Si, au II<sup>e</sup> siècle, ce verbe signifie déjà « décrire », Hermogène—qui cite des *ekphrasis* de personnes, de lieux (port, rivage, ville), de temps (printemps, été, une fête) de circonstances (paix ou guerre) et d'actions (bataille)—considère l'*ekphrasis* comme un énoncé qui fait voir en détail, qui fait vivre. . . . (27)

On pouvait donc parler, à ce stade, de « description rhétoriquement ornée de tout objet digne d'admiration—la nature, les bâtiments, le corps humain, les tableaux, etc » (Bertho 53). De nos jours—depuis le milieu du vingtième siècle, selon Ruth Webb (10)—le terme a pris un sens à la fois plus restreint et plus vaste: l'*ekphrasis* « ne peut renvoyer qu'à un tableau, mais la manière dont elle le fait varie énormément » (Bertho 53). En fait, la notion a subi « a process of gradual redefinition to conform to contemporary intellectual and esthetic preoccupations » (Webb 17). Pour certains, comme James Heffernan, l'*ekphrasis* n'est autre que « the verbal representation of visual representation » (3). Pour Philippe Hamon, il s'agit de « la description littéraire (qu'elle soit intégrée ou non à un récit) d'une œuvre d'art réelle ou imaginaire—peinture, tapisserie, architecture, bas-relief, coupe ciselée, etc.—que va rencontrer tel ou tel personnage dans la fiction » (*La Description* 8). Enfin, pour Claus Clüver,

*Ekphrasis is the verbal representation of a real or fictitious text composed in a non-verbal sign system. This definition uses the term « text » as it is used in most semiotic discourses. It does, of course, include non-literary verbalizations (as in art criticism) of texts that are not necessarily works of art (such as posters and photographs), and it makes explicit the fact that these non-verbal texts may exist only in their verbalization. The definition does not restrict the objects of ekphrasis to representational texts: it covers architecture, as well as absolute music and non-narrative dance. (26)*

Pour notre part, nous adopterons la définition proposée par Hamon et consacrerons l'essentiel de cette étude à l'*ekphrasis* d'œuvres picturales. Cependant, la définition de Clüver nous sera utile au moment où nous aborderons l'*ekphrasis* de *La Cène*, puisque c'est une photographie, prise au Café Trieste à San Francisco<sup>7</sup> (265), qui éveille chez Jack le souvenir du tableau de Vinci.<sup>8</sup>

Parmi les nombreuses problématiques suscitées par l'*ekphrasis*,<sup>9</sup> nous avons choisi la pertinence du procédé dans un texte littéraire. Si les descriptions de tableaux peuvent avoir une fonction décorative, elles nous intéressent surtout dans la mesure où « elles opèrent une fusion d'éléments narratifs divers » (Bourneuf 71).

Pour fournir un cadre théorique à notre analyse, nous mettrons en œuvre le *Differential Model* proposé par Valerie Robillard. Il s'agit d'un système typologique dérivé du *Scalar Model* de Manfred Pfister, et qui permet de définir la nature ekphrastique d'un texte.<sup>10</sup> Dans les lignes qui suivent, chacune des trois ekphrasis<sup>11</sup> relevées dans *Volkswagen Blues* sera examinée à partir des trois catégories typologiques du *Differential Model*: *attributive*, *depictive* et *associative*.<sup>12</sup>

**V***olkswagen Blues* est un roman de la quête. Celle de Théo, menée par son frère Jack Waterman accompagné de Pitsémine (la Grande Sauterelle), en est le « motif prédominant » (Harel 176). Comme il se doit, la quête engendre un certain nombre de péripéties, parmi lesquelles revient la mise en présence de documents visuels, d'ordre pictural et éventuellement photographique, qui, sous le regard des deux protagonistes, donnent lieu à autant d'ekphrasis. Notre propos est de montrer que les trois ekphrasis relevées ci-dessus, loin d'être de « simple[s] auxiliaire[s] du récit »<sup>13</sup> (Genette 58), rendent compte des vicissitudes de la quête, au même titre que la narratif.

### **Première ekphrasis: *Detroit Industry***

Sur les instances de sa compagne de route, Jack accepte de passer au *Detroit Institute of Arts* pour « jeter un petit coup d'œil » sur la murale de Rivera, mais à la condition expresse qu'ils n'y chercheront pas la trace de Théo (92). Pourquoi cette dernière clause, peu avant l'ekphrasis? Les circonstances, le cadre de la quête, les intertextes fournissent des éléments de réponse. La poursuite de Théo n'est pas une idée fixe, au sens littéral du terme; son intensité peut varier selon l'humeur du moment. À Pitsémine, qui lui demande s'il veut ou non chercher à Detroit la trace de son frère, Jack répond: « Ça ne me dit rien. La ville est grise et sale. J'ai hâte qu'on soit rendus à Saint-Louis »<sup>14</sup> (92). Mais lorsque Pitsémine propose une visite du musée, il devient plus catégorique: « . . . on ne cherche pas la trace de mon frère » (92)—et Pitsémine acquiesce à sa requête: « Promis, dit-elle » (92). Cette visite *menace*, en effet, de fournir des indices. Roman de la route, *Volkswagen Blues* se réclame d'une philosophie qui reprend volontiers à son compte l'image biblique du « message écrit sur le mur » (*the writing on the wall*).<sup>15</sup> Jack aurait plusieurs raisons de se méfier de la murale *en tant que telle*: les grandes compositions picturales correspondent souvent à un souci didactique (c'est flagrant chez Rivera), elles se caractérisent volontiers par la profusion des détails et leur

capacité à *faire courir l'œil*, invitant tout naturellement à la recherche—qui peut n'être que ludique<sup>16</sup>. En tout état de cause, même si Jack semble résolu à s'offrir la visite du *Detroit Institute* comme une simple diversion (sans doute dans les deux sens du terme), il n'en reste pas moins que la visite s'inscrit *a priori* et *a contrario* dans la dynamique de la quête—puisqu'elle a provoqué ce réflexe d'autodéfense.

Au seuil de cette première ekphrasis, l'œuvre de l'artiste mexicain n'est pas identifiée par son titre officiel, *Detroit Industry*, mais par une périphrase: Pitsémine évoque la « murale de Diego Rivera » (92) et le narrateur en fait autant, abstraction faite du prénom du peintre (93). En tout état de cause, l'ekphrasis à venir est déjà dotée d'un « thème-titre », pour reprendre la terminologie de Jean-Michel Adam et d'André Petitjean<sup>17</sup> (*Le Texte* 108). La présence d'un thème-titre convoque une première catégorie du *Differential Model*, la démarche *attributive*.<sup>18</sup> Mais même si l'identification du modèle est facilitée ici par un indice toponymique, *Detroit Institute of Arts*, l'ekphrasis que voici relève au mieux, dans la taxinomie de Robillard, de la sous-catégorie *allusion*.<sup>19</sup> Or, au fil des trois ekphrasis, l'identification du modèle fera de moins en moins problème: le thème-titre sera de plus en plus explicite—alors même que le personnage de Théo s'inscrira de plus en plus nettement dans l'objet décrit.

L'autre fonction de la catégorie *attributive* se mesure à « son importance comme *type* de relation intertextuelle » (61, nous traduisons). Selon Robillard, il faut se demander si l'ekphrasis à l'étude n'est qu'une référence anodine (purement *attributive*, donc) ou si elle constitue un apport significatif à la diégèse (auquel cas il faudrait évoquer la catégorie *associative*). Il apparaîtra que l'ekphrasis de *Detroit Industry* dépasse largement, comme d'ailleurs les deux suivantes, le stade *attributive* pour s'inscrire dans la catégorie *associative*. Mais avant de s'attarder sur cette troisième catégorie du *Differential Model*, il faut faire justice à la deuxième: la catégorie *depictive*.

Robillard range dans cette catégorie les ekphrasis qui satisfont le mieux, côté lecteur, « aux exigences de fidélité dans la représentation (représentation) du modèle pictural » (61, nous traduisons). Dans *Volkswagen Blues*, l'immense salle occupée par la murale du peintre mexicain est décrite en ces termes:

La salle mesurait près de dix mètres de hauteur et elle était éclairée par la lumière naturelle qui venait du plafond en verre. L'œuvre de Rivera couvrait les quatre murs de la pièce. Elle représentait, en des tons où dominaient le vert pâle, le jaune pâle et surtout le gris, de gigantesques machines industrielles autour desquelles s'affairaient des ouvriers aux visages sans expression.

Les machines, ils le constatèrent en examinant les diverses parties de la murale, étaient celles de l'industrie de l'automobile. Sur le mur du côté nord, des ouvriers fabriquaient des moteurs: ils préparaient la fonte, moulaient des blocs-cylindres et actionnaient deux énormes appareils servant à percer des ouvertures pour les pistons et les valves. Sur le mur sud, les ouvriers travaillaient à une chaîne d'assemblage, à gauche de laquelle se trouvaient un convoyeur et, à droite, une presse géante qui moulait des pièces de carrosserie.

Tous les visages étaient immuablement sérieux, presque solennels, et cette gravité ajoutait à l'impression d'austérité qui se dégagait des couleurs ternes. L'ensemble était lourd, triste et accablant.

Au moment où un gardien annonçait que l'heure de la fermeture était arrivée, ils aperçurent en plein milieu de la murale, sur le mur du côté sud, une petite tache rouge vif. En s'approchant, ils virent qu'il s'agissait d'une automobile sortant de la chaîne d'assemblage. La chaîne était disposée de telle manière qu'elle s'éloignait de l'observateur, et l'automobile semblait toute petite à l'autre bout. *La minuscule auto rouge était la seule tache de couleur vive dans l'immense murale de Rivera.* (93, nous soulignons)

Ce morceau, qui occupe une page à peine dans le roman, ne semble guère à la mesure d'une murale « immense » qui s'étale sur « quatre murs » de « près de dix mètres de hauteur ». Si l'on suit Robillard, il faudrait inscrire l'ekphrasis dans la sous-catégorie *description*.<sup>20</sup> Que l'ekphrasis n'atteigne pas ici un niveau élevé de complétude dans le dénombrement des parties et des propriétés de la murale, cela ne porte guère à conséquence, loin s'en faut. Ginette Michaud a démontré l'extrême importance du détail chez Poulin. En phase *depictive*, l'ekphrasis s'emploie ici à isoler puis à magnifier le détail révélateur. Malgré un examen soigneux de la murale (du moins les murs nord et sud), les deux protagonistes ont dû attendre la toute dernière minute de leur visite pour que le détail déterminant (à leurs yeux, bien sûr) les interpelle, justifiant une ekphrasis. Le connecteur de simultanéité « au moment où » suggère d'ailleurs l'imminence d'un événement. En fait, précédée de tout un « appareil de discriminations spatiales » (Vouilloux, « La description du tableau: la peinture » 63), « en plein milieu de la murale, sur le mur du côté sud » (nous soulignons), la « petite tache rouge vif », qui tranche sur la grisaille générale de l'œuvre, va acquérir, pour Jack et la Grande Sauterelle, le statut exceptionnel de ce que Roland Barthes appelle le « punctum », c'est-à-dire—coïncidence étonnante—la « petite tache » qui fixe le regard de l'observateur, ou encore ce qui le « point » (49, 84). Soupçonnant une intention de la part du peintre, Jack et la Grande Sauterelle s'approchent donc de la « petite tache rouge vif » et constatent qu'il s'agit d'une « minuscule auto rouge », dont ils vont s'employer à percer le sens. Ils croiront y voir « le symbole du bonheur » et décrèteront que « Rivera avait

voulu dire une chose très simple: le bonheur est rare et pour l'obtenir il faut beaucoup d'efforts, de peines et de fatigues »<sup>21</sup> (97–98). Or, selon Barthes, « donner des exemples de punctum c'est d'une certaine façon, [se] livrer » (73). Le punctum, ajoute-t-il, a une « force d'expansion », « souvent métonymique » (74). Le message que les deux voyageurs croient pouvoir déchiffrer dans le punctum se présente ici de manière « très simple »—guère plus abscons, en fait, qu'une morale de fable—et ne suscite aucun marchandage: « Ils s'entendaient sur l'idée que l'auto rouge était le symbole du bonheur . . . » (97–98). Tout se passe comme si la simplicité du message et la communauté de pensée devaient ôter à la « petite tache rouge vif » des connotations plus troublantes, peut-être liées à ce qu'il était convenu de passer sous silence: la quête de Théo.

Nous avons évoqué le potentiel énigmatique des peintures murales. Celles de Diego Rivera sont remarquables sous cet angle. La fresque *Sueño de una tarde dominical en la Alameda Central* (1947), par exemple, propose une foule de personnages dont certains, identifiables de prime abord, comme l'incontournable Frida Kahlo, suscitent inmanquablement la quête de leurs comparses attirés: où trouver, par exemple, l'image du peintre lui-même? Comme c'est presque toujours le cas lorsqu'est exposé un tableau représentant une foule de gens célèbres (*La Fée électricité* de Raoul Dufy, *L'Atelier* de Courbet, etc), l'institution qui l'abrite<sup>22</sup> ou l'éditeur (si l'œuvre est reproduite dans un livre) propose une légende numérotée qui permettra, par exemple, aux moins perspicaces d'identifier Diego Rivera, en plein milieu du tableau sous les traits d'un enfant! Si le fantôme de Théo n'est pas encore perceptible dans la murale, les deux compagnons de route semblent céder à la tentation d'un jeu—tentation inhérente à la contemplation d'un tableau de taille inaccoutumée et qui, de surcroît, représentant ici une chaîne de montage, relève du labyrinthe.<sup>23</sup> La morale de fable qui conclut l'examen du punctum par les deux personnages s'acomode aisément d'un parti pris ludique—ou de diversion.

Quant à la troisième rubrique du *Differential Model*, la catégorie *associative*,<sup>24</sup> Robillard admet qu'elle est moins structurée que les deux premières. Ainsi, un texte littéraire à vocation *associative* pourra poser le « dilemme Temps vs Espace ou suggérer d'une façon ou d'une autre que sa thématique est cubiste, ou futuriste, etc. » (62, nous traduisons). La présence d'une quête nous autorise à inscrire l'ekphrasis de *Detroit Industry* dans la sous-catégorie *topos*, au même titre que toute ekphrasis de tableau, tapisserie ou vitrail illustrant, par exemple la quête du Saint-Graal—



évoquée d'ailleurs, dans *Volkswagen Blues*, comme objet de lecture (99). Pierre Hébert propose un rapprochement intéressant entre « la petite tache rouge vif » sur « le mur du côté sud » et le nom de Théo, gravé en lettres rouges sur un rocher, également du côté sud:

Cette murale de Rivera sert de panneau indicateur: pour le bonheur, direction Sud. Elle couvre les quatre murs de la pièce, mais Jack et la Grande Sauterelle aperçoivent « sur le mur du côté sud, une petite tache rouge vif » (93), « le symbole du bonheur » (97–98). Il en sera de même pour le nom de Théo en rouge, sur le rocher (213–214), placé du côté sud, orientation privilégiée chez Théo, avec son chapeau de Camargue (sud de la France, milieu aqueux), ce frère dont Jack souhaite qu'il soit au pôle Sud, réchauffé par les manchots (62). Tous les déplacements des deux personnages à la recherche de Théo s'inscrivent dans l'espace eutopique de la piste de l'Oregon et sont émaillés d'indices conduisant irrémédiablement vers le Sud, l'or, le bonheur. (*Jacques Poulin: La Création*, 139)

Les recoupements opérés par Hébert semblent prouver que le rouge est la couleur emblématique de Théo. Or, le rouge, nous rappelle Michel Pastoureau,<sup>25</sup> est, dans la culture occidentale, « couleur du signe, du signal, de la marque » (191). La piste de Théo serait-elle balisée en rouge, *comme il se doit*? Un premier indice de concordance chromatique nous est livré, bien avant l'ekphrasis de *Detroit Industry*, à propos d'un livre. Au seuil de son entreprise, Jack, qui a découvert dans le « cahier des visiteurs » du musée de Gaspé (24) l'adresse de Théo—« Saint Louis, Missouri » (25)—va quérir dans sa bibliothèque un ouvrage de Brouillette, *La Pénétration du continent américain par les Canadiens français*, se rappelant qu'il y est question de la ville américaine. Or, le livre est relié en « rouge brique » (44). À partir de cela, les indices matériels qui jalonnent la quête seront dotés de cette couleur *prioritaire*, le rouge—« la couleur par excellence, la couleur archétypale, la première de toutes les couleurs » (Pastoureau 189).

Par ailleurs, le nom Théo—une apocope qui met en valeur le radical grec *theos*—désignant l'objet d'une quête n'est guère plus opaque que celui de Godot (*God*) chez Samuel Beckett. Théo est en effet *omniprésent* (pour Jack) et *omnipotent* (selon lui-même) puisque « absolument convaincu qu'il était capable de faire tout ce qu'il voulait » (137). C'est ce même Théo, doté d'un « fort ascendant » sur Jack, qui lui a trouvé un nom de plume, « tel Dieu nommant ses créatures » (Dupuis 56). Sachant que la symbolique du rouge est, entre autres, « presque toujours associée . . . à celle du feu » (Pastoureau 190), l'inscription du nom sur le rocher, en lettres de *feu*, prend alors une forte tonalité biblique. Comme nous l'avons proposé plus haut, on peut d'ores et déjà présumer qu'une des fonctions de l'ekphrasis, dans ce roman,

est de présenter l'objet de la quête, Théo/*Theos*, comme capable, par la fascination qu'il provoque, de *s'afficher sur les murs*.

Outre le fait que Théo est un amateur de voitures (13), on trouve chez Jonathan M. Weiss une raison supplémentaire de distinguer la présence de Théo dans l'auto rouge.<sup>26</sup> Pour Weiss, la signification de la Volkswagen (le véhicule de Jack) « se précise et se concrétise » dans l'ekphrasis: produit de la machine, la petite auto rouge devient « plus important[e] que la machine elle-même. De même, la Volkswagen . . . devient le symbole de la résistance au nivellement imposé par la machine . . . » (94). Si Weiss voit dans l'auto rouge et dans le minibus Volkswagen, « rongé par la *rouille* » malgré sa « nouvelle tôle » (84–85, nous soulignons), un « symbole de la résistance », nous retrouverons aussi le personnage de Théo. Son frère, confie Jack, « ne faisait pas les choses comme tout le monde » (15) . . . à l'instar de son homonyme Dieu le Fils, autre *résistant*. Vulgairement parlant, il arrive à Jésus, dans sa juste colère, de *voir rouge*, face aux marchands du Temple, par exemple.<sup>27</sup> Inversement, Pastoureau nous rappelle que la couleur rouge, ou plus précisément « le mauvais rouge sang », peut symboliser, dans la culture chrétienne, la violence répréhensible—c'est le rouge « des crimes de sang, des hommes révoltés contre leur Dieu ou contre d'autres hommes » (190). Or Théo est explicitement associé à ce type de violence: il est arrêté pour port d'« arme à feu sans permis » (74); il est « détenu comme suspect dans une affaire de vol avec effraction » au cours de laquelle il a gravement blessé un gardien (139). Jack le soupçonne même d'être un « membre du F.L.Q. » (146). Après avoir découvert l'inscription « Théo. 75 » (214) en rouge sur le rocher, Jack ne doute plus guère qu'il s'agit là de son frère: « La vérité était rouge comme une tache de sang » (214), dit le narrateur, associant métonymiquement Théo au sang versé. De fait, la présence du sang nous renvoie au punctum de la murale de Rivera, dans la mesure où la « petite tache rouge vif » se détache sur un environnement exsangue.<sup>28</sup> Bref, si Jack et la Grande Sauterelle sont sollicités par le punctum de la murale, c'est que ce dernier évoque obscurément ce qui les hante: Théo.<sup>29</sup> L'imagination fait le reste, cette « lentille involontaire à travers laquelle la chose vue ne peut pas passer sans se transformer, sans être *interprétée*, synthétisée, agrandie ou réduite, embellie ou attristée, commentée et présentée » (Hamon, *La Description* 58).

### **Deuxième ekphrasis: *Sur la terrasse, 1881***

Contrairement à ce qui se passe pour la première ekphrasis, la source picturale de la deuxième est clairement identifiée, en début de segment, à

cela près que le descripteur fournit le titre en anglais (*On the Terrace*, 1881), celui qu'il porte à l'*Art Institute* de Chicago.<sup>30</sup> Le recours au titre exact (en traduction, bien sûr) et la notoriété du tableau semblent exclure tout problème d'identification pour un lecteur raisonnablement renseigné des choses de la peinture. On peut donc classer cette deuxième ekphrasis dans la catégorie *attributive* et dans la sous-catégorie *naming*<sup>31</sup> puisque la toile est désignée par son nom. Comme nous l'avons dit plus haut, ce processus d'identification qui va croissant au fil des ekphrasis du roman a vraisemblablement une fonction métaphorique: Théo lui-même est de plus en plus présent, de plus en plus *nommé* dans le tableau.

Le chef d'œuvre de Renoir est décrit ainsi dans le texte poulilien:

C'était une jeune femme assise à une terrasse en compagnie d'une petite fille. Le tableau était intitulé *On the Terrace*, 1881. Derrière la femme, il y avait une balustrade de fer envahie par des arbustes fleuris et puis une rangée d'arbres à travers laquelle on apercevait une rivière, des gens en barque et, plus loin, des maisons et des collines. La petite fille portait une robe blanche et un chapeau à fleurs, et ses mains étaient posées sur le rebord d'un panier de fruits qui était placé sur la table. La femme semblait très jeune; elle avait une robe noire *et un chapeau d'un rouge incroyablement vif*; l'expression de son visage avait une douceur infinie et cette douceur se confondait avec la lumière qui imprégnait l'ensemble du tableau. (105–106, nous soulignons)

*Sur la terrasse*, 1881 est une toile de dimensions appréciables, 100 x 80 cm (Monneret 153). Pourtant, les quatorze lignes vouées à son ekphrasis suffisent à en donner une idée d'ensemble. Il faudrait alors ranger cette ekphrasis, selon le *Differential Model*, dans la catégorie *depictive* et plus particulièrement dans la sous-catégorie *analogous structuring*, puisque aussi bien l'ekphrasis implique « un haut degré de similitude avec le modèle » (61, nous traduisons). Mais, comme pour l'ekphrasis de la murale, c'est moins le degré de fidélité de la description qui importe que le détail interpellant. À peine Jack a-t-il mis les pieds dans la salle réservée aux Impressionnistes français qu'il repère « tout de suite la femme au chapeau rouge » (105), *rebaptisant* de fait le tableau de Renoir avant même que n'en soit révélé le titre véritable. Pour Jack, le punctum de la toile est assurément ce « chapeau d'un rouge incroyablement vif »—révélé lui aussi en fin d'ekphrasis—car il reste littéralement *cloué* (ou *point*, au sens archaïque du mot) devant le personnage, le « regard fixe », « les yeux mouillés », « la bouche ouverte », « sans dire un mot », « complètement immobile » sur le banc (106) pendant « trois heures »<sup>32</sup> (107). Si la quête de Théo n'est qu'implicite dans l'ekphrasis de la murale, elle se manifeste ici de façon plus évidente, comme on va le

voir au moment où nous indexerons le punctum à la catégorie *associative* (sous-catégorie: *topos*).

Peu après le départ de Théo pour les États-Unis, Jack se souvient d'avoir reçu une carte postale de son frère postée à Chicago et dans laquelle il s'agissait « d'une peinture de Renoir » (104) représentant une « femme avec un chapeau rouge et beaucoup de fleurs » (104). Théo « disait qu'il avait pensé à [lui] » qui « aimai[t] beaucoup Renoir » (104), et ajoutait, sans achever sa phrase, que si Jack « passai[t] un jour par Chicago . . . » (105). Cette fois, Théo est indiscutablement l'instigateur de la visite. La gestuelle en fait foi: littéralement *convoqué* par son frère, Jack « s'install[e] sur un banc devant *la toile dont Théo avait parlé* » (105, nous soulignons). Théo, en somme, s'est approprié le tableau et ce n'est plus avec Renoir que Jack a rendez-vous, mais avec *l'autre*, l'objet de la quête. On a pu dire, rappelle Bernard Vouilloux, qu'à la peinture « il ne manque que la parole »—et le critique d'ajouter « [n]'est-ce pas une manière de souligner ce qui fait du tableau un interlocuteur potentiel, l'autre silencieux . . . ? » (« La description du tableau: l'échange » 25). Si Jack reste en *état d'hypnose*,<sup>33</sup> durant trois heures, devant « la femme au chapeau rouge » (106), ce n'est pas seulement parce qu'il est anéanti par la « 'lumière' » et l'« 'harmonie' » qui selon lui émanent du tableau (106), c'est aussi et surtout parce que Théo le regarde. Le silence de Jack est d'ailleurs révélateur de l'impact du tableau: comme nous l'apprenons plus loin, « chaque fois qu'une chose importante se produi[t], Jack rest[e] *muet* » (214, nous soulignons). Pour rappeler Jack à la réalité, la Grande Sauterelle devra « s'interposer entre lui et le tableau » (106). Qui plus est, l'effet cataleptique du punctum est tel que, pour faire sortir Jack du musée, la Grande Sauterelle doit le prendre par la main (107). Ce qu'a pu dire Christine Vial de la photographie vaut ici pour le tableau: « lorsqu'un être est séparé des personnes ou des lieux qu'il aime, une photo les représentant peut servir de substitut et venir, au creux de l'absence, pointer une présence » (376). Le punctum comble ici l'absence du frère disparu mais non sans provoquer une certaine douleur inscrite sur le visage de Jack.<sup>34</sup>

Si le rouge est bien la couleur emblématique de Théo, que dire de la couleur du punctum chez Renoir?<sup>35</sup> Théo, nous apprend son frère dans une de ces phrases avortées qu'il affectionne, préfère « Van Gogh à Renoir à cause de la force de . . . »<sup>36</sup> (104–105). Le lecteur averti complètera aisément. Van Gogh, précurseur du Fauvisme, est le premier, écrit Marcel Giry, à avoir donné à la couleur « des accents aussi intenses, aussi dionysiaques » (38). Si Théo aime Van Gogh, et par conséquent la couleur crue, primaire, donc

évidemment le rouge, c'est sans doute par tempérament. « [L]'infiltration progressive de la violence », estime Hébert, s'opère dans *Volkswagen Blues* « à travers l'image de Théo » (« Jacques Poulin: de la représentation » 52). On observe, d'autre part, que, de Rivera à Renoir, le rouge du punctum s'est exarcebé: la « petite tache rouge vif » a tourné au « rouge incroyablement vif » (nous soulignons). Si, comme l'affirme Gabriel Bauret, la couleur est « entièrement dépendante du sujet de la perception » (32), l'intensité du rouge semble avoir augmenté en proportion de la ferveur de la quête et des progrès accomplis. Du punctum de Rivera à celui de Renoir, il y aurait moins un simple écho qu'une piste en train de *rougir*, pour reprendre la banale métaphore de l'enquêteur qui « brûle ».

### Troisième ekphrasis: *La Cène*

Le point de départ de cette troisième ekphrasis est la photographie tirée de l'ouvrage *Beat Angels*, prise par Diana Church en 1977 (265): « Quand je regarde la photo de loin », déclare Jack, « je sais que c'est ridicule mais elle me fait penser au tableau de Léonard de Vinci qui s'appelle *La Cène* » (267). Du coup, les deux œuvres vont donner lieu à ekphrasis,<sup>37</sup> non sans avoir été clairement désignées, dans le narratif, par leur titre officiel.<sup>38</sup> Si le tableau de Vinci, de par sa notoriété, ne saurait poser un problème de reconnaissance, la photo de Church, quant à elle, est tout simplement reproduite dans le texte, avec référence bibliographique à l'appui. Les deux ekphrasis appartiennent donc à la catégorie *attributive* du *Differential Model*, et à la sous-catégorie *naming*.

Le regard de Jack se focalise sur l'unique personnage non identifié (« UNIDENTIFIED MAN », 267) de la photographie<sup>39</sup>, ce même personnage qui sera décrit dans l'ekphrasis de cette dernière comme « un homme qui avait une barbe et les cheveux très noirs et frisés » (266). Jack reconnaît Théo, qu'il retrouve alors, dans ses souvenirs, sous les traits du Judas de *La Cène*: « Et mon frère . . . avec sa grosse tête noire et frisée, je ne peux pas m'empêcher de trouver que mon frère ressemble à Judas » (267).<sup>40</sup> Ce genre de transfert, Vial l'explique ainsi:

Le travail de remémoration à partir d'une photo s'apparente à une mémoire sous hypnose. Bien sûr, il se déroule de façon intentionnelle et en conscience claire; mais il impose, lui aussi, la concentration et la fixité du regard. Dans sa fonction d'objet inducteur, la photo n'est pas aide-mémoire mais plutôt contrainte, suggestion contraignante qui force le souvenir à prendre une certaine forme. (376, nous soulignons)

Selon les termes du *Differential Model*, ces deux ekphrasis relèvent de la catégorie *depictive* et, bien entendu, de la sous-catégorie *description* puisque

le point de vue est limité à un élément de la représentation visuelle. Il va sans dire que pour Jack le punctum commun à la photographie et à la toile c'est Théo/Judas. Son émoi quand il reconnaît Théo sur la photo (265), sa fixation visuelle—« l'homme n'arrêtait pas de regarder la photo de son frère » (267), son irritation lorsqu'il découvre au bas de la photo l'inscription: « UNIDENTIFIED MAN » (267) et son agacement face au lien ressenti entre Théo et Judas dans le tableau (267), tout cela prouve que Jack ressent la rencontre comme un événement *poignant*.

Si Théo ne se manifeste encore dans les ekphrasis des tableaux de Rivera et de Renoir qu'à titre métonymique, son image en surimpression dans l'ekphrasis de *La Cène* permet d'indexer catégoriquement la fresque de Vinci dans la matérialité de la quête (catégorie: *associative*, sous-catégorie: *topos*). En fait, l'ekphrasis de *La Cène* annonce l'imminence des retrouvailles: Théo n'est plus représenté *in absentia* par un objet (la « petite tache rouge vif » de l'automobile, le chapeau « d'un rouge incroyablement vif »), mais *présenté*—comme une *épiphanie*. Ainsi, dans la dynamique de la quête, l'œuvre de Vinci constitue le troisième maillon d'une chaîne non arbitraire. On assiste donc, dans *Volkswagen Blues*, à la mise en place de ce que Hans Lund appelle *ekphrastic linkage* (174): trois œuvres d'art qui n'ont presque rien en commun s'enchaînent par la grâce d'un regard et d'une idée fixe.

**À** en croire Weiss, « [l]a piste de Théo ne se trouve pas entièrement dans les livres ni dans les traces écrites que le frère a laissées derrière lui ». Ce sont surtout « les petites gens » rencontrées pendant la traversée de l'Amérique « qui fournissent les informations indispensables pour trouver Théo » (92). Il semble à présent raisonnable d'ajouter les ekphrasis à cette liste. Le *Differential Model* de Robillard, en nous permettant de préciser la teneur ekphrastique des segments à l'étude, nous permet de baliser le chemin parcouru:

<b>Ekphrasis</b>	<b>Catégories</b>		
	Attributive	Depictive	Associative
<i>Detroit Industry</i>	allusion	description	topos
<i>Sur la terrasse, 1881</i>	naming	analogous structuring	topos
<i>La Cène</i>	naming	description	topos

Cette grille montre que les ekphrasis de *Volkswagen Blues* ont une valeur *attributive* conséquente mais que leur valeur *depictive* demeure faible. L'importance de ces ekphrasis réside avant tout dans leur forte valeur *associative*, marquée par le *topos* de la quête que révèle un examen attentif du *punctum*. Il se confirme donc qu'il ne saurait s'agir, dans *Volkswagen Blues*, de considérer le tableau pour ce qu'il est *per se*, mais dans son rapport au texte qui l'énonce. L'ekphrasis constitue ici un dédoublement de la quête qui se déroule *officiellement* dans le narratif, et assume dès lors une fonction « régulative-transformationnelle » importante (Reuter 137).<sup>41</sup> S'il est possible, comme l'avance Clüver, de considérer l'ekphrasis comme une forme de réécriture (31), ne pourrait-on voir dans celles de *Volkswagen Blues* une réécriture de la quête?

#### NOTES

- 1 Version remaniée d'une communication faite dans le cadre du Congrès mondial du Conseil international d'études francophones qui s'est tenu à Gosier (Guadeloupe) en mai 1997.
- 2 Jacques Poulin, *Volkswagen Blues*, Montréal, Éditions Québec/Amérique, 1984. Toutes les références au texte renvoient à cette édition.
- 3 Pour une iconographie des œuvres de Rivera conservées au *Detroit Institute of Arts*, on consultera, entre autres, Cockcroft 87–88 ou Rivera 55–80.
- 4 Pour ce tableau, exposé à l'*Art Institute* de Chicago, on se reportera, par exemple, à Monneret 153 ou à Distel 77.
- 5 Pour cette toile, on pourra consulter Goldscheider (planches et notes 73–75) et Wasserman 124–135.
- 6 Il s'agit des actes du colloque organisé par Olivier Bonfait, *La descrizione dell'opera arte: dal modello classico della ecphrasis umanistica alle sue variazioni contemporanee*, et tenu à Rome, Villa Médicis, du 13 au 15 juin 2001.
- 7 Pour cette photographie, prise par Diana Church en 1977, on se reportera à Norse 11.
- 8 Si l'on suivait à la lettre la définition de Clüver, il faudrait également étudier les ekphrasis de la carte postale de Théo (12), de la photographie de Chimney Rock (188) et du dessin du chariot de pionniers (199). Mais ce n'est pas notre propos.
- 9 L'une des plus captivantes, peut-être, a été formulée par Murray Krieger. Il s'agit de peser la capacité du verbal à reproduire le pictural (3).
- 10 « This typology is designed to help differentiate the strong and explicitly marked ekphrastic texts from those that signal more nebulous relationships with their pictorial source(s); it is also designed to provide a means of accounting for those texts which might otherwise fall into that rather overcrowded group called 'the pictorial'. . .—and even those which would be excluded from this present discussion altogether » (60). Robillard entend ici *the pictorial* dans le même sens que Heffernan, c'est-à-dire les textes qui impliquent des techniques propres à la peinture ou empruntent au style d'un peintre (71).
- 11 Comme Adam, nous avons préféré cette forme de pluriel à celle, plus savante, de « ekphraseis ».
- 12 Pour garantir le sens que leur prête Robillard et éviter des confusions, nous avons décidé

- de laisser ces trois mots en anglais et de les mettre en italiques tout au long de cette étude. On ne s'étonnera donc pas de buter sur des « fautes » d'accord ou d'accentuation.
- 13 Gérard Genette estime que la description est « tout naturellement *ancilla narrationis*, esclave toujours nécessaire, mais toujours soumise, jamais émancipée » (57).
  - 14 Rappelons pour mémoire que Jack et Pitsémine ont trouvé dans le « cahier des visiteurs » du musée à Gaspé (24) l'adresse de Théo: « Saint Louis, Missouri » (25) et à Toronto, en visionnant la fiche microfilmée sur Théo à la « centrale de police » (72), la « photo d'une fille avec l'inscription 'Claudia, Saint Louis' » (75). On comprend ainsi l'impatience de Jack d'arriver à Saint Louis.
  - 15 Il n'est pas inutile de rappeler l'image tant évoquée, dans les « sixties », du « writing on the wall ».
  - 16 Il va sans dire que le *jeu* tient une place importante dans le texte. Il suffit de penser, entre autres, à la description du jeu-combat entre « les Blancs et les Indiens » organisé par le jeune Théo (68).
  - 17 Philippe Hamon préfère parler de « pantonyme » (*Du descriptif* 127).
  - 18 Dans la typologie de Robillard, cette démarche est essentiellement préventive, « it functions as 'the palace guard', making certain that all texts entering the domain of *Ekphrasis* in some way mark their sources » (61).
  - 19 « [A]lluding to painter, style or genre . . . is a less specific form of attributive marking » (61).
  - 20 L'ekphrasis « sélectionne certaines zones du modèle, plus ou moins étendues, compromettant la visualisation de l'ensemble par le lecteur » (61, nous traduisons). L'emploi du terme *description* peut surprendre. Robillard convoque sans doute la connotation de *choix* identifiable dans le préfixe. « [D]ans la pratique des textes, une description est . . . toujours le produit d'un acte de sélection rigoureux qui engage totalement une subjectivité énonciative . . . » (Adam et Petitjean, « Les enjeux » 95).
  - 21 Anne Marie Miraglia a observé que dans plusieurs textes de Poulin, notamment *Volkswagen Blues*, « la représentation de la lecture met en relief son aspect interprétatif » (64).
  - 22 *Sueño de una tarde dominical en la Alameda Central* se trouve au *Museo Mural Diego Rivera* de Mexico.
  - 23 Voir *Modern Times*, de Charles Chaplin.
  - 24 Figurent ici les ekphrasis qui renvoient à des « conventions ou à des idées associées avec les arts plastiques, qu'elles soient d'ordre structurel, thématique ou théorique » (62, nous traduisons).
  - 25 Pastoreau, historien et spécialiste des emblèmes, couleurs et codes sociaux, est directeur d'études et titulaire de la chaire d'histoire et de symbolique occidentale, à l'École pratique des hautes études (Sorbonne, IV<sup>e</sup> section).
  - 26 Rappelons pour mémoire que le personnage central du quatrième roman de Poulin, *Faites de beaux rêves*, s'appelle aussi Théo et que les voitures rouges jouent un rôle essentiel dans son imaginaire. Pilote de Formule 3, surtout en Europe, Théo se passionne pour les courses automobiles de Formule 1. Il va de circuit en circuit, au gré du Championnat du Monde des conducteurs, et le roman se situe au Mont-Tremblant, en 1970, lors du Grand Prix du Canada. Le pilote préféré de Théo, Jackie Stewart (Écurie Tyrrell), affronte les bolides rouges (le *rosso corsa* de légende) de la « scuderia » Ferrari. Or, Théo entretient des relations équivoques avec la voiture italienne: assoupi, il « souriait vaguement dans son sommeil; il avait l'air de rêver qu'il pilotait une Ferrari sur le circuit de Monza pour le Grand prix d'Italie » (21). Éveillé, en revanche, il a « l'air de mettre au point une stratégie qui allait permettre à Stewart et à Cevert de mener la vie dure aux Ferrari . . . » (112). Au grand désespoir du héros, la course du Mont-Tremblant s'achève sur la déconfiture de la Tyrrell: «—Je suis écœuré en christ », lâche Théo (190) et le triomphe



- absolu des « rouges »: «—Les deux Ferrari ont gagné, dit le commis . . . Théo fit signe qu'il le savait déjà » (197–98). On voit ici que le « rouge Théo », s'il représente le personnage dans son épaisseur, figure également, dans la diégèse, la couleur de la déconvenue—la déconvenue sur laquelle débouche aussi la « piste rouge » de *Volkswagen Blues*.
- 27 L'Évangile selon Saint-Jean narre ainsi l'incident: « La Pâque des Juifs était proche, et Jésus monta à Jérusalem. Il trouva dans le temple les vendeurs de bœufs, de moutons et de pigeons, et les changeurs assis. Ayant fait un *fouet avec des cordes*, il les *chassa* tous du temple, ainsi que les brebis et les bœufs; il *dispersa la monnaie* des changeurs et *renversa leurs comptoirs*; et il dit aux vendeurs de pigeons: ôtez cela d'ici; ne faites pas de la maison de mon Père une maison de trafic. Ses disciples se souvinrent qu'il est écrit: Le zèle de ta maison me dévore » (La Bible, Jean 2, 13–17, nous soulignons).
- 28 Ajoutons pour mémoire, que Rivera est connu pour ses opinions marxistes (la plupart de ses murales en font foi) et que l'objet manufacturé est volontiers associé, dans la symbolique marxiste, au sang de l'ouvrier. Notons aussi qu'au contrôle d'immigration de Detroit, Jack et Pitsémine ont affaire à un agent des douanes dont les yeux sont « gris et froids comme l'acier » et le visage « de marbre » (91), véritable prolepse de l'ekphrasis de *Detroit Industry*. Si les compositions de Rivera ne jouent généralement pas dans la nuance (la façon, en particulier, dont est représenté le conquérant espagnol), on observe qu'ici le processus de déshumanisation est décrit au moment précis où les deux personnages passent la frontière.
- 29 On notera cette autre coïncidence: si Jack et la Grande Sauterelle découvrent la « petite tache rouge vif » *en catastrophe*, c'est-à-dire à « l'heure de la fermeture » du musée, il en sera de même au moment de mettre la main sur Théo à la fin du spectacle, alors que la Grande Sauterelle a repéré le frère de Jack dans une « espèce d'amphithéâtre » à San Francisco (280). En fait, ils devront convenir d'une « stratégie » pour ne pas « le perdre de vue » dans la foule (282–284).
- 30 Anne Distel, dans son livre *Renoir: a Sensuous Vision*, nous raconte les vicissitudes du tableau: « Originally called *The Two Sisters*, this painting was dismissed by the critics with coarse jokes. It has since become one of the best known and best loved by Renoir. The models are sitting on the terrace of the Fournaise restaurant, and the work is now known more by the site than by the sisters: *On the Terrace (1881)* » (77).
- 31 Pour Robillard, « direct *naming* in the title or elsewhere in the text, . . . creates the strongest link to the pictorial source » (61).
- 32 La violence des réactions de Jack peut expliquer, rétrospectivement, sa crainte de retrouver Théo dans la murale *Detroit Industry*.
- 33 Cet engourdissement en annonce un autre qui durera non pas trois heures mais « trois jours » (143). Jack appelle cela le « complexe du scaphandrier », un « état pathologique dans lequel on se renferme quand on est en présence de difficultés qui paraissent insurmontables » (146).
- 34 Tandis que Roland Barthes joue sur l'homonymie du substantif « point » (punctum) et de la troisième personne du verbe « poindre » (« meurtri[r] ») (49), Christine Vial, quant à elle, joue sur la paronymie implicite entre le verbe « pointer » (matérialiser) et « poindre » (se révéler « poignant ») puisque la photo agit « au creux de l'absence ».
- 35 Dans son article « Quatre pistes de lecture de *Volkswagen Blues* », Jean-Marc Lemelin relève les trois ekphrasis qui nous occupent (107, 114). Il note que la couleur rouge traverse les peintures de Rivera et de Renoir et « réapparaît lors de la découverte de l'inscription en lettres rouges » sur le rocher (107).
- 36 La représentation des deux sœurs a pu entraîner la référence à Van Gogh, dont on connaît la « relation complexe » avec son frère, un autre Théo (Harel 161).

- 37 Rappelons que Clüver considère les descriptions de photographies comme des ekphrasis (26).
- 38 Bien que la photographie prise par Church n'ait pas de titre à proprement parler, il n'en reste pas moins qu'elle est nettement identifiée dans *Volkswagen Blues* (côté droit de la photo) par la mention du titre de l'ouvrage d'où elle est tirée (*Beat Angels*), des noms des éditeurs de *Beat Angels* (Arthur et Kit Knight) et du numéro de la page où elle apparaît (p.11).
- 39 La première édition de *Volkswagen Blues* (Éditions Québec/Amérique), ne donne que la photographie et une référence bibliographique (sur le côté droit de la photo on peut lire: « *Beat Angels*, Edited by Arthur and Kit Knight, p. 11 », 265) tandis que la dernière édition (Leméac), propose en plus, et cette fois sous la photographie, les noms des figurants, le nom du lieu où la photo a été prise, l'année, le nom du photographe: « Lawrence Ferlinghetti, Minette Le Blanc, Peter Le Blanc, unidentifié man, Allen Ginsberg, Harold Norse, Jack Hirschman and Bob Kaufman. Café Trieste, Grant Avenue and Vallejo, San Francisco, 1977. Photo by Diana Church » (292).
- 40 Parlant de l'état actuel de la fresque de Vinci, Wasserman remarque: « [t]he decayed and ascetic impression the *Last Supper* makes today hides what was once probably a luminous and richly decorated painting. The clear and vivid colors (blues, reds, greens, and yellows) no longer vibrate in the light, and the tablecloth and eight wall hangings have faded into neutral tones and nearly lost their patterns of ornamentation » (124, nous soulignons).
- 41 Reuter entend par cette fonction « les multiples façons par lesquelles la description assume un rôle fondamental dans la progression sémantique et dans le mouvement de lecture, pour poser, recomposer, annoncer, transformer, manifester, dissimuler . . . les contenus » (137).

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# bushed

my willow sisters turn their dull grey backs when I am in this mood  
when there's no bench  
no planted tree  
no shadowed park where strangers' children squabble  
no corner table where my face  
can empty into dreams  
without offense

in Utrecht I say clematis climbs out of paving stones  
to splash grey walls  
and couples laugh in windows  
inches from the swirl of bicycle bells

then go down and drink Dutch beer the willows sniff

your departure will not keep the moose  
from browsing in our branches  
or redpolls from celebrating the seeds  
of an unexpected birch  
the sacred text unfurling from its trunk  
coyote studies everything  
her nose tracks the grouse  
hiding in the grass  
fur feathers and leaves all shivering in some holy wind

you'll come crawling back

still  
some thing smokes out my heart  
slides under the barbed wire fence  
and disarms me  
whispers of windowpanes  
    of boys on their bikes  
        arms outstretched and laughing  
            whooping down  
                the whole long recklessness into the valley

# Caroline Clement

## The Hidden Life of Mazo de la Roche's Collaborator

"In privacy I can find myself and the creative impulse in me can move unhampered," said Mazo de la Roche in a 1955 interview. Finding the truth about the author of the phenomenally successful *Jalna* novels has been difficult, for she herself was reticent and evasive. Even the best biographer of de la Roche, Ronald Hambleton, made mistakes: for example, he missed the Acton years. Joan Givner uncovered the Acton years, but one aspect of her *Mazo de la Roche: The Hidden Life* was terribly wrong: de la Roche was not a child molester who victimized her cousin and life-long companion Caroline Clement.<sup>1</sup> De la Roche herself had said in her autobiography, *Ringing the Changes*, that she and Clement were "raised together as sisters," but Givner, guessing at Clement's age, contradicted this statement saying "Caroline was much more likely to have found in Mazo a surrogate parent than a playmate her own age" (18). De la Roche had said that the two women first met and began engaging in their innocent "play" when de la Roche was seven years old and Clement was about the same age (3–9, 51–59). Givner, however, insisted that "Caroline was probably a child of seven and Mazo a young woman in her mid-teens" when the two women came together. Furthermore, Givner pronounced, the play was "erotic" (49–54). Givner implied that Clement was hiding de la Roche's crime when she became a "willing collaborator" in giving incorrect dates of birth for the two of them. Givner also implied that Clement was a mindless follower (17, 18) or a pitiful blackmailer exerting "some kind of control over Mazo and her work" (3). The truth is that de la Roche was younger than Clement, and the two met when de la Roche said they did. Moreover, Clement was the leader of the pair

and a respected, honourable partner in the creation of the Jalna series. The more one learns about Clement, the more one learns about de la Roche.

Mazo de la Roche claimed that Caroline Clement's mother married "the most affluent young man of the neighbourhood," the "eldest son" of "Squire Clement" of United Empire Loyalist stock (*Ringling* 19). This statement was ambiguous. Actually Clement's father was not an eldest child but a second-born with eight younger siblings.<sup>2</sup> And Clement's father was not rich, only her grandfather was. Grandfather Clement had personal property and cash valued at well over 7000 dollars by the time he died in 1873, an enormous sum for the time; furthermore, like Captain Philip Whiteoak, the grandfather in the Jalna series, he also owned about 1000 acres of land (Clement, Lewis James). De la Roche probably repressed such details in order to hide the many ways that Caroline Clement's family—combined with the family of de la Roche—provided material for the Jalna series (Kirk). Grandfather Clement's land was located at the south end of Innisfil Township, Simcoe County, Ontario, where Lewis James and his wife Abigail had arrived in 1829 from Niagara to settle on 200 acres granted by the Crown. Lewis James Clement had been born in Canada, as had his wife. His father, another James, a descendant of early Dutch settlers of New York State, had been an officer in the British army and one of the first settlers of the Canadian Niagara Peninsula. This great-grandfather James Clement had been a hero of the War of 1812, as had other members of the family.<sup>3</sup> De la Roche also said that Squire Clement "did very well" by his eldest son, but that the son was "unable to settle down with his young bride. He was full of ideas which invariably cost money, ideas which carried him and his wife far afield before fruition evaporated" (19). This statement was too kind. The younger James Clement was harum-scarum. He changed jobs frequently, borrowed money compulsively, and failed his dependents badly.

Before his third child Caroline was born, James Clement worked as a farmer, storekeeper, justice of the peace, and innkeeper in Simcoe County.<sup>4</sup> He also trained show horses and exhibited them in New York State (Hambleton, *Mazo* 112). In 1852 James bought 100 acres of land from his father for \$150. The land, in the post office district of Cherry Creek (now Fennell), adjoined the eastern half of the original 200-acre Clement homestead to the south. The next year, 23-year-old James married 17-year-old Martha Willson,<sup>5</sup> another UE Loyalist descendant, the middle daughter of neighbours on a 100-acre farm two concessions to the north called "The Maples" (*Genealogy* 3, 14). These neighbours, Hiram and Caroline Willson,

had been members of the Quaker breakaway group, Children of Peace, centred in Sharon, Ontario; they had moved 20 kilometres north to Innisfil Township in 1840 (Kirk 14–16). The Willson's oldest daughter, Louise, married Daniel Lundy of Whitchurch Township at about the same time, for in 1854 Louise bore her first child at the age of 23: the Alberta who would become the mother of Mazo de la Roche (Hambleton, *Mazo* 70). (Thus Caroline Clement's Aunt Louise was Mazo de la Roche's "Grandma Lundy.") Daughter Martha, who was "almost wildly romantic, high-tempered and extravagant" (*Ringing* 20), but also "loving" and "genial" ("The death"), would not begin to bear children for 18 years.

For 14 years, while he operated his first farm, James Clement mortgaged it three times for dramatically-increasing amounts.<sup>6</sup> Perhaps he was buying horses. Meanwhile, like the fictional Renny Whiteoak, James (doubtless with Martha's help) would have helped raise his youngest siblings, because James' mother died in 1857 (Rhodes), leaving five children not yet fully grown—aged eight, nine, 11, 15, and 17.<sup>7</sup> Then in 1866, James sold his land outright for \$1580 and bought a 96-acre property three concessions to the north in the post office district of Churchill.<sup>8</sup> The property was uncleared and unfenced; it consisted mainly of bush (*Township* 162). Perhaps the couple wanted to be farther from the Clements and closer to the Willsons, for brother-in-law Wellington Willson was now diagonally across the Concession 4 road to the northwest (*Genealogy* 4), while father-in-law Hiram was diagonally across the Yonge Street road to the southeast (*Assessment Innisfil*). James' new property was 96 acres rather than 100 because a previous owner, Colonel George Duggan, had donated four acres to create St. Peter's Anglican Church in the 1850s (*St. Peter's*). In the 1920s, this church would become the model for the fictional Whiteoaks' church.<sup>9</sup> In the late 1860s, James and Martha lived above and ran the picturesque, red-brick Churchill store, built in the 1820s (*Township* 167). The store was located on the northwest corner of Concession 4 and Yonge Street. It still stood in 2004.

In 1870, James sold the 96 acres of bush to his father for \$2000. He probably used this money to pay a debt, for during the next four or five years, while he worked as an innkeeper in nearby Bell Ewart and then more distant Bracebridge, he only rented accommodation, although Martha bore their first two children at this time.<sup>10</sup> Even after James' father divided the 96 acres and willed 50 acres of it back to James and 46 acres to a brother (Lewis), James did not make this property his home. Perhaps he was angry



with his father, for cynically on August 15, 1874, James sold his 50 acres to two Bracebridge men, James Langdon and Jacob Dill, for one dollar.<sup>11</sup> Evidently he owed the men money. In fact, legally James could not sell his 50 acres because a provision in his father's will stipulated that all of the old patriarch's land gifts must go first to his children and then, upon his children's deaths, to their children. After Lewis James Clement's death in 1873, James or his brother Lewis rented the 50 acres to tenants more or less continuously until 1899 (*Assessment Innisfil*). In 1899, one half of these 50 acres became important to Caroline Clement.

Meanwhile in 1874 James Clement was seeing signs of the 1874–78 Canadian Depression and in 1876 he was reading stories about General Custer's defeat at Little Big Horn, Montana (Brown 339, 349, 350). The Dakota Territory must have seemed an exciting place of opportunity to an enterprising, impecunious fellow with mounting domestic responsibilities; in August of 1877, James Clement made his way to Grand Forks. There, on September 5, 1877, he signed a formal declaration of his intention to "renounce forever" the "Queen of England" and become a US citizen (Slater, *United*). Meanwhile Martha and the children stayed behind in Simcoe County at "The Maples," where her recently widowed mother Caroline Willson and her brother Lambert Willson were living.<sup>12</sup> The unpretentious but substantial two-storey Willson home—a wooden frame with a stuccoed, white exterior—is likely where Caroline Louise Clement was born nine months after her father's departure (*Genealogy*, photo "3rd Line Farm"). Although no record of Caroline Clement's birthdate is available in the Ontario Archives, and all church records for the parish and period of her birth were lost in a fire (Rhodes), several sources give her birthday as April 4.<sup>13</sup> Five other documents (three census listings, a will, and a land instrument) prove beyond a doubt that Clement's birth year was 1878. Caroline Clement was nine months older than Mazo de la Roche, who was born Mazo Louise Roche in Newmarket, Ontario on January 15, 1879 (Hambleton, *Secret* 40). Thus, biographers of de la Roche were wrong to suppose that Caroline Clement was six or more years younger than her cousin (Hambleton, *Secret* 62; Givner 18). De la Roche herself was untruthful when she said Martha Clement was "almost fifty" when Caroline was born (*Ring* 20); Martha was 42.

Caroline Clement emigrated to the United States while still a "delicate infant" (*Ring* 20). The 1880 US Census lists Clement and her immediate family as living in Grand Forks, Dakota Territory.<sup>14</sup> Although Caroline lived in Grand Forks for only about seven years, James Clement lived there

continuously for about twelve years, Martha for about eleven years.<sup>15</sup> Caroline learned to sew and read in Grand Forks (*Ringing* 7), and she must have experienced a fairly normal home life in many ways, for later she proved to be an ordinary, self-confident, practical young woman (*Ringing* 7–9, 58; Hambleton, *Secret* 63; Givner 46, 57). Furthermore, she always retained a happy memory of her parents “singing tunefully together” (*Ringing* 20). Yet Caroline also experienced upheavals, as others have mentioned (Hambleton, *Mazo* 99; Givner 47). Caroline’s parents, James and Martha, experienced euphoria, grief, and humiliation.

In 1879, as the great Dakota land boom got underway (State 8, 9; Remele), James Clement made what must have seemed like an excellent investment. He acquired 160 acres of land that, because it had originally been granted as Military Bounty to a veteran of the “Florida War” in 1856 (Eide; National), was not isolated in the wilderness. Clement’s new/old land was on the edge of the original downtown area of Grand Forks, about two blocks from the railroad tracks and a depot building, one block from two churches (Byzewski, 19 Dec.). Surely the land would increase in value as the village grew. Meanwhile, the family was not roughing it in a sod hut miles from the nearest neighbour. James Clement received final title to the land in October 1882, the same month he took out a mortgage of \$600 with Emma D. Skidmore of St. Paul, Minnesota (National; Hanzal, “Skidmore”). Now James enjoyed some productive creativity, for nine months later, on May 25, 1883, he made the front page of the local newspaper because he had invented a new type of ditch-digging machine and patented it in the US and Canada (“New”). Within three weeks of this positive publicity, on June 13, 1883, James was borrowing money again: this time \$500, in effect a second mortgage on his land held by a local man named Diedrich Bahn (Hanzal, “Bahn”). James probably needed the money to finance a scheme to capitalize on his invention.

Then personal tragedy struck and James’ credit rating plummeted. In 1882 or 1883, James’ daughter Mary died at the age of 11.<sup>16</sup> During the next two years, James did not keep up with his mortgage payments, so the sheriff seized his land. At ten o’clock on the morning of July 11, 1885, Sheriff James K. Swan sold James Clement’s land in front of the Court House in Grand Forks to the highest bidder, Emma Skidmore, who offered \$959. Stubbornly, James refused to vacate the land, undoubtedly promising rental payments to the new owner. Three years later, Skidmore lost patience with James “and Martha” for not paying their rent and not leaving her land. She asked the

sheriff to evict them; Swan did so on October 29, 1888 (Hanzal, "Indenture"). For a few months James (and Martha?) lingered in Grand Forks, boarding with and working for a prominent young farmer named J. D. Bacon, but he soon returned to Simcoe County, Canada.<sup>17</sup> James had abandoned his marvellous machine on the American prairie (*Ringings* 20).

Caroline was not with her parents when they returned home. Caroline had been brought back to Canada by her mother several years earlier; the following social note appeared in the *Grand Forks Daily Herald* of December 8, 1886: "Mrs. James Clement and two children left for Toronto, Ont. today to spend the winter." Given that Caroline was only eight years old, she was undoubtedly one of the two children mentioned, although by then she may have had a younger brother.<sup>18</sup> Caroline was brought to the Newmarket home of her uncle and aunt, Daniel and Louise Lundy, in the first week of January 1887, and the Lundys took care of Clement for the next few years. Mazo de la Roche begins her autobiography with an account of the arrival of Clement "that January day" when de la Roche was "seven" (*Ringings*, 3–9, 51–59). De la Roche implies that she and Clement were not separated again after their initial meeting until de la Roche and her parents moved temporarily to Galt. De la Roche turned eight on January 15, 1887, and she says that the meeting took place within the Christmas season while she and her parents were visiting from Toronto (*Ringings* 5). De la Roche says Caroline came with de la Roche's "Uncle George" (George Lundy, Daniel and Louise Lundy's second son) and father (William Roche); she also says that she and her parents were visiting from Toronto. The social column of the Newmarket newspaper confirms that "Mr. Wm. Roche" and "Mr. Geo. H. Lundy," both "from Toronto," were visiting relatives in Newmarket that Christmas ("Social"). Likely the visitors stayed longer than usual to help Daniel and Louise Lundy endure the first anniversary of the death of their first son, Frank, killed January 14, 1886 in a terrible accident at the sawmill in Newmarket where Daniel Lundy was foreman ("Fearful"). Possibly the loss of one child was a motive for the temporary adoption of another child. Undoubtedly two happy little girls who played together well were easier to take care of than one unhappy little girl who was lonely and bored. De la Roche does not specify where this Lundy home was, but her description of the house being "high above the road" with a "steep terrace" fits their house in Newmarket, which still exists today on Prospect Street, on a terraced height of land above the railway track and a park. The Lundys moved to Orillia in 1888 (*Assessment* 1889). Neither of the streets in Orillia they

lived on—Mary Street and Coldwater Road—has such topography. (Nor do the streets in Orillia that the Clements later lived on—Brant and Front.)

That Martha Clement could have left her eight-year-old daughter behind when she returned to Grand Forks is plausible in light of the Clements' 1885 economic disaster. That Caroline Clement did indeed experience such a separation at such a young age is also confirmed indirectly by Clement. "I was brought up in such an atmosphere of tobacco smoke and people older than myself that I always seemed to be running in and out of hard legs and being snatched and thrown up into the air by somebody with a beard," Clement told Hambleton (*Mazo* 99). This early memory is of a relaxed, extended family such as lived in the Ontario homes of Daniel Lundy,<sup>19</sup> not of a tense, immediate family such as lived in the Dakota home of James Clement. Hambleton reported: "Caroline scarcely remembers her parents. . . . As a child Caroline was sent to stay with relatives . . . they 'didn't like children at all. . . .' The Clements as a family . . . were cold" (*Mazo* 112). Presumably Caroline was brought to the Lundys after a brief stay at a branch of the Clement family: likely the household of Dr. and Mrs. Lewis Clement in Bradford, West Gwillimbury Township, Ontario. Lewis Clement, M.D., James Clement's only childless sibling, was already co-operating with James by administering the rental of their adjoining land holdings in Churchill, and later Lewis would virtually adopt the son of a widowed sister, leaving money and property to him as well as to two other nephews and a niece (*Assessment Innisfil*, 1879–1899; Clement, Lewis). A January 1887 Barrie newspaper mentions that diphtheria was "prevalent" in West Gwillimbury ("Captured"), so Dr. Clement would have been busy and worried about his niece contracting the disease. A lengthy passage in de la Roche's *Growth of a Man* describes the visit of a fictional child, Shaw Manifold, to the childless home of a Doctor "Clemency" whose wife is sickly (114–120); this passage could be based on a brief stay by little Caroline in the home of Dr. Clement.

There is further evidence for Caroline Clement's being separated from her parents and taken in by the Lundys when she was young. Clement told her adopted niece, Esmee Rees, that she "hardly knew" her brother because he lived in the United States. Rees understood that Clement's brother lived in Detroit, Michigan as an adult and married an American (12 Aug.; 10 Jan.), but in these last details Rees was mistaken. James Harvey Clement only lived in the United States during his childhood and youth, when he resided with his parents in Grand Forks; thereafter, he lived in Orillia and Brantford, Ontario ("Serious"; "To the Grave"). Joan Givner's belief that

James Harvey Clement moved to the United States as an adult (46, 249) was based on her interviews with Rees and a 1909 newspaper article about the diamond wedding anniversary of Wellington Willson, one of Martha Clement's older brothers. This article stated that "Harvey of Buffalo, a steamboat engineer," attended the anniversary. But James Harvey Clement never lived in Buffalo, NY and was never a steamboat engineer (Kennedy; Messmer). The "Harvey" referred to in the 1909 report was undoubtedly James Harvey Willson, a son of Wellington Willson who did live in Buffalo and who was "an engineer on the lakes" ("J. Wellington," 513). Thus, when Caroline Clement told her niece that James Harvey Clement lived in the United States, she was referring to a separation during her childhood between 1886 and 1889. If Clement deliberately gave Rees the impression that her brother lived in the US as an adult, she was prevaricating in order to hide something embarrassing.

In 1889 when James Clement returned to Simcoe County, he did not settle on his 50 acres near his Clement siblings and Willson in-laws,<sup>20</sup> but rather 65 kilometres farther north in Orillia. Since James Clement only rented part of a house in Orillia and since he and his son, James Harvey, both worked there as humble pail makers, James was obviously in straitened circumstances, so why did he settle so far from his land and family? Likely he did so because Martha's sister, Louise Lundy, was living in Orillia. Since Louise had been taking care of Caroline for several years, when her parents arrived the girl would have been well settled in Orillia and reluctant to leave. Moreover, Louise's husband, Daniel, foreman of the Thomson Brothers woodenware factory in Orillia—known locally as the "Old Pail Factory" (Sarjeant)—could find jobs for James and his son.<sup>21</sup> James could expect to obtain mainly scorn from his own brothers and sisters. While James had been losing his 160 acres and his reputation in the Dakota Territory, his closest brother Stephen had been gaining 640 acres and prestige in Manitoba. Stephen, father of eight children who survived to adulthood, had gone West one year after James but had not renounced the Queen; Stephen had become the first representative of Shoal Lake and Russell for the Manitoba legislature and the first sheriff of the Western Judicial District of Manitoba.<sup>22</sup> James' next brother, Lewis, had become wealthy from his medical practice in Bradford (Clement, Lewis). Of course James' sister Catherine was now a poor widow, but Catherine retained the prestige of being Mrs. Thomas McConkey. McConkey, a Barrie merchant, had become Sheriff of Simcoe County and member for North Simcoe of the federal

parliament in Ottawa.<sup>23</sup> And Joseph and David, unambitious farmers who never left the original 200-acre homestead that their father gave them, each had 100 acres to leave to his heirs (Clement, Joseph; Clement, David), as did little sisters Sarah and Abigail, both married women by this time.<sup>24</sup> Even illiterate Joseph had achieved local prestige by marrying a relative of Sir John A. MacDonald (Clement, Joseph; *Township* 33). James' siblings—the “cold” Clements—would have regarded their big brother as an awful bungler.

James' household in Orillia was not happy. Caroline is listed as being enrolled in the Orillia Public School only once, at the age of 15, in October 1893. Presumably the illness mentioned by de la Roche in her autobiography had held Clement back; de la Roche did not specify whether the illness was physical or emotional.<sup>25</sup> De la Roche herself had been enrolled in the same school at the age of 13 in September of the previous year, 1892.<sup>26</sup> Even though Caroline now lived officially with her parents and brother, she would have escaped often to the nearby Lundys to have fun with Mazo. De la Roche and her mother would have stayed from time to time in William Roche's various temporary lodgings in Toronto during the period 1888 to 1894, and they stayed more than one year with him in a Galt hotel around 1891.<sup>27</sup> But de la Roche would have regarded Orillia as her principal home for about six years. De la Roche did not mention the Orillia years in her autobiography, and they went undetected by her biographers. Hambleton implied that neither Clement nor de la Roche ever lived with the Lundys in Orillia, and that the Lundys' stay in that city was brief (*Mazo* 98). But the City of Orillia knew that de la Roche had lived there; indeed, in 1966, the year Hambleton's first biography was published, the city inducted her into the Orillia Hall of Fame (“Orillia”). The Orillia Museum says that de la Roche attended a private school run by a Miss Cecile Lafferty, later Mrs. Gerhardt Dryer, wife of Orillia's chief of police, and that the school was located on Coldwater Road (Sarjeant). Likely Clement attended the same private school (*Ringing* 55). De la Roche also attended the high school in Orillia (“Orillia”; Sarjeant).

Actually Caroline Clement revealed the Orillia secret when she told Hambleton about spending summer holidays on Strawberry Island (*Mazo*, 113, 114), but Hambleton did not recognize the clue. Clement even mentioned the island's original, English-language name, known only to Orillia old-timers: “Starvation Island” (Lajeunesse). Strawberry Island, in Lake Simcoe, is near Orillia. Since the 1920s it has belonged to the Catholic Church (Lajeunesse), and in 2002 it became briefly famous for providing healthful, safely remote

accommodation for the frail Pope John Paul II during World Youth Day in Toronto. Until World War I, the tiny island was a popular summer destination for Orillians because they could take a brief ferry ride there for a single-day excursion. There was no place on the island for the general public to stay overnight (Lajeunesse). The game Clement and de la Roche played on the island—discovering a cave and playing *Robinson Crusoe* and *Friday*—indicates that the girls were pre-adolescent. Thus their earliest Strawberry Island excursions undoubtedly predate the Galt year(s) and go back to 1888–1890.



photo courtesy of Benares Historic House, Bianca de la Roche, and the estate of Mazon de la Roche

*Caroline on fence*

Knowing that de la Roche was 15 when she moved in 1894 to Toronto to live with the Lundys, biographers struggled to account for de la Roche's child-like behaviour at the time of her supposed reunion with Clement in *Toronto* after de la Roche had been away with her parents in Galt.<sup>28</sup> But the reunion actually took place in Orillia in 1891 or 1892. Not wanting to admit she and Clement had lived in unsophisticated Orillia, de la Roche did some splicing to create the scene where the pair walk down to a lake together and begin again their "play." Grandfather Lundy's homes in Orillia's West Ward and Toronto's westerly Parkdale district were all only a few blocks from a large lake, so de la Roche could allude vaguely to an unnamed "city" and "west end" and "lake" and give the impression of being in Toronto beside Lake Ontario instead of Orillia beside Lake Couchiching or Lake Simcoe.

Caroline Clement probably went to live with the Lundys in Toronto soon after her father died. His death occurred on August 27, 1894. He was 64 years old.<sup>29</sup> He had left his wife Martha, 59, and surviving children, James Harvey 21 and Caroline Louise 16, with little means, for Martha never again owned a home and her children's main material legacy was the 50 acres willed to them by their paternal grandfather (Hambleton, *Secret* 70). According to a provision of Lewis James Clement's will, this land could go to James' children only when the youngest of them turned 21. James Harvey and Caroline

Louise took possession of this inheritance in 1899, when Caroline turned 21. They sold the land in November of that year for \$600.<sup>30</sup> Presumably they split the profit evenly. By that time Caroline had been living in Toronto for about five years in the Lundy home. The Lundys had moved to that city in 1894 when Daniel became mechanical supervisor of the woodworking shop at Central Prison (“After”). Also living in the Lundy home during this period were Mazo de la Roche, her parents, and assorted uncles and aunts (*Ringing* 80; Hambleton *Mazo* 99). Meanwhile, Caroline’s mother and brother may have lived together in Orillia for a while, but by 1901 Martha Clement was boarding with her younger sister, Mary (Willson) Rogerson, in Lefroy, Innisfil Township. James Harvey Clement was living in Brantford with the Orillia girl he had married, Mary Coulson.<sup>31</sup>

After Daniel Lundy died in 1900, Caroline Clement lived with de la Roche and de la Roche’s parents, William and Alberta Roche, in various locations in southern Ontario, including three or four years in Acton, where the Roches ran a hotel (Givner 69–78), and four years in Bronte, where the Roches tried farming (Hambleton, *Mazo* 101–111; *Secret* 59–69). Clement, aged 33, was living in Bronte when her mother died suddenly of “heart failure” in November 1911 in nearby Brantford. The death was “most unexpected” because the “deceased was apparently in fair health” (“The death”). Martha Clement was “found dead in bed.”<sup>32</sup> At age 75, Martha had just moved into a small, square, one-storey, white-brick cottage at 10 Duke Street, Brantford, rented for her by her son (Bowman). Martha’s life was celebrated with two funeral services. The first was held in the home of her son, James Harvey, at 37 Brighton Row in Brantford. Her body was then transported by train to Innisfil Township. After a second service at the Lefroy home of her sister Mary, Martha’s body was buried beside that of her husband in the Clement Cemetery (“The funeral”).<sup>33</sup> Thus, Martha Clement did not die one year after her husband, as Hambleton and Rees believed (*Mazo* 70; Rees 12 Aug.), and there is no reason to suppose she had a chronic mental or physical illness, as Givner believed (46).<sup>34</sup>

According to a Bronte neighbour, Caroline Clement worked “like a slave for the Roches,” using her “common sense” and “clearest eye” for the “practical work” of raising animals and crops, occupations at which the Roches were inexperienced (Hambleton, *Secret* 63). So Clement too would have worked hard in the hotel and in the Roche’s various homes. A hint of her industriousness appears in *Lark Ascending*, a non-Jalna novel written as soon as the Jalna series was well established, which dealt with Clement’s hitherto



unacknowledged contributions to de la Roche's success. One of the protagonists in this novel is Josie Froward, the hard-working cousin of lazy, self-centred young painter Diego Vargas. Josie lives with and works for Diego's equally self-centred mother, Fay. In *Lark Ascending*, Josie "carried herself with an air of stubborn courage as though she were in the habit of undertaking more than her strength was equal to, and carrying it through" (12). Josie runs a bakery and sells antiques to support Fay and Diego. The period from about 1900 to 1915 may be seen both as an extended childhood for Clement (she was now being protected by de la Roche's parents), and as an experimental adulthood (she was now trying innkeeping and farming, occupations which her parents had tried, and exploring southern Ontario, the region from which her parents had fled). Clement would have wanted to understand why her father had failed financially and avoid his mistakes. As well as working hard, Clement was showing leadership within her adopted family.

Clement's psychological strength is a recurring theme in de la Roche's autobiography, *Ringed the Changes*. In de la Roche's account of their first meeting, Clement pooh-poohs the fears of sheltered, indulged, only-child de la Roche, who has been spooked by a mere stuffed owl in her grandmother's house (6, 7). In her description of her nervous breakdown in her twenties, de la Roche credits Clement with helping her recover. Clement held de la Roche in her arms "when despair threatened." Later, when de la Roche was recuperating, Clement walked with her and participated in the "play" (122, 135, 136). After the bankruptcy, decline, and death of William Roche in 1914-15, Clement supported de la Roche and her mother emotionally and financially. Clement faced "those difficult days" with "gallant resolution" and became "the principal pillar" of their "little household," securing positions in the provincial government (173). Indeed, Clement was the household's chief wage earner until *Jalna* won the \$10,000 Atlantic Little Brown prize in 1927 and the book's huge sales made the regular government salary unnecessary (226). When de la Roche had another breakdown in 1928, Clement devoted herself to ensuring that de la Roche finish the first sequel to *Jalna*, *Whiteoaks of Jalna*. Clement "massaged [her] temples and neck" and took dictation when de la Roche could not write, helping de la Roche "accomplish much more" and giving her "confidence" in herself (226, 231). During their life in England, Clement not only dealt with the practical aspects of running their household but also worked on manuscripts. For example, at their Devon farmhouse, "Seckington," Clement worried about wallpaper and furnishings, typed *Portrait of a Dog*, and made "an admirable

condensed version of it for an American magazine” (244, 245). Finally, at the end of her autobiography, de la Roche declared that it was Clement “who [had] always made [their] decisions” (331).

De la Roche’s repeated assertion in *Ringling* that Clement was the leader of the two, yet a sensitive partner in de la Roche’s creative processes, able to set aside her dominating nature and lose herself in de la Roche’s imaginings, is supported by other sources. The presence of both women’s handwriting, turn and turn about, on the original manuscript of *Whiteoaks of Jalna* (Hambleton, *Secret* 27), provides physical evidence that Clement must have harmonized exquisitely with the temperamental de la Roche. Then too Esmee Rees has said: “I know Caroline had considerable influence on the creation of the Jalna novels. They read the manuscript over every day. Caroline would never take credit for anything. She didn’t push herself forward” (10 Jan.). Joan Givner observed that although many superficial acquaintances described Clement as “sweet,” considerable evidence shows she was actually “bossy” (228). But Clement’s “hold” on de la Roche was not necessarily sexual, as Givner implied (3), for Clement could provide sound judgement, like a good editor. In *Ringling the Changes*, de la Roche describes Clement as “receptive as a crystal goblet held beneath a tap” (52). In *Lark Ascending*, de la Roche says Diego “had the ability to create” and Josie “knew she did not have it. But she had the power to interpret what he created. She could take his formless, ill-judged creations and build them up,

coax them into a kind of serenity, so they satisfied the senses, not tormented them” (15, 16).

Givner made the same mistake as did Pierre Fritz Mansbendel, a suitor of de la Roche who underestimated Clement’s intelligence and seriousness: “Because she was small and blond and pretty he thought of her as frivolous—ignoring her cool, critical quality. Once, when she picked up a book of essays he had been reading, he took it from her with a curt, ‘But, my dear, you would not yet understand this,’ and deeply offended her” (*Ringling* 147).



photo courtesy of Benares Historic House, Blanca de la Roche, and the estate of Mazo de la Roche

Mazo and Caroline in 1934

Caroline may not have received a good education, but she had a good mind. Hambleton obviously thought this too, for he commented, “Caroline’s role throughout their long life together was that of protector, housekeeper, typist, hostess, *critic*” (emphasis mine). He then quoted a de la Roche letter: “And beside all her tender qualities she is the backbone of my work, as it were. She has a far better critical mind than I” (*Mazo* 115). Hambleton’s (and de la Roche’s) assessment that Clement was astute is reinforced by her rising from clerk-typist to Chief Statistician in the Fire Marshall’s office of the government of Ontario (Hambleton, *Mazo* 101–112, *Secret* 70). Furthermore, many of her relatives were also bright and successful.

Caroline Clement often mentioned to her adopted niece and nephew that her paternal grandfather, Lewis James Clement, had been a judge (Rees, 12 Aug.). But her maternal grandfather, Hiram Robinson Willson, had been also a justice of the peace as well as captain of the local militia (*Township* 115). And a number of earlier forebears had been military officers or religious leaders (Kirk 13–18). Furthermore, within Caroline Clement’s own generation, many men in her family were successful professionals, and several were brilliant. Her first cousins included engineers, druggists, lawyers, and a forester; one druggist also served as an alderman, and one lawyer also served as an alderman and judge.<sup>35</sup> Another lawyer—Stephen, third son of Stephen, who bore a strong physical resemblance to Caroline Clement—was an alderman for the city of Brandon, Manitoba; the mayor of Brandon; a member of the Manitoba provincial legislature; a long-time, county-court judge; and a director of many organizations.<sup>36</sup> The forester was Harvey Reginald Macmillan, educated at the Guelph agricultural college and Yale University, co-founder of the giant British Columbia forestry company, Macmillan Bloedel (“Harvey”; “J. Willson” 513). These conspicuous accomplishments of Caroline Clement’s near relations increase the likelihood that she herself was not only brainy but also ambitious. Actually, the name-dropping in which Clement indulged and the upper-class English accent which she affected throughout her 1964 interview with Hambleton, provide evidence that she was obsessed with the notion of high social position. This obsession would have stemmed from her immediate family not having done well by comparison to her extended family, for her brother had failed as spectacularly as her father. James Harvey Clement had become foreman of the Verity Plow Company; he had also been elected an alderman in the city of Brantford (“To the Grave”). But as his first term as alderman came to a close, James Harvey had blown himself up figuratively like a suicide bomber.

In May 1919, several nasty stories about James Harvey appeared on the front page of his local newspaper. In the first story, George Tomlin, an employee of the Verity Plow Company, accused Alderman J. H. Clement of taking a bribe for an exemption from military duty during World War I. In the second story, Magistrate Livingston acquitted Alderman Clement of Tomlin's charge, but the acquittal was suspicious because the trial took place before Tomlin's lawyer could reach the court ("Serious"; "Honorable"). Eight months later, Alderman Clement was bad news again. On December 31, 1919, the evening of his sudden death at the age of 46, Clement was guzzling bootlegged liquor during a period of prohibition while on alderman's business. Warden McCann testified that he had accepted a single drink from Clement's bottle that evening when Clement came to his home. McCann was not sickened by the bottle's contents, which he described as "ordinary rye whisky." But Clement drank so much from his bottle that Mayor MacBride, with whom Clement also conferred in a downtown Brantford restaurant, the Devonshire Cafe, had to help him leave the restaurant. Just beyond the door, Clement slid unconscious onto the sidewalk. Mayor MacBride, who testified that he himself was a total abstainer from alcohol because of a medical condition, asked a passing acquaintance, P.C. Gillen, to take Clement home in a taxi. Gillen and the taxi driver carried Clement into his home, placed him on a couch, realized he was dead, and called Dr. Philips. At the inquest into Clement's death, the coroner, Dr. Fissette, remarked that Clement's stomach "showed a pathological condition," and that it "had been insulted by alcohol." Fissette concluded that "death was due to heart failure, and the contributory cause alcoholism" ("Adjournment"; "Regret"). If Caroline Clement told people that her brother had lived in Detroit, Michigan, she was deflecting attention away from the small Canadian town where the shameful end of Alderman Clement was public knowledge. Perhaps she had similar motives for maintaining silence about her early years with her parents in Grand Forks and Orillia (Rees 10 Jan.).

The hidden life of Caroline Clement was her family life, which biographers did not probe. The sex life that Joan Givner discovered was quite possibly a product of Givner's imagination. Elspeth Cameron and Clara Thomas both have said that, given the period in which Clement and de la Roche lived, the pair were probably not sexually active. I myself am unconvinced by Givner's arguments.<sup>37</sup> I am suspicious when Givner does not cite medical authorities for generalizations like, "Such collapses of health and identity are usually reflected in erratic sexual behaviour" (64). I disagree with Givner's pro-

nouncement that de la Roche made “gender problems” central to Finch’s nervous breakdowns (65, 66). I fail to see sexual explicitness in the *Jalna* passages that Givner labels “erotic” (49, 50). I think Givner should give more weight to the statements she quotes by Lovat Dickson and Esmee Rees, people who knew the women well and who felt that they were not active lesbians (142, 211). In any case, Clement was obviously not victimized by de la Roche, as Givner implied (17). On the contrary, given Clement’s seniority and leadership—and the cynicism displayed by her father and brother—it is possible that de la Roche was victimized by Clement.



Caroline in 1937

photo courtesy of Benares Historic House, Banca de la Roche, and the estate of Mazo de la Roche

But there is no reason to believe that victimization was part of their relationship. Because they were born only nine months apart and raised together from childhood, their relationship would have been symbiotic. De la Roche found in Clement not only subject matter but also reason to live. Hambleton was correct when he commented, “Caroline Clement was almost Mazo’s other self. These two dissimilar but perfectly attuned persons lived one of the most unusual and certainly most productive partnerships in the history of literature” (*Mazo* 16). Exiled from her extended and immediate families, Clement was an outsider who wanted in. Humiliated by the failures of her father and brother, she was a low-life who wanted up. Like her mother, she was an invisible partner. Like her father, she was an audacious entrepreneur. Caroline Clement was the ingenious person who developed and maintained an amazing writing machine that got her what she wanted. Through fiction, her 25 acres became 1,000. She became as wealthy and powerful as Grandfather Clement and Captain Philip Whiteoak.

#### NOTES

- 1 The Internet gave me an advantage over Givner. Also, I was able to probe relatively inexpensively because I live in Simcoe County. I owe thanks to many local people not mentioned in “Works Cited.” These include Sharon Bunn, Director, Family History Center,

- Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, Barrie; Information Services Staff, Barrie Public Library; Gail Lucas, longtime Innisfil Township resident; Ellen Millar, Assistant Archivist, SCA; Peter Moran, former Archivist, SCA; Staff, LRO. I also owe thanks to Kathy Lowinger of Tundra Books who recommended me for a Writers' Reserve grant from the Ontario Arts Council to write a book about Mazo de la Roche for young people.
- 2 Clement, Lewis James; *Township* 33. Mary Jane was born first, then James, Stephen, Lewis, Joseph, Catherine, David, Robert, Sarah, and Abigail, in that order. Most of the children were close in age, so there was probably much sibling rivalry. Mary Jane was born 4 Aug. 1828, while James was born 25 June 1830, and Stephen was born 30 Jan. 1832 (Rhodes). Hambleton lists the children in the wrong order (*Mazo* 70); he also mistakenly says that James "was the sixth of the ten children" (*Secret* 51).
  - 3 Hunter II, 53; *Township* 32,33; Kirk 16, 17. Hambleton mistakenly says Lewis James Clement came "to Canada from the United States in 1829" (*Secret* 51).
  - 4 *Assessment Innisfil* 1864–1874; *Township* 167; *Directory* 19, 63.
  - 5 *Ringing* 19. *Census* 1901, District No. 115, Simcoe South, Township of Innisfil, Division No. 3, enumerated April 1901, page [?], family no. [?]: Rogerson, Richard, "head"; Rogerson, Mary, "wife" . . . Clement, Martha, "lodger," born "Feb. 25, 1836" in "Ontario," age "65."
  - 6 Instrument Nos. 11253, 19404, 29175, 29176, 35558, 35659, and 41989 for S ½ Lot 17, Con. 1, Township of Innisfil (LRO).
  - 7 *Census* 1861 *Innisfil*, District No. 1, page 11, lines no. 17–19; page 13, lines no. 1–7. This census shows one of James' younger brothers, Joseph, living with James and Martha in their separate house on their separate farm. It also shows James' 12-year-old sister, Abigail, going by the name "Martha." It gives Joseph's age as 25, but a record for Joseph's marriage indicates that he was 27 when he married in 1867, so he would have been 17 when his mother died and 21 when the 1861 census was taken (*inGeneas*).
  - 8 Instrument No. 45943 for N ½ Lot 15, Con. 3, Innisfil (LRO).
  - 9 Of course, Hambleton thought the model was St. Peter's Anglican Church in Erindale (now Mississauga), several kilometres north of Benares (*Mazo* 66; *Secret*, 78, 79), at the corner of Dundas Street and Mississauga Road. Hiram and Caroline Willson, the maternal grandparents of Caroline Clement and great-grandparents of Mazo de la Roche, are buried in the cemetery of the St. Peter's in Innisfil Township. The fictional Whiteoak cemetery is a combination of this cemetery and the Clement Cemetery a few kilometres away, where Caroline's parents, paternal grandparents, and several great-aunts of de la Roche are buried (Kirk 18, 19).
  - 10 *Ontario Births*. MS 929, Reel 4, No. 00787: Mary Elizabeth Clement, born 1 Sept. 1871 in Innisfil Township. *Census* 1871, District No. 41, South Simcoe, Township of Innisfil, Division No. 2, page 91[?], family no. 255. Instruments for Lot 23, Con. 4 (LRO). *Ontario Births*. MS 929, Reel 11, No. 013051: James Harvey Clement, born 8 Mar. 1873 in Macaulay Township, Muskoka. Aoaki. I do not know where James Clement was between 1875 and August 1877.
  - 11 Instrument No. 79217 for N ½ Lot 15, Con. 3, Township of Innisfil (LRO).
  - 12 *Assessment Innisfil*, 1879, entries 167, 168, 169 for S ½ Lot 16, Con. 3.
  - 13 *Genealogy*, 17, gives Clement's birthday as April 4, 1879. The Statement of Death, filled in by Clement's adopted nephew, Rene de la Roche, gives Clement's date of birth as April 4, 1889!
  - 14 In the family are father James, "carpenter"; mother Martha, "keeping house"; older sister Mary, eight; older brother James Harvey, seven; Caroline, two. Caroline's birth year is listed as 1878. Everyone's birth place is listed as Canada. That this listing is indeed that of the family of the Caroline Clement, cousin of Mazo de la Roche, can be proven by comparing the handwriting and signature on James Clement's 1877 declaration with

- those on papers related to the probation in 1873 of the will of Lewis James Clement.
- 15 Hambleton mistakenly says that James Clement “took off on [intermittent] jaunts to the United States” (*Secret* 51).
  - 16 *Ringing* 20. *Genealogy* 17. No record of Mary’s death or burial is available today from church, cemetery or government sources in Grand Forks (Byzewski, 21 Dec.; Wittman, 19 Dec.). Likely she was buried on her father’s land. I could find no mention of Mary’s death in the *Grand Forks Daily Herald* newspapers between 1 Sept. 1882 and 1 Sept. 1883 (fiches borrowed from State Archives, State Historical Society of North Dakota, Bismarck, ND).
  - 17 “Personal.” *Grand Forks Daily Herald* 4 Dec. 1886: 4; fiche. Slater, *Grand* 1889–90; 1891–2. *Assessment Innisfil* 1890, entry no. 185, indicates that James Clement was residing in Orillia for at least part of the year 1889.
  - 18 Sometime between June 1885 and May 1891, the youngest child of James and Martha Clement—not Caroline but Franklin—disappeared. I presume Franklin had died and was buried on his father’s forfeited land in Grand Forks. He is not mentioned on cemetery or vital-statistics records for Grand Forks (Byzewski, 21 Dec.; Wittman, 4 Mar.). Franklin is mentioned only on the Grand Forks census of June 1885 (Slater, *Inhabitants*). The four-year-old “Frank,” born 1881 in the Dakota Territory, is listed right after his seven-year-old sister, “Carrie,” born in Canada. Franklin is not mentioned on the 1891 Canadian census listing for his family. On this listing (see below), there is only James, 60; Martha, 55; “James,” 18; and “Caroline,” 13.
  - 19 *Ringing* 13; *Census 1891* District No. 116, Simcoe East, Town of Orillia, Division No.[?], enumerated 13 May 1891, page 5[?], family no. 81.
  - 20 Martha’s oldest brother, Wellington Willson, had moved to Aurora in 1883; her mother Caroline Willson had died in 1884. But Lambert Willson was still at The Maples, and Martha’s younger sister, Mary (Willson) Rogerson, who had a daughter about the same age as Caroline and Mazo, was just two kilometres away on a 100-acre farm near Lefroy. (*Genealogy* 1, 4, 18.)
  - 21 *Census 1891* District No. 116, Simcoe East; Town of Orillia, Division No.[?]; enumerated 13 May 1891, page 5[?]; family no. 81. *Assessment Orillia, West Ward*, 1889, entry no. 1077; 1890, no. 1127; 1891, no. 1265. “After.”
  - 22 Rutherford, *Crown*; Pressman; “Sheriff.” Stephen held the former position for two years and the latter for 19 years until his death in 1901.
  - 23 Clement, Lewis; Clement, Lewis James; Hunter II, 53, 61, 62.
  - 24 Clement, Lewis James; *Township* 33. According to their tombstones in the Clement Cemetery, James’ older sister Mary Jane had died at 14 in 1842, while his youngest brother Robert had died at 19 in 1867.
  - 25 *Ringing* 81, 82; *School*, entry 968. Caroline is registered as “Anne” Clement, daughter of James Clement, Front Street. Her name appears on another document, the 1899 land instrument mentioned below, as “Caroline A. Louise Clement,” so perhaps she was using the name Anne at this time to distinguish herself from her grandmother Caroline Willson and her aunt Louise Lundy. She also experimented with the spelling of “Caroline” when young, using the variant “Carolyn.” See the dedication, “To my dear Carolyn,” in de la Roche’s 1926 novel, *Delight*.
  - 26 *School*, entry 913. Mazo was enrolled on September 1, 1892. Her father is given as “Wm. Roche, Coldwater Road.” The 1892 and 1893 assessment rolls for Orillia do not list William Roche, but the 1893 roll lists Daniel Lundy as having lived in 1892 on Coldwater Road.
  - 27 Hambleton *Secret* 48. *Census 1891*, District No. 123, Waterloo South, Town of Galt, Division 1, enumerated 22 April, page 71, family no. 336.

- 28 *Ringing*, 80–82; Hambleton *Mazo* 99, 100; Hambleton *Secret* 51, 52, 53; Givner 45, 46.
- 29 The cause of James Clement's death is unknown to me. I could find no record of his death in Orillia or Barrie newspapers (fiches SCA) or in the Ontario Archives. His tombstone in the Clement Cemetery gives his date of death as August 27, 1894.
- 30 Instrument no. 6669 for N ½ Lot 15, Con. 3, Innisfil, dated 2 Nov. 1899 (LRO).
- 31 *Census 1901*; "Honourable"; "To the Grave." Martha Clement likely remained with her sister until at least 1909, for in the newspaper report about the anniversary of Wellington Willson, mentioned above, her address is given as Lefroy.
- 32 *Ontario: Deaths*. MS 935, Reel 162, No. 00776911: Martha Clement, Brantford, died 8 Nov. 1911.
- 33 The Clement Cemetery is on Lewis James Clement's original land grant and can be accessed by the public from Concession 2 of Innisfil Township, just east of County Road 4 (the old Yonge Street road, later Highway 11). Martha Clement's grave is unmarked, but visitors can see the small, grey, weathered, limestone marker for James Clement. It lies between the bigger, marble stones of his brothers Lewis and David — which remain easy to read— and the tall, white obelisk for James's parents and his brother Joseph. The obelisk is broken off at the top and its letters are worn. On the other side of the obelisk are the small, moss-covered stones of James' older sister, Mary Jane, and his youngest brother, Robert. I was assisted in deciphering the stones by Doreen Horton and what she termed the "Clement Cemetery Book." The stone inscriptions in this book were transcribed in 1973 by Ross Wallace.
- 34 There is no record of a Martha Clement having been admitted to the mental hospital in Orillia that was the only facility of the kind in Simcoe County in the 1880s and 1890s (Skinner).
- 35 Clement, David; "Obituary: Louis [sic] Clement"; "Obituary: Eleanor Clement"; "Obituary: Final Respects"; "William Dixon Clement"; "J. Willson" 513.
- 36 "S.E. Clement"; Hume 26, 27; Barker 93, 106, 109, 110, 121, 156, 160, 161, 208, 246, 283, 291. Compare the photo of Stephen in Hume 27 with the photo of Caroline in *Ringing* 120E.
- 37 Givner's biography inspired widely differing reactions. The *Globe and Mail* gave it positive, front-page treatment (Givner). CBC *Ideas* based a program on it (Givner). *Canadian Materials* called it a "splendid piece of literary detection" (Reimer). Subsequent biographer Daniel Bratton built on it unquestioningly. But Scott Symons declared that de la Roche had been "murdered." Robin Mathews condemned the biography as "seriously defective." Carole Gerson criticized Givner's "facile generalizations." Esmee Rees was "horrified" (Aug. 12).

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## Abbreviations:

LRO Land Registry Office, Barrie, Ontario.

OA Ontario Archives, Toronto, Ontario.

SCA Simcoe County Archives, Midhurst, Ontario.

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## Dwindling Sally

Dwindling Sally is gone with the carnival  
over horizons of reason and ease  
leaving her life full of rigid predictables  
leaving her lovers their desert of days  
Shedding her shadows and shaking her attitudes  
shaping a sunset to glory her hair  
Dwindling Sally is gone with the carnival  
Dwindling Sally is gone with the fair

Once she was one with the creatures of ritual  
sure of their purpose and sure of their praise  
going through motions in meaningless vestibules  
hiding her hurting averting her eyes  
Once she was one with the creatures of schedule  
Now she's a gypsy who jigs with a bear  
Dwindling Sally is gone with the carnival  
Dwindling Sally is gone with the fair

All in her dreams she was kissed by a miracle  
stunned by a wonder she went to her wish  
slipping the shackles of surly reality  
fled to a destiny random and rich  
Glad in her passing she sings like a parable  
one with her fantasies flickering rare  
Dwindling Sally is gone with the carnival  
Dwindling Sally is gone with the fair

# Skinned

## Taxidermy and Pedophilia in Alice Munro's "Vandals"

Nature hides.  
—Heraclitus

**T**axidermy is a narrative art. Whether the animal's body is part of a diorama containing an overabundance of figures arranged to suggest interspecies communion, or whether its glass eyes gaze directly out of a head hanging on a rumpus room wall, taxidermy tells a story about human-animal interactions. But a taxidermic diorama can also tell a different kind of story. In Alice Munro's "Vandals," a taxidermic display arranged to present a narrative about the innocence of nature in fact reveals another, more disturbing one. Because the strangely denatured taxidermic diorama in "Vandals" features idealized displays of animal life that are predicated on the slaughtering, skinning, and stuffing of their animal subjects but are nevertheless received as icons of the natural, it emphasizes our tendency to see nature as a "naïve reality" that is self-evident and not in need of explanation.<sup>1</sup> The *perception* of the outdoor diorama as a haven of intra- and interspecies communion works to disguise both the violence on which it is premised and the violence that takes place on its grounds; the diorama reminds us of the consequences of failing to scrutinize the "natural." Thus, the diorama, as a simulation of a natural environment, provides fertile ground in which to explore the willing self-deception at the centre of this complex, chilling story.

"Vandals" opens with a letter that Bea Doud composes to Liza, the young woman whom she remembers as one of two "pretty sunburned children" who grew up across the street from "Dismal," the property that Bea shared with her recently deceased partner, Ladner (305). Bea means to thank Liza for checking on the property while Bea cared for Ladner in the hospital, but the letter never gets sent. Instead, Bea retreats into a period of slightly

drunken musing that provides the material for much of the first part of the story. Among other things, Bea remembers the second time she visited Ladner at Dismal: “‘I expect you’d like a tour,’ Ladner said” (316), before leading her on a strenuous walk along the trails criss-crossing the property. Bea recalls that “[s]he couldn’t keep track of their direction or get any idea of the layout of the property” (317), but it soon becomes evident that the heavy foliage is not the only cause of her confusion. Bea sees live animals moving among “stuffed and lifelike” ones (317): for example, mating swans let out “bitter squawks” beside “a glass-fronted case containing a stuffed golden eagle with its wings spread, a gray owl, and a snow owl” (316), and real birds flit in and out of a group of stuffed birds that are positioned beside signs inscribed with “tight, accurate, complicated information” about their habitats, food preferences, and Latin names (317).

The stuffed animals belong to indigenous species, so Ladner’s carefully crafted taxidermic garden could be construed as a simulacrum of the Ontario countryside in which it is located. The presence of a fridge, detailed signs, and inert, reconstructed animals in a garden that also contains living ones seems to create a dialectical context for thinking about the relations between nature and culture, and between the natural and the simulated. But Ladner’s garden deflects this line of questioning that it seems to invite. In addition to the species identification signs, Ladner has posted quotations in his garden:

Nature does nothing uselessly.  
—Aristotle

Nature never deceives us; it is always we who deceive ourselves.  
—Rousseau (317)

On one hand, the signs direct visitors to see nature in general and this garden in particular as a sanctuary from human pomp and pretense, a haven from deceit. On the other hand, the “stuffed and lifelike” animal bodies encourage visitors to suspend disbelief and thus deceive themselves. But Bea appears not to see this contradiction. Although she remembers the scene in front of her as “complicated,” Bea perceives the taxidermic specimens as frozen in mid-motion—“a wolf stood poised to howl, and a black bear had just managed to lift its big soft head” (317)—suggesting her willingness to partake of the fantasy established by the diorama. Given that the story is also concerned with Bea’s refusal to admit—to others and, perhaps, even to herself—that Ladner was a pedophile, his diorama functions as a symbol of the often

complex relationships between ways of knowing and of not knowing, of preserving disbelief in the face of knowledge too horrible to contemplate.

James Kincaid argues that “what passes for knowledge” about pedophilia “is really ‘knowingness’, a pact that authorizes us to treat our ignorance as wisdom and to make that ignorance the basis for action” (3). To the best of my knowledge, Munro has not explicitly addressed the particular challenges of writing about pedophilia, but her characterization of *Open Secrets* (the collection in which “Vandals” appears), suggests a shared interest in the dynamic that Kincaid calls knowingness: it is, she says, an attempt to “challenge what people want to know. Or expect to know. Or anticipate knowing” (“National Treasure” 227). In “Vandals,” Munro uses the contradictions and violence inherent in the taxidermic garden to “challenge what people want to know” about pedophilia.

In *Child Loving: The Erotic Child and Victorian Culture*, Kincaid emphasizes the extent to which Victorian and, to a lesser extent, contemporary constructions of pedophiles have been used to shore up dominant ideals of the natural. If pedophiles are perverse animals who violate the order of nature, then the “rest of us” can be civilized, socialized, and controlled. Kincaid’s idea of the natural is understandably restricted to the historical dissociation of child and adult, asexuality and sexuality, innocence and experience. Munro also addresses this dissociation, but she does so by using “nature”—in the commonplace sense of the great outdoors—to make us examine the “natural” in the context of human behaviour. Put differently, Munro uses the events that take place in Ladner’s garden to demonstrate the consequences of our failure to scrutinize the “natural.” The “shame in the grass” (341) at Dismal goes undetected or at least unreported, in part because it is disguised by its setting and by the perception of its setting. When, for example, Ladner takes Bea on her first tour of Dismal, Bea, who is wearing high heels and nursing a vague plan to seduce him, thinks, “this tour, so strenuous physically and mentally, might be a joke on her, a punishment for being, after all, such a tiresome vamp and a fraud” (318). Whether or not Ladner intends the tour as a rebuke, Bea believes that the time spent in the bush is designed to be corrective. While Bea’s response to the tour draws on a longstanding discourse about nature as the source of health and purity and as a model for social relations, nature does not—as she later recognizes—work this way at Dismal. Bea notes that the physical exertion of the hike has caused her lust to evaporate. However, Munro subtly suggests that Bea’s sexual energy is not lost at all, but redirected onto the nonhuman

world: “By this time lust was lost to her altogether, though the smell of the hawthorn blossoms seemed to her an intimate one, musty or yeasty” (318). Thus at the same time that Bea figures the nonhuman world as a haven from or curative for human deceit and desire, Munro shows that we experience and represent that nonhuman world—in this case, the hawthorn blossoms—through our own human predilections.

As a taxidermist, Ladner is skilled in the art of deception. But because taxidermy is such a realistic art form it has, as Donna Haraway argues, been traditionally understood to be peculiarly “capable of embodying truth” in the bodies of its lifelike subjects (“Teddy Bear” 254). In a discussion of Carl Akeley’s contribution to the field of taxidermy, Haraway explains the relationship between taxidermy and truth-telling:

Taxidermy became the art most suited to the epistemological and aesthetic stance of realism. The power of this stance is in its magical effects: what is so painfully constructed appears effortlessly, spontaneously found, discovered, simply there if one will look. Realism does not appear to be a point of view, but appears as a ‘peephole into the jungle’ where peace may be witnessed. (“Teddy Bear” 254)

Ladner’s attempt to “tell the truth of nature” (257) with his taxidermic garden is, of course, enhanced by the outdoor setting. And because the garden purports to “tell the truth of nature,” it disguises the violations that take place on its grounds: where the truth is “effortlessly, spontaneously found,” one need not look very hard.

Given Munro’s stated desire in *Open Secrets* to “challenge what people want to know” and “to record how women adapt to protect men” (“A National Treasure” 227), we can assume that “Vandals” is centrally concerned with the question or possibility of what Bea knows. The assumption that Bea does know what goes on in the garden is supported by Liza’s expectation that “Bea could spread safety, if she wanted to” (343). When, for example, Liza finds Bea sitting contentedly under a plum tree drinking wine with Ladner shortly after Liza has witnessed him contemptuously mimicking Bea, she thinks that Bea had “forgiven Ladner, after all, or made a bargain not to remember” (343). It seems that the incident for which Ladner is ostensibly forgiven is his imitation of Bea, but maybe Bea has agreed to forgive and forget a great deal more. Similarly, Bea’s characterization of herself as a “fake” whose voice is memorable for its “artificiality” (337, 336), combined with her suggestion that she has come to terms with “what [Ladner] would say and wouldn’t say” (320), intimates that she may indeed know



more than she is willing or able to say.<sup>2</sup> In “Carried Away,” another story in *Open Secrets*, Bea acknowledges her tendency to edit or selectively “forget” the truth where “it would have made the story less amusing” (29).

Bea’s “knowingness” is encoded in her references to nature (in all the many senses of the word). For example, on the topic of self-deception, Bea thinks, “such was not her nature. Even after years of good behaviour, it was not her nature” (313). In the context of a story in which the nonhuman world is denaturalized and rendered deceptive by a taxidermic diorama, Bea’s repetition of “nature,” combined with the repeated evidence that she might well be given to self-deception, suggests her inclination to use the ostensibly self-evident “natural” to justify her self-deception. In an attempt to characterize Ladner’s brusque and heavily ironic manner of treating her, Bea describes herself as “*slit top to bottom with jokes*” (315). This image aligns Bea with the animals whose skins have been slit; it also indicates Ladner’s capacity for violence. Moreover “slit,” a derogatory term for female genitalia, might also suggest that sex and violence are linked in Bea’s mind.

The connection between Bea’s apparent naivete and her invocation of the natural world is also evident in her metaphorical connection of teenagers and “savage beasts.” In the letter that Bea writes to Liza, she thanks Liza for boarding up the windows of her home, and thus protecting the house from “savage beasts,” which, as a subsequent comment makes clear, means teenagers. The house is in fact raided by people in their late teens or early twenties: Liza and her husband Warren. When Liza returns to Dismal at Bea’s bidding, she does not check the pipes as asked. Instead, she goes on a rampage, breaking furniture and glass, and throwing stuffed animal specimens to the floor. As she prepares to leave, Warren reminds her that they need to smash a hole in a window—“Big enough so a kid could get in” (344)—so that Bea will not know that the vandals were key-holders. After breaking the window, Warren nails a board over the smashed pane, saying, “Otherwise animals could get in” (344). That Bea’s allusion to teenagers as beasts so closely resembles Warren’s comment suggests that she knows what happened at the house, even though the tone and content of the letter do not reveal this. Bea’s comment that the vandalized house “looked natural” and that it “seemed almost the right way for things to be” (306) can be read as her tacit recognition of the violence that has taken place just outside its doors.

William Cronon argues that “the time has come to rethink wilderness,” to rethink our conception of wilderness as an “antidote to our human selves” and “the one place we can turn to escape from our own too-muchness”

(“Trouble” 69). Munro makes a similar argument in “Vandals.” Both authors suggest that our tendency to see the nonhuman world as “an antidote to our human selves” means that we fail to see “our own unexamined longings and desires” reflected there (Cronon, “Trouble” 70). We may also fail to see our deepest fears. Bea’s many references to “nature” seem premised on a belief that the nonhuman world is the site or repository of authenticity and truth. This view inhibits Bea from looking more closely at what went on in the garden. If she had looked more closely, she might have been able to meet Liza’s expectation that she would “spread safety” at Dismal (343).

If pedophilia is an “open secret” in “Vandals,” it is the taxidermic diorama that makes it so. Although Ladner’s garden—like so many taxidermic displays—sets out to celebrate individual communion with nature, what the mute and inert animal bodies demonstrate is the painfully reconstructed nature of the scene. The taxidermic display can be read as a story about the violation and manipulation of bodies, and about man’s domination of nature. In “Vandals,” the taxidermist’s aesthetic arrangement of bodies and his choice of ideal(ized) specimens, frozen in a state of arrested development, hints at a very particular kind of bodily violation.<sup>3</sup> In the second half of the story, Liza remembers what happened while she was swimming in the pond at Dismal. Ladner attempted to grab her between her legs, and she escaped his clutches by clambering through the diorama: “She splashed her way out and heavily climbed the bank. She passed the owls and the eagle staring from behind the glass. The ‘Nature does nothing uselessly’ sign” (338). Liza is unable to articulate the trauma of Ladner’s assault, but her position among the animals is telling. The image of the violated girl child among the dead birds recalls the myth of Philomela, the rape victim turned tongue-tied bird. Because Liza is seen against the backdrop of the diorama but does not appear to look at any of the birds, she does not exercise the transcendence implied by the taxidermic gaze; she is not constituted as a viewer of displayed animal bodies but is implicitly compared to the birds, whose silent and violated bodies are on display.

While Ladner’s diorama tells the story of pedophilia, it is difficult to interpret because the heavily forested landscape at Dismal is, as both Bea and Liza acknowledge, confusing and difficult to read.<sup>4</sup> But readerly difficulty also arises at Dismal because meaning in Ladner’s taxidermic garden is very unstable and changes according to his whim. For instance, Liza recalls the time when she first showed Bea the initials “P.D.P.” carved into a tree:

In the middle of the path was a beech tree you had to go around, and there were initials carved in the smooth bark. One "L" for Ladner, another for Liza, a "K" for Kenny. A foot or so below were the letters "P.D.P." When Liza had first shown Bea the initials, Kenny had banged his fist against P.D.P. "Pull down pants!" he shouted, hopping up and down. Ladner gave him a serious pretend-rap on the head. "Proceed down path," he said, and pointed out the arrow scratched in the bark, curving around the trunk. "Pay no attention to the dirty-minded juveniles," he said to Bea. (338)

Given that the children are sexually abused in the garden, we can assume that Kenny has been led to believe that "P.D.P." sometimes does mean, "Pull down pants." This reading is also suggested by the context in which the phrase "P.D.P." subsequently appears:

Here are the places of serious instruction where Ladner taught them how to tell a hickory tree from a butternut. . . . And places where Liza thinks there is a bruise on the ground, a tickling and shame in the grass.

*P.D.P.*

*Squeegey-boy.*

*Rub-a-dub-dub.* (341)

The message carved into the tree shows Ladner's ability to make meanings shift according to his desires, and his garden demonstrates his desire to control his surroundings. In an essay about Scottish poet Ian Hamilton Finlay's garden, Susan Stewart argues that "[I]n making a garden one composes with living things, intervening in and contextualising, and thus changing, their form. . . . The garden is thereby linked to other means of ordering life: codifying and ritualizing social time and space, creating political orders and social hierarchies" (111). Because Ladner's garden is composed, in part, of dead things, it "orders" life not by ritualizing time, but by freezing it in an image of "taxidermic timelessness" (Simpson 94).<sup>5</sup> And, because Ladner is ultimately powerless to prevent the growth and eventual departure of the children, his taxidermic garden can be understood as an attempt to preserve a fantasy of intra- as well as inter-species control and communion. It should not be surprising, then, that the animals in Ladner's "remarkable sort of nature preserve" (311) are arranged in groups that tell a nostalgic story about man's God-given dominion over nature and about Edenic unity and plenitude. For example, the careful arrangement of a "dainty family of skunks" simulates a congenial community, and, in an image reminiscent of the lion lying down with the lamb, a porcupine is positioned beside a fisher, which, says Ladner, "was intrepid enough to kill porcupines" (317).

There is a long tradition of taxidermists who have attempted to recreate

a Canadian Eden. As George Colpitts demonstrates, taxidermists played an important part in producing images of Edenic natural abundance that were used to attract immigrants between 1890 and 1914. Wildlife specimens were installed in provincial and municipal natural history museums across the country, and they were also sent to international exhibitions in the USA and Europe. For example, the federal superintendent of immigration shipped crates of birds and a large buffalo to various European offices as evidence of “what could be got in Canada” (qtd. in Colpitts 106). And yet, given the fate that befell the Canadian buffalo in the last decades of the nineteenth century, the buffalo was an ironic but not inappropriate choice for a symbol of Canadian wildlife: as Colpitts points out, the taxidermic images of Canadian over-abundance belied the fact that Western Canadians had faced a meat crisis and general food shortages as recently as the mid-1870s.

Colpitts’s argument identifies antecedents for Ladner’s efforts to recreate Eden in spite of the evidence that “should have countered” the formation of that image of Canada (Colpitts 113). But it is Robert Lecker’s reading of another story in *Open Secrets* that is most useful in demonstrating the perversity of Ladner’s nostalgic garden of Dismal. Drawing extensively on Leo Marx’s *Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in American*, Lecker argues that “Carried Away” documents the “postwar, postindustrial fall that is identified with the commodification of all forms of human activity” and with the perceived “loss of nature” (103). Although “Carried Away” is centrally concerned with the postwar loss of a sense of community and an unspoiled rural landscape, the dream of what Leo Marx calls an “undefiled green republic” (qtd. in Lecker 104) still exists in the character of Patrick Agnew, a gardener who spends his free time in the countryside and who fishes for his supper or dines on the fruit of wild apple trees. But some fifty years later,<sup>6</sup> the over-abundance of animals, the happy juxtaposition of enemy species, and the implicit communion between man and animal in the garden of Dismal constitute a perversion of the “vanishing pastoral ideal” represented by Patrick Agnew. In the “green republic” of Dismal, neither the land nor its inhabitants are “undefiled”: children are raped; animals are perceived as commodities that bring “a good price”; and the ground itself is “bruise[d]” and “shame[d]” (341).

Ladner’s idea of Dismal as a prelapsarian and, by implication, pre-industrial landscape is also deeply ironic because the garden itself is full of thinly veiled manufactured things.

Ladner fitted the skin around a body in which nothing was real. A bird's body could be all of one piece, carved of wood, but an animal's larger body was a wonderful construction of wires and burlap and glue and mushed-up paper and clay. (334)

Drawing on Donna Haraway's argument about the enduring dualism that pervades discussions of nature and culture, it might be said that Munro represents the "stuffed and lifelike" animals as cyborgs, "beings that are simultaneously animal and machine who populate worlds ambiguously natural and crafted" (*Simians* 149). Because a "cyborg body is not innocent" and "was not born in a garden" (*Simians* 180), its presence constitutes a reminder of the extent to which nature is imagined as the absence of and antidote to technology. Ladner employs the cyborg-animals to affirm a vision of nature and technology as separate. But Munro ensures that we see how human beings inevitably construct the nonhuman world in their own image: whether or not our construction of our natural environment involves "wires and burlap and glue and mushed-up paper and clay," it is, she suggests, a construction nevertheless.

Presented in the context of a narrative about an altogether different kind of assault on bodily integrity, and added to the image of Ladner scraping animal skulls and skins, Munro's ironically rendered image of the taxidermic specimens as "wonderful constructions" repudiates Ladner's nostalgic rendering of a thoroughly pastoral, prelapsarian Dismal.<sup>7</sup> At the same time, it also repudiates an enduring tendency to see animal bodies as self-evident and utterly literal. Jane Desmond points out the particular symbolic power of animal bodies:

Animals' identities as authentic representatives of the natural are ultimately presumed to reside in their bodies, in their physical difference from humans. Their division from us articulates the Cartesian and Christian mind-body or body-spirit split. Even when these conceptual boundaries are smudged, animals are seen as fundamentally more embodied than humans, that is, as more determined by their bodily aspects. (149)

If, on the one hand, the taxidermic garden encourages this view of animal bodies by presenting animals as "aestheticized bodies" whose "stasis . . . heightens their objectness and allows for [the] leisurely contemplation of discrete bodily details" and the affirmation of bodily difference (Desmond 149-50), Munro's emphasis on scraped skins, "guts that looked like plastic tubing," and eyeballs "squished . . . to jelly" (334) demands a meditation on the processes by which that "objectness" is established and, more importantly, on the ends it serves.

In *Picturing the Beast: Animals, Identity, and Representation*, Steve Baker argues that the animal body needs to be taken out of nature and “rendered unstable as a sign” in order that we might understand what it is that we have invested in the animal and what is occluded in our tendency to rely unthinkingly on animals as a prime symbolic site (223). Munro advances a similar view by emphasizing how Ladner has made the animals in his garden. Animal bodies are also destabilized in “Vandals” through the use of animal imagery to describe the human characters. When, for example, Bea arrives at Dismal and asks Liza and her brother, Kenny, “what kind of animals they’d like to be” (332), she reminds the reader of the extent to which they are ready to become animal victims like those whose “skinned bodies” are manipulated by Ladner (334). The connection between the children’s bodies and the animals’ bodies is reinforced in a number of other passages: Liza “cluck[s]” and makes “croaking noises” (326, 332); she is possessed by a “slithery spirit” (328); and she claims to have been “wild” as a child (329). Given the sexual abuse perpetrated in the garden, Liza’s father’s warning that she “better not cross [Ladner] or he’ll skin you alive. . . . [l]ike he does with his other stuff” (334), further aligns her with the animals. She and Kenny quickly learn “not to talk so much about all [they] knew” (335); they are silent like the animal specimens. But the equation of the violated children with the stuffed animals is complicated by Munro’s description of Ladner in animal images. When Bea first meets Ladner, she mistakenly thinks that he is accompanied by a fierce dog, but later decides that he is “his own fierce dog” (312). As an adult, Liza remembers a time when Ladner raped her and then “collapsed heavily, like the pelt of an animal flung loose from its flesh and bones” (341): as he collected himself, he “clucked his tongue faintly, and his eyes shone out of ambush, hard and round as the animals’ glass eyes” (342). Although Munro repeatedly invites the reader to compare Ladner’s treatment of childish bodies with his treatment of the animals he stuffs, the fact that Ladner is also likened to an animal ultimately prevents easy correlations. Moreover, by comparing Ladner to a taxidermic animal (“glass eyes” and a disconnected “pelt”), perhaps Munro is also pointing to the tendency to figure pedophiles as animals: if Ladner is an animal, he is one that is painstakingly constructed as such by humans.

James Kincaid argues that the steadfast reluctance to talk about childhood sexuality allows pedophilia to flourish.<sup>8</sup> He goes on to suggest that the contemporary disavowal of childhood sexuality is a hangover from the Romantic era, when a wide range of poets, prose writers, and philosophers

constructed the innocent child in nature as an ideal with which to counter the grim reality of the working conditions of child labourers during the Industrial Revolution. Although William Cronon does not address the implications of longstanding ideas about the child in nature, his general discussion of discourses of nature helps to explain how an appeal to “the natural” can deflect critical discussions of childhood sexuality:

The great attraction of nature for those who wish to ground their moral vision in external reality is precisely its capacity to take disputed values and make them seem innate, essential, eternal, nonnegotiable. When we speak of “the natural way of doing things,” we implicitly suggest that there can be no other way, and that all alternatives, being unnatural, should have no claim on our sympathies. (“Introduction” 36)

The essentialism to which Cronon refers helps us understand why “Vandals” is so disturbing: Munro not only brings the pedophile out from the trees and takes nature out of the animal, she also takes the child out of nature. Put differently, Munro’s children, like her animals, are not “innocent” and are “not born in a garden” (Haraway, *Simians* 180).

Munro does not suggest that the children sexually desire Ladner, but she does represent them as sexual beings whose behaviours and motivations are as complex and conditioned as those of adults. For example, Liza gives a rhinestone earring to Bea as an acknowledgement of and apology for Ladner’s cruel imitation of her: when Bea asks if the earring belonged to Liza’s mother—who is dead—Liza lies and says yes, all the while aware that her gift “might be seen as childish and pathetic—perhaps intentionally pathetic” (342). And, in a move that further repudiates the vision of the child as innocent and natural, Munro has Liza—who lives in a house painted “glaring pink, like lipstick,” on a property on which there is “not one tree” (340)—project her own sexual urges onto the natural world. After characterizing Ladner’s abuse as a situation she “couldn’t get out of . . . , or even want to” (339, emphasis added), Liza describes the allure of Ladner’s property:

Then the pine plantation . . . with its high boughs and needled carpet, inducing whispering. And the dark rooms under downswept branches of the cedars—entirely shaded and secret rooms with a bare earth floor. . . . In some places the air is thick and private, and in other places you feel an energetic breeze. (341)

In an ironic rejoinder to the image of the Romantic child at home in nature, Munro has Liza figure the natural realm as a domicile—a place with “rooms,” a “floor,” “carpet,” and culture. Not only does Munro refuse to polarize child and adult, human and animal, nature and culture, but she also shows

us what we risk by doing so. She shows us that the tendency to posit the natural and the cultural as distinctive spheres allows for what Desmond calls “the naturalization of the cultural” (192): it allows the category of the natural to function as a “rudder,” steering us away from destabilizing questions and bringing us back, time and again, “to biology as if it were a neutral, natural, ordinary category” (192). Likewise, Munro shows us that by imagining childhood innocence in opposition to adult sexuality, and by using pedophilia to shore up our ideas of what is natural, we “find ourselves sacrificing the bodies of children” (Kincaid 6).

“**D**o you care if he croaks?” (332). In answer to the question that Warren puts to Liza while she sets about destroying Ladner and Bea’s property, Liza makes “croaking noises to stop him being thoughtful” (332). Moments earlier she makes “a funny noise—an admiring cluck of her tongue” while dumping the contents of desk drawers on the floor (326). After raping Liza, Ladner also “clucked his tongue” (342). The echoing “cluck” is important because it establishes Liza’s violent behaviour as a direct response to Ladner’s abuse of her, while also suggesting her tendency to emulate Ladner and identify with him. As Nathalie Foy argues, Liza “recuperates the good in Ladner” by recalling and taking on his role as instructor (159):

“Can you tell what the trees are by their bark?” she said.

Warren said that he couldn’t even tell from their leaves. “Well, maples,” he said. “Maples and pines.”

“Cedar,” said Liza. “You’ve got to know cedar. There’s a cedar. . . . And that one with the bark like gray skin? That’s a beech. See, it had letters carved on it, but they’ve spread out, they just look like any old blotches now.”

Warren wasn’t interested. He only wanted to get home. It wasn’t much after three o’clock, but you could feel the darkness collecting, rising among the trees, like cold smoke coming off the snow. (344)

At the end of the story, the reader also feels a “darkness collecting,” for the pedophile has been rendered more fearful for his lack of monstrosity, for the very ordinariness of his desire to teach children and his ability to elicit their trust and respect. Although I do not share Nathalie Foy’s sense that the blurred letters in the beech tree, rediscovered in the wake of Liza’s cathartic act of vandalism, indicate that she has succeeded in “dispell[ing]” the darkness that has haunted her (159), I do think that the act of reading the natural world is represented as a means of staving off that darkness. The first meeting between Ladner and the children contains a specific injunction:



The first time that Liza and Kenny had ever been on Ladner's property, they had sneaked in under a fence, as all the signs and their own father had warned them not to do. When they had got so far into the trees that Liza was not sure of the way out, they heard a sharp whistle.

Ladner called them: "You two!" He came out like a murderer on television, with a little axe, from behind a tree. "Can you two read?"

They were about six and seven at this time. Liza said, "Yes."

"So did you read my signs?" (333)

The context suggests that the signs to which Ladner refers are the "No Trespassing," "No Hunting," and "Keep Out" signs that line his property (325), but there are, as I have already indicated, numerous other signs in Dismal. Some of them contain scientific information, but others present quotations:

Nature does nothing uselessly.

—Aristotle

Nature never deceives us; it is always we who deceive ourselves.

—Rousseau

These signs—set off from the text and presented in italics—contain a direct challenge to the reader. Aristotle's dictum, "Nature does nothing uselessly," demands that we reflect critically on the uses—both material and metaphorical—to which nature is put. The Rousseau quotation, displayed in the midst of a "lifelike" simulation of the natural, challenges us to consider how we deceive ourselves by clinging to the idea that the "natural" world is a repository of truth—as indeed both Bea and Ladner do. Bea's references to nature and the natural inhibit her own critical faculties; Ladner uses the nonhuman world to stage his own Edenic dream of timelessness and communion. If, like Bea and Ladner, we fail to heed the challenges implicit in these two signs, presented in a story concerned with the abuse of both the "natural" and the human, then we, too, are mired in—and even complicit in—the darkness collecting at the story's end. But to accept this challenge, and to remember, for example, Heraclitus' dictum that "Nature hides," is to begin to shed light on the ways that we think, or refuse to think, about pedophilia. "So did you read my signs?" asks Munro.<sup>9</sup>

#### NOTES

- 1 In the "Introduction" to *UnCommon Ground*, William Cronon describes the perception of "nature as naïve reality" this way: "It is in fact one of the oldest meanings that the word 'nature' carries in the English language: the sense that when we speak of the nature

- of something, we are describing its fundamental essence, what it really and truly is. Indispensable as the usage may be, it is dangerous for what it tempts us to assume: the very thing it seeks to label is too often obscured beneath the presumption of naturalness" (34).
- 2 Natalie Foy disagrees, arguing that Bea's "ignorance" of the abuse is "complete" (151). However, Foy's otherwise very strong argument is undermined by her own acknowledgement that "[w]e know that Bea is capable of forgetting unpleasant associations" (151) and, more generally, by Munro's determination to preserve and to emphasise a degree of ambiguity. As a further argument for the possibility of Bea's "knowingness," consider the extent to which the following passage invites us to question her motivation for sending Liza to college: "It was her gave me some money,' Liza continued, as if it was something he ought to know, 'To go to college. I never asked her. She just phones up out of the blue and says she wants to'" (322). Also consider Bea's recognition of Ladner's "insanity" and of own very complicated desire for a man capable of offering her an insanity that she could "liv[e] inside" (314).
  - 3 For a discussion of the taxidermist's interest in ideal(ised) animal bodies, see "Teddy Bear Patriarchy," where Haraway discusses Carl Akeley's relentless search for "the unblemished type specimen" (254).
  - 4 See Bea's description of the property on 317, Liza's description of the property on 333, and Liza's description of the attraction that Dismal held for her as a child on 340–41.
  - 5 Simpson's "Immaculate Trophies" does a good job of exploring the contradictions and ironies of the "frozen liveness of wild nature" (92).
  - 6 The central event in "Carried Away" is the factory accident that results in the beheading of Jack Agnew in 1924. At that time Bea, who also makes an appearance in the story, is 13. When Bea sits down to write Liza a letter in the opening paragraph of "Vandals," more than 50 years have passed. No dates are given in "Vandals," but Bea's indication that Ladner was a Vietnam veteran when she first met him, and the fact that reruns of "I Dream of Jeannie" are playing on the television suggest that "Vandals" is set in the early to mid 1980s.
  - 7 See Redekop's argument that Munro frequently constructs the nostalgic as grotesque in order to repudiate it.
  - 8 Also see Levine and Steed.
  - 9 Thanks to Susan Fisher, Susie O'Brien, Pat Saunders-Evans, and Andy Wainwright, who generously read and commented on earlier versions of this paper.

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# Advent

Resist the pace imposed.  
Culture (as with malign intent)

fears the boundless.  
Something (if unleashed)

might overthrow dominions  
and set up a child in the Mercy Seat,

that frowning, burning babe.

“Close, very close,  
a *b’gwus* howls”

The Contingency of Execution in  
Eden Robinson’s *Monkey Beach*

**A**ll too frequently, Aboriginal artists are viewed (by Aboriginals and non-Aboriginals alike) as impersonal explicators of truths about their culture. Eager to see the negative images of the past replaced by ones more representative of Aboriginal life and history, many critics assume that the work of Aboriginal artists must be interpreted according to strict conceptual frameworks. In this context, Claude Lévi-Strauss’s distinction between two types of artists seems pertinent: “the engineer works by means of concepts and the *bricoleur* by means of signs” (19–20). The Aboriginal artist is often perceived as an “engineer” who proceeds with conceptual foreknowledge of the project of cultural expression, and whose artistry lies in the deft deployment of specially designed tools, in this case the certain signs of culture. Both dominant and resistant tropes of aboriginality operate within the engineer model, which serves the editorial function of eliminating elements not consonant with or not “authentic enough” for a tacitly or explicitly conceived project of Aboriginal cultural expression. In his influential discussion of Lévi-Strauss, Jacques Derrida argues that the very notion of the engineer is an impossibility, since such an entity would have to be “the absolute origin of his own discourse,” creating “the totality of his language, syntax, and lexicon” (256). For Derrida, all discourse is *bricolage*, bound by “the necessity of borrowing one’s concepts from the text of a heritage which is more or less coherent or ruined” (255). The desire for an Aboriginal engineer is motivated by a fundamental need for a cultural subject, one either open to cooption or enshrinement as a transcendental truth.

One author whose work has exposed the difficulty of applying the engineer model is Eden Robinson. Robinson’s collection of short stories entitled

*Traplines* (1996) and her first novel *Monkey Beach* (2000) have been widely praised, but they have also elicited problematic responses from critics. After engaging in an avowedly “allegorical” reading of one story in *Traplines* entitled “Contact Sports,” in which ethnically unidentified characters are read as enacting “the narrative of colonization, past and present” (159), Helen Hoy questions the engineering model of analysis which has permitted such a culturally normative reading: “Rather than redeploing given notions of Native history and culture in my analysis, I might more profitably read *Traplines* as a site of contestation of such notions, as enacting (in dynamic ways) and not merely (re)articulating Nativeness” (181). Similarly, yet without Hoy’s questioning of the contested notions that inform “Nativeness,” Jennifer Andrews argues that in *Monkey Beach*, “evil is primarily associated with Eurocentric interventions in the Haisla community rather than [with] individual Native characters” (12). Andrews’ view that the Eurocentric interventions destabilize a coherent, cohesive Haisla community—and thus cause evil—presupposes that the novel presents a stable Haisla worldview to be contaminated. Both Hoy’s and Andrews’ discussions of Robinson’s work reveal the vexed project of evaluating Aboriginal writing both as the product of normative cultural engineering (in Lévi-Strauss’ sense), and as the product of the unstable cultural *bricolage* that marks contemporary Aboriginal life. Clearly, the “myth” of the cultural engineer, who uses structures and tools for a deliberately conceived end, can shape how aboriginality is understood.

If we return to Lévi-Strauss’ distinction between the engineer and the *bricoleur*, it becomes clear that contemporary Aboriginal artists are caught between these two views of culture—culture-as-concept (or culture-as-certainty), and culture-as-signs (or culture-as-contingency). Lévi-Strauss describes the circumstances of traditional tribal expression as a three-fold contingency involving occasion, execution, and function: occasion is both exterior and prior to the creative act, and inspires the artist in his or her fashioning of the materials at hand; execution involves the limitations of the material; and function involves an awareness of how the work will be utilized, whether as ornament, tool, or sacred object. The most crucial type of contingency with respect to *Monkey Beach* is the second—the contingency of execution—for the limitations of the medium or cultural materials, and the resistance they offer to the author fuel the creative tension in the novel and expose the fallacy of the Aboriginal artist as engineer. Studying Aboriginal artistic expression requires considering how Aboriginal artists

recombine idiosyncratic and contingent elements of Aboriginal culture: *bricolage* as artistic practice. Eden Robinson does not simply “show us” Aboriginal culture-as-concept; she presents highly personal dialogues with Haisla/Heiltsuk culture that are often filled with elision, tactical irony, and unanswered questions.<sup>1</sup> *Monkey Beach* ends with an opaque passage which illustrates just this sort of elision:

I lie on the sand. The clamshells are hard against my back. I am no longer cold. I am so light I could just drift away. Close, very close, a *b'gwus* howls—not quite human, not quite wolf, but something in between. The howl echoes off the mountains. In the distance, I hear the sound of a speedboat. (374)

This final passage neatly illustrates the central problem posed by the novel as a whole: how to reconcile the ambiguity in the text with what many critics assume to be the project of Aboriginal writers, namely, the articulation of a cohesive and non-Othering indigenous subject position. Clearly, this passage can be read as a conclusive coda to a novel about a young Haisla woman's struggle to find her place in the world. In this vein, the narrator Lisamarie Hill, after undergoing trials as a troubled teen and a Haisla woman, survives a near drowning and encounters the spirits of her family, and succeeds in “finding strength in the past and a way to cope with the challenges of the present” (Andrews 20). All Lisamarie (and the reader, one presumes) has to do is lie still and wait for the speedboat.

While I do find this redemptive reading attractive, my experience reading and teaching the novel suggests other, less comforting possibilities. My undergraduate students (often uncomfortable with anti-positivist open endings) complain that this ending frustrates any tidy resolution of the central narrative and seriously compromises any strictly rite-of-passage interpretation. “Is Lisamarie dead?” they ask. “What's going on?” (Close, very close, my students howl.) Eden Robinson has admitted that the novel's open ending has perplexed even her own family, who think that she should have supplied some degree of resolution to Lisamarie Hill's story. However, she refuses to clarify Lisamarie's fate (Robinson “Reading”). While I hesitate to claim that I can “solve” the mystery of the novel's ending to anyone's satisfaction, I have chosen to pursue one ambiguous element in this final passage—the *b'gwus* or Sasquatch whose howl is “not quite human, not quite wolf, but something in between”—to argue for a critical reading that emphasizes the novel's strategic ambiguity and cultural *bricolage*. Robinson's novel exploits the ambiguity of this *b'gwus* figure to unify the novel around the theme of judgement and retribution, and to foreground

the fundamental anxiety over the inscription of Haisla cultural values within the text.

The *b'gwus* or Sasquatch is both a ubiquitous presence in West Coast First Nations mythology and a co-opted sign in settler culture. As Robinson states in a section of the novel entitled "In Search of the Elusive Sasquatch," "His image is even used to sell beer, and he is portrayed as a laid-back kind of guy, lounging on mountaintops in patio chairs, cracking open a frosty one" (317). Thus, Robinson allows the reader to see the *b'gwus* as another example of popular culture, to be catalogued with the myriad other examples in the novel, such as *Dynasty*, *Elvis*, *Air Supply*, and supermarket tabloids. Yet, the *b'gwus* as it is employed in the novel is also associated with Haisla cultural values, spiritual power, and real terror.

When Lisamarie's brother Jimmy is young, he becomes obsessed with the *b'gwus* figure. Excited by the stories told to him by his father, Jimmy is determined to capture the *b'gwus* on film in order to earn the thirty-thousand-dollar reward offered by the tabloid *World Weekly Globe*. Jimmy successfully begs his father and mother to take a family trip to Monkey Beach, a reputed *b'gwus* hangout. Lisamarie, disgusted by her brother's gullibility, nevertheless tags along, the designated babysitter for her baby brother. One morning on the beach, Lisamarie awakes to find the beach deserted. Hearing Jimmy's elated yell—"I found him! I found him!" (15)—she crashes into the woods in angry pursuit:

Suddenly, every hair on my body prickled. The trees were thick, and beneath them everything was hushed . . . I could hear myself breathing. I could feel someone watching me. "Jimmy?" . . . I turned very slowly. No one was behind me. I turned back and saw him. Just for a moment, just a glimpse of a tall man, covered in brown fur. He gave me a wide, friendly smile, but he had too many teeth and they were all pointed. He backed into the shadows, then stepped behind a cedar tree and vanished. I couldn't move. Then I heard myself screaming, and I stood there, not moving. Jimmy came running with his camera ready. He broke through the bushes and started snapping pictures wildly, first of me screaming and then of the woods around us. (15–16)

This encounter could be read simply as one of Lisamarie's many encounters with the uncanny in the novel, but it is, in fact, a defining moment in the development of Lisamarie's character.

Although the Haisla word *b'gwus* means literally "wild man of the woods," and is associated in Robinson's novel with hairy male hominids, the word has a complex etymology that includes creatures other than the one typically associated with Sasquatch. The anthropologist Marjorie



Halpin has convincingly argued that the term *b'gwus*, common to the Nisga'a, Gitksan, Tsimshian, Kwakw'ala, and Haisla languages, has evolved from an older root word *pa'gwus* or *pi'kis*, defined by anthropologists in at least four different ways: "monkey," "monkey woman," "wealth woman," and "land otter woman" (212–20).<sup>2</sup> While the first meaning of the word has become dominant, the last two glosses are particularly important in relation to Robinson's novel. "Wealth woman" is a figure common to both Tsimshian and Gitksan peoples, a human-like creature that carries a crying child on her back. When virtuous men (almost always men) hear the cry of the child in the woods, they are compelled to follow the cry deep into the trees. The anthropologist George Emmons recorded a Gitksan version of the typical "wealth woman" encounter in 1915:

Only one without fault could see this miraculous creature, and when the voice [of the child] called, [the human] was obliged to follow. . . . [The human] must then take the child, which immediately appeared to be human. The mother pleaded for her infant and it was returned to her, whereupon she agreed to grant any wish asked. (365–66)

"Wealth woman" can only be met by those who do not expect or want to encounter her. Yet, while *pa'gwus* or *pi'kis* is frequently a beneficent figure in individual encounters, several stories from Tsimshian and Gitksan informants cast her as an avenging figure, a scourge who destroys entire villages where "proper marriages are not taking place" (Halpin 215). In some of these stories, "wealth woman" is associated or conflated with the land otter, hence the gloss "land otter woman." In these tales, "land otter woman" leaves her crying child afloat in the ocean, and sea otter hunters are lured, as if by sirens, to rescue it, resulting in their death by drowning. The "land otter woman" could also drive people insane, especially those who hear her child's cry and become possessed by the land otter spirit. In contrast to "wealth woman," who is associated with both the purity of the individual witness—and the potential of reward for this purity—and the punishment of communities for violations of sexual taboos, "land otter woman" is clearly a figure of individual punishment. She is typically seen by those who are deemed "sinful" or "guilty." Thus, the *b'gwus*, who is now typically associated with the "wild man of the woods," has older and more complex associations with purity, sin, wealth, death, and insanity.<sup>3</sup>

Robinson's *Monkey Beach* incorporates these traditional resonances, especially the inherent tension between "wealth woman" as judge or scourge, and "land otter woman" as a symbol of spirit possession. When Jimmy

hears Lisamarie's terrified scream at seeing the "tall man, covered in brown fur," he "[breaks] through the bushes and start[s] snapping pictures wildly, first of [Lisamarie] screaming and then of the woods around [them]." This detail is perhaps incidental, underlining either Jimmy's foolishness or (from a traditional Haisla perspective) his unworthiness for a *b'gwus* encounter because he desires it so much. Yet, what if Jimmy *did* capture the *b'gwus* on film? What if Lisamarie is the *b'gwus* he has been so desperate to find?

Although Andrews argues for a conceptual linkage between Lisamarie and the traditional figure of T'sonoqua in the novel, a "basket ogress" figure for whom "human flesh is the ultimate delicacy" (Andrews 18; Robinson 337), the consistent connection between Lisamarie and the *b'gwus* is difficult to ignore. While hardly a hairy hominid with too many pointed teeth, Lisamarie is described in the novel in ways which link her to the "wild man of the woods." Uncle Mick calls her "Monster," and one of her first acts of schoolyard self-assertion when tormented by Frank is to sink her teeth deeply into Frank's "butt" (65). "You are an evil little monster," accuses Frank's mother at the hospital, while Uncle Mick enthuses that Lisamarie is "my favourite monster in the whole wide world" (67). But the *b'gwus* motif does more than simply "explain" Lisamarie's "monstrous" nature: it introduces into the contemporary Haisla context traditional concepts of crime and retribution.

The etymology of *b'gwus* reveals its connection to "wealth woman," with her double liminal roles of benefactor and judge, policing the boundaries of both purity and the *proprie*. Robinson demonstrates her familiarity with this aspect of the *b'gwus* by including in the novel a story of adultery, attempted murder, and the *b'gwus* as supernatural agent of retribution. Lisamarie is told a story by her grandmother Ma-ma-oo about "a beautiful woman who was having an affair with her husband's brother." After clubbing her husband and leaving him for dead, the beautiful woman and her brother-in-law return to bury the body. Instead of the body, they find "large footprints in the sand." The supposedly dead husband has transformed into a *b'gwus*, and he kills both his brother and his adulterous wife (211). The Haisla have a tradition of tales involving the violation of marriage taboos by both human and supernatural agents (Olson 185–188), but Ma-ma-oo's story also foreshadows an adulterous affair much more central to the life of Lisamarie. When Lisamarie, her mother, and Uncle Mick (her brother-in-law) take a trip to Kitlope, Lisamarie wanders off to explore a deserted village. Lisamarie, upon her return to the camp's cabin, observes an unsettling

scene: “[My mother] was frying corned beef. Mick was sneaking up on her, and I stepped back onto the porch so I wouldn’t ruin the surprise. He came up behind her, encircled her waist with his arms and gave her a gentle kiss on the neck. She pulled his arms off, slowly, then pushed him away, eyes downcast.” After witnessing this intimate scene, Lisamarie “felt like [she] was going to throw up” (122). Interestingly, this episode is never mentioned again in the novel. But its import is clear: Lisamarie’s family is hiding a secret, one of many just below the surface of the narrative.

In fact, the novel contains a series of interlocking crimes, which, if revealed, necessitate some sort of moral judgement or retribution. Lisamarie’s family is torn by the mysterious decision of her grandmother Ma-ma-oo to send her children Trudy and Mick away to residential school rather than deal directly with her abusive husband Ba-ba-oo. Late in the novel, we find that Mick’s dead wife Cookie was killed by FBI agents, who were never formally charged with her murder. Lisamarie is raped by her friend Cheese; he is never punished for his actions. Her friend Pooch commits suicide for mysterious reasons that may or may not stem from sexual abuse at the hands of his mother’s boyfriend “Uncle Josh.” The revelation of Karaoke’s sexual abuse precipitates the avenging murder of Josh by Lisamarie’s brother Jimmy, who also perishes. The novel could be read as a mystery story, in that the narrator/detective Lisamarie gradually discovers skeleton after skeleton in her family closet. Her growing awareness of family dysfunction spurs her to discover the final secret in the novel: the fate of her brother Jimmy.

But Lisamarie is a highly problematic detective and an imperfect moral arbiter. She is consistently characterized as a naïve observer of her family. “God, you can be so dense,” complains her cousin Tab, who accuses Lisamarie of not paying attention (59). She is on the periphery of the relationship between Jimmy and Karaoke, and is surprised to learn of their attraction, let alone of Jimmy’s decision to avenge Karaoke’s abuse. In an earlier text, “Queen of the North,” upon which *Monkey Beach* is based, Karaoke is the narrator, and the reader is made privy to the exact nature of Josh’s abuse from the outset. When asked why she shifted the narrative point-of-view from the character of Karaoke to the character of Lisamarie in her novel, Robinson explained that she wanted to focus the narrative around a character more removed from the central relationship of Jimmy and Karaoke, in order to capitalize upon the ambiguity such a character’s narration would lend to the unfolding of the story (Robinson “Reading”).

Not only is Lisamarie naïve about family relationships; she is also

ignorant of Haisla traditions and knowledge that might serve to orient both her and the reader within the cultural world of the novel:

Six crows sit in our greengage tree. Half-awake, I hear them speak to me in Haisla. *La'es*, they say, *La'es*, *la'es*. I push myself out of bed and go to the open window, but they launch themselves upward, cawing. Morning light slants over the mountains behind the reserve. A breeze coming down the channel makes my curtains flap limply. Ripples sparkle in the shallows as a seal bobs its dark head. *La'es*—go down to the bottom of the ocean. The word means something else, but I can't remember what. (1)

Lisamarie acknowledges that the word *La'es* means “something else” which she has forgotten, an admission all the more troubling because cultural loss is remembered and confessed.<sup>4</sup> Thus, from the first page, Lisamarie calls into question her own reliability as a “Native informant.” Clearly, Lisamarie is less an engineer than a *bricoleur*, and her journey throughout the novel involves not only the search for truth, but also the investigation of her Haisla heritage to determine to what extent its text is either “coherent or ruined.”<sup>5</sup>

By constructing a narrative point of view which continually manifests its own limitations, Robinson foregrounds the process of trying to understand relations, both causal and cultural. Lisamarie's “gift,” the ability to contact spirits, makes this process especially complex. Her mother, who has suppressed her own occult powers, pronounces her daughter's gift to be “clearly a sign . . . that you need Prozac” (3). Even Ma-ma-oo, Lisamarie's mentor, gives her little concrete guidance. While Ma-ma-oo tells Lisamarie that her visitations from the little red-haired tree spirit might mean “you're going to make canoes,” Ma-ma-oo rejects this hypothesis, advising her granddaughter that “old ways don't matter much now. Just hold you back” (152–3).

If viewed in relation to Lisamarie's desire for self knowledge, her connection to the *b'gwus* is vital and complex. The traditional *b'gwus* narrative, with its connections to “wealth woman” and “land otter woman,” offers Robinson the opportunity to interpolate a traditional Haisla narrative of reward, crime and retribution into the contemporary story of a young Haisla woman's coming-of-age. Yet, if Lisamarie's encounter with the *b'gwus* is meant to imbue her role with traditional Haisla significance, what is it? Since the *b'gwus* can bestow great wealth, act as scourge of the sexually deviant, or drive the witness mad, it isn't at all clear which (if any) meaning is predominant.

For example, is Lisamarie truly a scourge, a judge who metes out just punishment to those who transgress cultural taboos? Many characters in the novel manifest some form of guilt for past actions, but they also appear

to be caught between a desire for judgement and fear of it. One can, like Jimmy and Lisamarie, desire to pass judgment upon those who have committed crimes. But at the same time, one can fear that judgement (cosmic or otherwise) will be passed on oneself, the punishment creating the sense of guilty responsibility that may or may not be warranted by human ethical standards. This ambiguity is nicely illustrated by Ma-ma-oo's story of the death of her sister Eunice (or Mimayus), who fell in love with a boy from Bella Bella (a neighboring tribe, the Heiltsuk). One night, Mimayus traveled by boat to visit her boyfriend, but was caught in a deadly storm. One woman in the lead boat who survived claimed that she saw "a funnel descending from the clouds like a black finger. The sound, [she] said, was like a thousand people screaming" (162). By anthropomorphizing the storm as a crowd seemingly bent on destroying Mimayus, Robinson makes plain the disjunction between the traditional Haisla worldview and the contemporary one. Mimayus's fate-as-punishment precipitates a retroactive search for a crime, such as falling in love with someone "not of her people": an unlikely conclusion given the novel's thoroughly pluralist contemporary context.<sup>6</sup> The novel is rife with the anxiety born of not being able to reconcile traditional ways with the complexity of modern Haisla life, and the fear of judgement that this failure precipitates. Aunt Edith relates a near drowning episode she experienced with Uncle Mick and Lisamarie's mother, when a rogue wave capsized a punt they were towing:

Mom said that during those few seconds that she was thinking they were goners, she saw porpoises playing around the punt and knew they were going to be all right. But for a moment, she said, the porpoises looked like people, and she screamed. (123)

Halpin argues that the West Coast First Nations' anxiety over the transgression of necessary boundaries between animals and human beings reveals the primal fear of effacing the boundaries between self and Other, leading to possession and loss of self. The *b'gwus*, not quite human, not quite animal, is a stark archetype of this transgression:

When [*b'gwus*] animals imitate humans, they transgress the boundary onto the human side. . . . Persons who have already diminished their humanity or not yet achieved it—children, the drowning, men and woman who break sexual taboos—are subject to the dangerous contagion of their resemblance to animals. Similarities between humans and animals create openings in the separation between their realms through which the superior powers of the non-human can erupt into the precariously structured human order and overwhelm those who have released them. (221–2)

The complexities of the relations between humans and other animals form part of the larger ethical landscape of the novel. Significantly, Robinson places the passage describing the porpoises directly after Lisamarie's observation of her mother and Uncle Mick's transgressive intimacy in the cabin. The conjunction of "the violation of marriage taboos" and Lisamarie's mother's terror at mistaking porpoises for humans illustrates the consistent collision, throughout the novel, of contemporary Haisla characters with traditional Haisla beliefs. In this context, Uncle Mick's grisly death—he is eaten by seals—can be seen as cosmic punishment for the "crime" of loving his sister-in-law, as the "beautiful woman who was having an affair with her husband's brother" is pronounced guilty through her finding "large footprints in the sand" (211).<sup>7</sup>

Although the narrative invites a reading that foregrounds a traditional Haisla ethical system, it does not offer a simplistic interpretation of this system. Lisamarie, the "monster" who has been chosen by the *b'gwus*, seems incapable of understanding the significance of being chosen. Left without a clear ethical or ontological framework, she vacillates between rejection of her gift as "crazy" and headlong exploitation of it, in particular her blood sacrifice to the spirits of the woods, who promise her that "they can hurt him for you" (261). The "him," we assume, is her rapist Cheese, but so many others in the novel might also deserve some "hurt."

The ethical terrain of *b'gwus*, *pa'gwus*, "wealth woman," and "land otter woman" requires innocence, guilt, purity and impurity to be clearly and divinely recognized. When one hears the baby's cry and follows it deeper into the trees, one meets the fate one deserves. But in the contemporary world of murky social values and personal motivations, can such a fate truly be assigned? Lisamarie's role as *b'gwus* is clearly vexed. Her powerful desire to judge those who have wronged both her and her family is countered by the equally powerful fear that such judgements are impossible. She fears, moreover, that adopting this ethical system will mean that she has to judge herself in the same harsh light: Lisamarie struggles with her own responsibility for her misfortunes, especially her rape by Cheese at the drunken house party.

In this way, the *b'gwus* subtext in *Monkey Beach* highlights the desire for and fear of judgement and retribution. Lisamarie's connection to the *b'gwus* indicates her role as (failed) judge (a connection necessarily predicated upon her "purity as a witness"), but it also suggests that Lisamarie's struggle to maintain her sanity is ultimately doomed, because of her inability to resist the "contagion" the *b'gwus* represents. As indicated, *b'gwus* is also connected

to the “land otter woman,” who leaves her crying child afloat in the ocean in order to lure sinful men to their deaths. A passage late in the novel indicates Robinson’s familiarity with this figure. When Lisamarie attempts an “intervention” with her brother Jimmy and takes him to Monkey Beach, she again wakes up alone on the shore. “Something in the water was drifting out with the tide. . . . For a moment, it looked like a baby in a christening outfit. But when I was a few feet from it, it was just a bucket” (356). Jimmy returns to the beach to find his sister “waist deep in the ocean” (356), and he pulls her out just as “something caught [her] ankle . . . and pulled [her] under” (357). This unexplained occurrence indicates that despite Lisamarie’s “gift,” she, too, can fall victim to the spirits of the environment who judge and punish sinners.

Given the strategic ambiguity Robinson maintains throughout the novel whenever traditional Haisla belief is employed, the ending of the novel is apt. Lisamarie is intimately connected with the *b’gwus* she hears at the end of the novel. “Close, very close, a *b’gwus* howls” (374). On one end of the interpretive spectrum, she is hearing herself “howl,” accepting (yet not explicating for herself or the reader) her role in the ethical universe she flounders within. On the other end, she is hearing a howl from a creature who promises ethical certainty, the ability to judge, reward, or punish according to the individual’s true character. Perhaps only through this ethical litmus test—her encounter with the *b’gwus*—can Lisamarie hope to know her own moral quality. However, the most common English translation of *b’gwus* is, according to Dunn, “any animal that can imitate human behaviour with great alacrity and deftness” (Dunn, qtd. in Halpin, 214). By employing a figure from the Haisla tradition whose power resides in its ability to mimic humans, Robinson heightens the sense that the characters are constantly confronted with (and seduced by) distorted reflections of their own desires and fears, their “contagions,” as Halpin terms the threat of becoming an animal. In a larger sense, by problematizing Haisla traditions, or at least making their thoroughgoing application problematic, Robinson demonstrates both the risks of, and the necessity for, cultural *bricolage*.

In describing traditional tribal expression, Lévi-Strauss uses the example of a wood sculptor to illustrate how the contingent affects the execution of the work in “the size or shape of the piece of wood the sculptor lays hands on, in the direction and quality of its grain, in the imperfection of his tools, in the resistance which his materials or project offer to the work in the course of its accomplishment, in the unforeseen incidents arising during

work” (27). This “resistance” is consistently signalled throughout *Monkey Beach* as Lisamarie ultimately fails to incorporate her limited knowledge of Haisla cultural traditions into a coherent program of living. Robinson demonstrates, and exploits, to poignant effect on the level of plot and character development, the desire and fear the contemporary Aboriginal subject experiences as she confronts what she cannot (but feels she must) know. Thus, Lisamarie’s ultimate failure to “really” discover the fate of her brother Jimmy on Monkey Beach is also the failure to engineer Haisla culture, to discover its certainty amidst the confusing signs that forestall such a discovery.

Like such other Aboriginal writers as Sherman Alexie, Daniel David Moses, and Thomas King, Robinson organizes her narrative around the search by characters for authentic Aboriginality. Rather than investing traditional cultural information with immanence—what Tiffany Ana Lopez calls in another context “the skeleton key for the cultural insider” (21)—Robinson recognizes with these authors that a hermetic, authentic Aboriginal subjecthood is unattainable. By interpolating traditional materials in a contemporary narrative and by refusing to signal the primacy of either, Robinson succeeds in foregrounding Lévi-Strauss’ contingency of execution and the resistance these traditional materials manifest. When this resistance is ignored or mediated by readers, the fundamental suspension of certainty in the text is elided, to misleading effect.

Early on in the novel, the narrator instructs the reader to find a map of British Columbia. Our attention is drawn to the factors that make an accurate map difficult, if not impossible to render: kermode bears which are called black but are really white; territorial disputes between the Tsimshian and Haisla nations; the misnaming of Kitamaat by Hudson’s Bay traders, and the co-option of the name Kitimat by Alcan Aluminum workers (4–5). This commentary on maps demonstrates how, as Guillermo Verdecchia puts it, “maps have been of no use because I always forget that they are metaphors and not the territory” (20). Just as the map teases us to conflate the two-dimensional representation with the terrain it covers, Robinson’s text tempts us to believe that it “explains” Haisla culture, locating First Nations experience and thus making it knowable. Andrews sees this passage as a detailed and “substantial description” of Kitamaat, which stands in stark contrast to the mystery of Jimmy’s disappearance (10–11). I would argue that the contrast is false: like Jimmy’s fate, the map is fraught with ambiguity; it reflects Lisamarie’s desire to “map” her world and thereby stave off the recognition that such an act, as an assertion of mastery, is always misleading.



The *b'gwus* motif in the novel helps to symbolize the desire for and/or fear of judgement in the ethical universe of the narrative, and to articulate the moral underpinnings of traditional Haisla encounters with the unknown. But it also calls into question the narrator's role in this ethical universe. Anthropologist Victor Turner sees the function of monsters in traditional cultures as twofold: "In a sense, [monsters] have the pedagogical function of stimulating [people's] powers of analysis and revealing to them the building-blocks from which their hitherto taken-for-granted world has been constructed. But in another way they reveal the freedom, the indeterminacy underlying all culturally constructed worlds" (69). While the Haisla beliefs deployed in the text can be seen as helping to articulate a non-Othering indigenous subject position, they also can be seen as problematizing any attempt to understand the novel as an exercise in atavistic "neo-traditionalism." While the *b'gwus* has clear resonance as Lisamarie's cultural and narrative Doppelgänger, it may also reflect the "indeterminacy underlying all culturally constructed worlds," as Turner posits.

As with concepts of "authentic" Aboriginal culture, circumscribed by both fear and desire in dominant discourse, the *b'gwus* invites and ultimately resists imaginative reconstruction. In an extended passage describing the *b'gwus*' own "clans, stories, and wars," Robinson includes details that clearly echo the dominant discourse's construction of North American Aboriginal peoples:

There are rumours that [the *b'gwus*] killed themselves off, fighting over some unfathomable cause. Other reports say they starved to death near the turn of the century, after a decade of horrific winters. A variation of this rumour says that they were infected with TB and smallpox . . . They are no longer sighted, no longer make dashes into villages to carry off women and children, because they avoid disease-ridden humans. (318)

By linking the rumours of the demise of *b'gwus* to the trauma of post-contact Aboriginal histories, Robinson sets up a curious analogy. Are we to see contemporary interest in "authentic" Aboriginal subjectivity and identity as being akin to the interest "Bigfoot hunters" have in tracking the elusive *b'gwus*, tantalized by oversized footprints and anomalous forest spoor? In an early poem entitled "Oratorio for Sasquatch, Man, and Two Androids," Margaret Atwood uses the Sasquatch figure in a similar fashion, as a symbol of the unknowable and as the ultimate Other that is the locus for fear and desire: "I expected always to see it, / the beast no-one acknowledges, / the final mask: the animal / who is a man covered in fur. / It tracks me, it walks

/ at night over the lawn, / in through the neo- / colonial door, over the walls of my room" (14–15). By linking Sasquatch with "neo-colonial" fear and desire, Atwood evocatively refigures post-contact settler engagement with indigenous cultures as a search for (or escape from?) "the final mask." Of course, this shift is not the same as viewing indigenous peoples as "animals." Rather, Atwood suggests that neo-colonialism, with its necessary binary of civilized/savage, is the "door" through which all Others are invited to enter. Thus, Robinson's allusive evocation of Aboriginal history within the rumoured history of the *b'gwus* indicates how the projection of human fears and desires on near-humans replicates the neo-colonial projection of similar fears and desires on Aboriginal peoples. Lisamarie's statement "I felt deeply comforted knowing that magical things were still living in the world" (315–16) articulates a particular kind of self-reflexive ideological irony, since as an "authentic" Haisla woman with spiritual power, she is neo-colonialism's "magical thing."

While Lévi-Strauss distinguishes between the engineer and the *bricoleur*, and Derrida exposes the former as an ontological fiction, Robinson's novel explores the conscious tension between these two models of cultural construction. She narrates the struggle of a cultural *bricoleur* to understand the signs of her traditional culture and thus make conceptual sense of these signs. As *bricoleur*, Lisamarie embraces her Haisla culture as being sign-driven and therefore contingent, but as engineer, she also recognizes her implicit failure to understand her culture conceptually (for both herself and the reader). Robinson's use of the *b'gwus* figure, "the final mask," lures one to interpret the novel "traditionally" but also forces one to acknowledge the uncertainty such an interpretation uncovers. As Lisamarie laments, "I wish the dead would just come out and say what they mean instead of being so passive-aggressive about the whole thing" (17). Robinson's strategic ambiguity allows her to explore aspects of traditional Haisla life without obscuring the ideological drive to engineer culture.

*Monkey Beach* makes apparent how traditional cultural signs can serve either to orient the Aboriginal subject as engineer of culture, or confirm her alienation as failed *bricoleur*. In her discussion of Lisamarie's personal connection to the Haisla figure T'sonoqua, the basket ogress who tricks and eats unsuspecting humans, Andrews suggests how "Lisamarie's recognition of herself in monstrous terms is a crucial breakthrough for the girl precisely because it links her to her Haisla culture and gives value to her talents in a context that fuses contemporary concerns with long-standing tribal

narratives.” (18). Yet the *b'gwus*—with its connections to neo-colonial co-option, threatened or manifest judgement, contagion, rumour, and mimicry—is a deeply ambivalent figure in the novel, and helps to signify Lisamarie’s abject status as an outsider. This abjection is not simply the result of non-Aboriginal intervention into a cohesive, coherent Haisla community as Andrews might argue. Michael E. Harkin has glossed the Heiltsuk word *pk'ws* (the homologue of *pi'kis* and *pa'gwus*) as “orphan,” “uninitiated,” and “a Sasquatch, that was thought to live in the bush, devoid of culture” (9). He goes on to say that *pk'ws*, when applied to individuals in a traditional Heiltsuk community, signified that “they were excluded from Heiltsuk symbolic life almost completely and so constituted a class of virtual nonpersons” (10). The relation between the Aboriginal subject and the traditional symbolic life of her community is plainly threatened when the Sasquatch interposes. Lisamarie’s connection to the *b'gwus* is less an orientation toward than a profound alienation from what is perceived (rightly or wrongly) to be the truly “authentic” and conceptually coherent Haisla culture. In important ways, the *b'gwus* figure in *Monkey Beach* allows Robinson to embed Haisla cultural material in a contemporary context that resists normative images of Aboriginality. Once exposed, the complex deployment of Haisla traditional spiritual motifs in the novel promises solutions to the mysteries in/of the text, but reveals these solutions to be fundamentally contingent. In this sense, the howl of the *b'gwus*, “close, very close,” calls to us as seductively (and as problematically) as it does to Lisamarie Hill.

#### NOTES

- 1 I have discussed tactical elision in Aboriginal performance in *Siting the Other: Re-visions of Marginality in Australian and English-Canadian Drama* (2001): 233–246.
- 2 See also Ridington, Sprague, and Suttles in Halpin and Ames.
- 3 While a discussion of the effect of the gender shift from female *p'gwis* to male *b'gwus* is beyond the scope of this paper, I am intrigued by the issue in relation to the discussion at hand. For example, Lisamarie’s own struggle to understand her gendered role in her family and in her community is central to the narrative, and the ambiguous gender of the *b'gwus* figure serves to echo this individual struggle.
- 4 Emmon Bach, author of the *Haisla-English and English-Haisla Dictionary* (in progress), points out that “there have been several spelling systems in use in Kitamaat Village,” rendering Lisamarie’s definition of “*La-es*” even more ambiguous. Bach provides two homologues for “*La-es*”: “*Lah'is*” (to set (sun); sunset; to go on the beach; to go on a wide expanse; to go to the bottom of the ocean), and “*La'aiz*” (go to the bottom of the ocean) (Personal correspondence). The denotative significance of sunset and the beach is

intriguing, since the novel ends with Lisamarie on Monkey Beach at sunset. But the word “La-es” also suggests a potential further linguistic irony. Ma-ma-oo tells Lisamarie that “everything in the land of the dead is backwards” (140). Thus, “la-es” could also be the English word “seal,” which “bobs its dark head” both in this introductory passage and in the final passage of the novel (374).

- 5 In an interview with Paulo DaCosta, Robinson reveals that she herself is a far from fluent Haisla speaker: “[When writing the novel] I . . . learned more Haisla words than I could handle. I was so entranced in learning Haisla it was actually getting in the way of writing the story” (“Interview”). Lisamarie’s struggle to learn her traditional language reflects the author’s own learning process, and reinforces the idea that the novel is not meant to be read as a product of cultural fluency.
- 6 I have called this conclusion unlikely for two reasons: anthropological work on both the Haisla and the Heiltsuk stresses the longstanding acceptance and even encouragement of intermarriage between the neighbouring peoples (Harkin 8; Olson 185); and, more pertinently, Robinson herself is the product of such a union, her father being Heiltsuk and her mother Haisla.
- 7 In a delightful ironic touch, Robinson has Lisamarie’s father, the implied cuckold, wear a Sasquatch mask and chase his children to scare them (9).

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## Darkness and Light

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**Gil Adamson**

*Ashland*. ECW Press \$16.95

**Noah Leznoff**

*Outside Magic*. Insomniac P \$11.95

**Tim Bowling**

*The Witness Ghost*. Nightwood Editions \$15.95

Reviewed by Zach Wells

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In *Ashland*, Gil Adamson creates a visually arresting oneiric dystopia with precise diction, craft whose greatest strength is unassuming subtlety (though she drops in the odd flashy, memorable line: “the canary has finished going mad,/and stands panting in its own damp mess”) and a knack for the stark image. The book reminds me of Ondaatje’s *Billy The Kid*, albeit a feminist revision thereof. But unlike Ondaatje’s book, Adamson’s is a bit shy on narrative intensity. Even poems narrated in the first person seem overly distant and clinical. In the penultimate section, “Mary,” theory gets the upper-hand, and Adamson slides at times into a didactic mode that is more jarring than the crisp image-driven visuals of the early sections—and indeed of the majority of “Mary.” The final prose sequence, “Euphoria,” about a consumptive man in a sanatorium, doesn’t seem to fit with the rest of the collection, and provides an anticlimactic close to an otherwise solid book.

*Outside Magic* is a collection of poems full of wit, sex, humour, joy, anger, bawdry, and tenderness. Noah Leznoff’s free verse line clips along kinetically, highlighted by a

virtuoso vocabulary, employed without apparent effort: “astride the permian//moss, mouldering stump, blue blossoms/observe our bed; midges loiter//in this open-mouthed rale.” Nothing seems to be above or beneath the notice of this poet, as he focuses his gaze on everything from insects to old women in grocery checkout lines to African villagers caught up in a corporate-sponsored civil war. Many poems deal with the routine indignities and occasional epiphanies of work, both blue collar and professional. This book shows what can be achieved in “people’s poetry” when craft is harnessed to politics. The only notable faiblesse is an over-reliance on quoted material. Some of these quotations, though apposite, are unnecessary, and a couple of poems get low-bridged by imported material. These failures are exceptional, however, in an exciting book that throbs and thrums with humanity.

I could say much about the virtues of Tim Bowling’s most recent collection, *The Witness Ghost*. I could talk about his ability to evoke life in a BC fishing town, his inventive diction, his bardic rhythms, his knack for metaphor, his deft use of assonance and alliteration. But all this would be worth very little without the emotional pull of these poems. This is a collection of elegies in memory of the poet’s father. It’s risky territory, making public material of private grief, and it can go wrong in so many ways. But Bowling walks the razor’s edge with great skill and dignity, rarely drifting into the sentimental and never into

self-pity or despair, death being a phase in the cycle of life. These poems are intensely personal, but never private, as the poet struggles “to satisfy in this public way/some private need [he] can’t begin to understand.” Bowling’s best poems do what all great poetry does: they bridge the gap between poet and reader with an electric arc. They deserve to be read and re-read.

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## Utopies d’une Amérique française

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**Bernard Andrès et Nancy Desjardins (dir.)**

*Utopies en Canada (1545–1845)*. Études littéraires, UQAM \$15,00

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**Jacques Mathieu**

*La Nouvelle-France. Les Français en Amérique du Nord XVI<sup>e</sup>–XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle*. Les Presses de l’Université Laval n.p.

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Comptes rendus par Constance Cartmill

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Les études publiées dans *Utopies en Canada (1545–1845)* sous la direction de Bernard Andrès et Nancy Desjardins recouvrent la grande période des utopies en Occident qui va du XVI<sup>e</sup> au XIX<sup>e</sup> siècles. L’étude de l’utopie semble tout à fait appropriée au contexte de l’Amérique septentrionale, car dès la période des grandes découvertes des explorateurs, le Nouveau Monde constituait aux yeux des Européens un Ailleurs où pouvaient se réaliser les rêves d’une société meilleure. En effet, les « utopies en Canada » semblent surtout des utopies de source ou d’inspiration européenne—autrement dit, les textes étudiés dans cet ouvrage ne sont utopiques que par rapport à l’Europe qui s’avère un point de mire constant. Or, le « non-lieu » que désigne le terme *utopia* est plutôt un lieu réel—l’Amérique, et notamment la Nouvelle-France et le Québec—qui se présente comme un lieu *autre*. L’altérité s’avère un enjeu central dans cet ouvrage collectif, et ce à double titre. Premièrement, l’Amérique se présente comme l’autre de l’Europe, et le Québec

l’autre de la France : l’Europe pouvait projeter ses rêves et fantasmes sur le Nouveau Monde, et, lors des rébellions des Patriotes autour des années 1837–1838, le Québec pouvait trouver son inspiration utopique dans la Révolution française de 1789 (« quand l’utopie devient ‘acte’ », selon André Bertrand) et la Révolution de Juillet 1830. Deuxièmement, les textes produits au Canada—récits de voyage, correspondances, pamphlets, journaux et gazettes—semblent constituer l’autre des œuvres canoniques qui ont défini le genre, telles que l’*Utopia* de Thomas More et le *Voyage dans la lune* de Cyrano de Bergerac. C’est ce que fait remarquer par exemple Lucie Villeneuve dans son analyse de l’intertextualité à l’œuvre dans le journal *Le Fantastique* (1837–1845). De fait, on retrouve dans plusieurs de ces études un souci de mesurer à leur juste valeur les contributions d’« utopistes mineurs »—comme le Suisse Napoléon Aubin (Lucie Villeneuve) et l’Irlandais Daniel Tracey (André Bertrand)—et de leur accorder une place d’importance dans l’histoire littéraire québécoise.

L’époque du régime français en Amérique fournit les premiers discours utopiques au Canada, l’esprit missionnaire et la découverte des sociétés amérindiennes en particulier donnant voix à l’espoir d’un royaume de Dieu sur terre (l’utopie ressemble, on le voit, au millénarisme). Julie Roy cherche à démontrer « une parenté entre le discours utopique et le discours féministe » auxquels auraient contribué, d’une part, le mythe des Amazones (à l’origine de la « conception de la Canadienne comme femme forte et déterminée [qui] marquera fortement l’imaginaire canadien »), et d’autre part, le renouveau du mysticisme (Marie de l’Incarnation et l’établissement de communautés féminines au Canada). Cette étude révèle à quel point les femmes—religieuses aussi bien que laïques—auraient joué un rôle de premier plan dans les fondations du Québec aux débuts de la colonisation.

La période après la Conquête sert de tremplin à un autre groupe de textes à tendance utopique. En analysant la « répercussion de la Révolution de Juillet 1830 au Québec », André Bertrand suggère que le mouvement indépendantiste de notre époque trouve ses racines dans les discours utopiques du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle, hypothèse qui renforce la notion que le projet mis sur pied par René Lévesque est surtout une tentative d'invalider une série de mesures qui a érodé le pouvoir du Québec au sein de l'Amérique, et notamment l'Acte d'Union de 1840 (ou l'« Union forcée ») et la Confédération de 1867. Pour trouver les racines utopiques du projet d'un Pierre Trudeau, visant à créer une nation véritablement bilingue, il faut remonter à la période qui suit la Conquête lorsque l'esprit des Lumières battait son plein et a donné expression dans la presse de la nouvelle colonie anglaise à « l'utopie d'une cité fraternelle où conquérants et conquis oublieraient leurs vieux différends » pour établir « une parfaite harmonie sociale entre Anglais et Canadiens » (Bernard Andrès). Ces aboutissements des discours utopiques mettent en lumière leur force de contestation politique, tout en nous rappelant que l'utopie ne cesse d'être utopique qu'en devenant acte.

Si les études réunies s'adressent d'abord à des spécialistes de la littérature, elles touchent néanmoins à d'autres disciplines telles que l'histoire et la sociologie : ce livre est donc susceptible d'intéresser un public plus large, et ce malgré les quelques coquilles que l'on retrouve çà et là (j'en ai compté au moins treize). On regrette l'absence d'un essai de synthèse, l'introduction de Bernard Andrès constituant plutôt un survol historique de l'esprit utopique au Canada pour la période en question. Les études de Pierre Monette et de Lucie Villeneuve présentent le plus grand intérêt théorique, puisqu'elles réussissent à problématiser le genre utopique, tandis que les autres se contentent de relever des tendances utopiques, sans pour autant contribuer à

une définition de l'utopie. D'ailleurs, la question posée par Pierre Monette à propos des *Letters from an American Farmer* de St. John de Crèvecoeur—« Peut-on pour autant parler d'utopie? »—pourrait s'appliquer à la plupart des textes étudiés dans cet ouvrage.

*La Nouvelle-France : Les Français en Amérique du Nord (xvi<sup>e</sup>–xviii<sup>e</sup> siècle)* de Jacques Mathieu, ouvrage visiblement destiné à un grand public, fournit une bonne synthèse des travaux déjà réalisés sur l'histoire de la Nouvelle-France—Mathieu nous transmet beaucoup d'information d'une façon succincte. Le livre se divise en trois grandes parties, chacune se rapportant à une période différente : la première partie est consacrée à une description de la civilisation amérindienne et de la connaissance du continent américain au XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle, la deuxième se concentre sur la colonisation et l'expansion des territoires français au XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle, tandis que la troisième partie retrace l'essor et le déclin de l'empire français en Amérique au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle. Dans un chapitre en particulier (« Transferts, adaptations et emprunts culturels »), qui aurait mérité sans doute un plus long développement, Mathieu montre comment en seulement deux ou trois générations les Français établis en Nouvelle-France sont devenus « Canadiens », terme qui correspond à ce qu'on appellerait aujourd'hui « Québécois ».

Livre d'abord conçu pour des étudiants français, cette nouvelle édition vise aussi des amateurs de l'histoire canadienne et québécoise, grâce à l'ajout de plus de deux cents illustrations, y compris des cartes et documents d'époque. Dans les marges du texte se trouvent des définitions de termes et d'expressions amérindiens et canadiens couvrant tous les domaines de la vie, des notices biographiques d'individus notables, aussi bien que des extraits de textes de l'époque du régime français, qui fonctionnent, je suppose, comme témoignages



« authentiques » : journaux et récits de voyage, lettres et relations, rapports militaires et documents d'administration (aux lecteurs qui s'y intéressent je signale en passant l'ouvrage qui vient de paraître de Marcel Trudel, *La Nouvelle-France par les textes. Les cadres de vie*). En effet, la mise en page stimulante s'avère le plus grand atout de ce livre qui constitue un outil de référence très maniable.

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## Crystal Methods

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**Christian Bök**

*Crystallography*. Coach House \$17.95

**Mark Laba**

*Dummy Spit*. Mercury P \$14.95

**Peter Culley**

*Hammertown*. New Star \$16.00

Reviewed by Ian Rae

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Due to the commercial and critical success of Christian Bök's *Eunoia*, Coach House Books has issued a revised version of the poet's 1994 collection, *Crystallography*. Bök explains in an afterword to this handsome volume that *Crystallography* is "a pataphysical encyclopaedia that misreads the language of poetics through the conceits of geology." Following in the footsteps of his pataphysical Canadian forebears, Bök combines Christopher Dewdney's scientific vocabulary with Steve McCaffrey's theory-mindedness and bp Nichol's orthographic obsessions, which might appear to be a fatal poetic strategy, but Bök has the craftsmanship to pull it off.

A lengthy epigram from M.C. Escher's *The Regular Divisions of the Plane* provides a useful clue to Bök's method. Escher wrote his treatise to demonstrate that visual motifs can be repeated to suggest infinite movement, instead of formal stasis. Inspired by the tiles and architecture of Moorish Spain, Escher had been experimenting with repetitions of contiguous, interlocking forms when he broke from tra-

dition and began using asymmetrical, organic forms. He discovered techniques of rotation, translation, and mirroring that enabled such repetition, but he did not understand his own method until his brother, a geology professor, explained that he was really working in the field of crystallography. Escher used the insights of crystallography to theorize his discoveries and create his later, more famous artworks.

Equally cryptic, Bök twists and turns a few key concepts in *Crystallography* until he has explored every facet of his motifs. Like houseflies that "see the world through gemstones," Bök directs the reader's gaze through every available refraction. After reading Bök's long poems and Borgesian essays, you will never think of mirrors, diamonds, and snow the same way again. His style "predicates itself upon an aesthetics of structural perfection," yet it pressures the logic of structure to the point where it turns against itself and ceases to limit interpretation. Thus Bök's concrete, diamond-shaped rendering of the word "diamond" resembles one of those Escher staircases that cycle round and round to infinity.

As an occasional rockhound who doesn't mind digging up words in the dictionary that I will never use again, I am probably the target audience for this collection. Still, there are moments when even I cringe at the intellectual exhibitionism. With the important exception of "Diamonds," Bök's writing is strong on aphorism and weak in empathy. In place of an emotional connection, the short poems offer the reader marginal notes from physics class, mnemonics from chemistry cheatsheets, and alliterations of Bök's favourite terms from dead languages. Perhaps the revisions to *Crystallography*, such as the omission of the subtitle "Book 1 of Information Theory," suggest that Bök is growing tired of search engines that mistake his collection for a textbook. But many poems still resemble those Mensa puzzles that are marketed to

people who like things difficult, abstract, and trivial. Real geniuses have bigger questions to ponder, and Bök may address them yet.

An overbearing obsession with form is not a problem affecting Mark Laba's *Dummy Spit*. Although the promotional blurb on the back cover advertises his book as "hardcore surrealism," "flacid" is the term that appears more often in Laba's writing. Laba, who writes an "Adventures in Dining" column for Vancouver's *Province* newspaper, appears to have raided the dormitories at UBC in his spare time and collected all the post-party profundities that the budding writers were tearing up the morning after. He collages these fragments together and dutifully changes the subject every four seconds, but the overall poems seem arbitrarily put together. Laba can craft an intriguing phrase, but when one witnesses a line break separate an article from its subject for no rhythmic purpose, one can be certain that the design is random. Only Laba's humour and flair for the grotesque gives this collection a compelling edge. His parodies of ventriloquism, in particular the play on vaudeville punchlines in the concluding poem, supply some hilarious and artful moments. More typical, unfortunately, are the poems where Laba strings together one or two words per line. This trick makes sentences look like poetry on the page, but to my mind it serves no other purpose than to get the Canada Council to support the pulp and paper industry.

This industry is responsible for the "pulpy sulphur rain" falling on the hometown of Nanaimo poet and art critic Peter Culley. Inspired by a reference to a village on Vancouver Island in George Perec's *Life: A User's Manual*, Culley imagines in *Hammertown* how Nanaimo might have appeared to the Oulipo poet. Culley does not paint a realist portrait, but rather seeks to capture "the syntax of place" as Perec might have perceived it. I doubt that the syntax of either Paris or Hammertown

compels a farmer to remark that "cattle from untasted fields do / bitterly return," but overall the collection provides some interesting interpretative challenges. Given the Perec epigram, one hunts for acrostic-telestics, hidden algorithms, omitted letters of the alphabet, or some guiding principle for the shifting subject matter. For example, a third of the collection consists of sequences of seven-line stanzas, each containing roughly seven beats per line. This form conveys a sense of rhythm and looks very nice on the page, but in what else the poems cohere I have no idea. Culley, like Laba, hopes that the tactility of words and the delirious struggle of the mind to cope with incessant change are pleasure enough. One may wish to worship with Culley on the "prayer-rug of faded beach," but he no sooner introduces this rug than he pulls it out from under the reader. Dizzy and confused, the reader lands in a world where "speech or its opposite / flutters the blinds / at the moment of sleep." In short bursts this dizziness is quite pleasing, but longer episodes induce sleep after all.

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## Orature Captured in Print

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**Randy Bouchard and Dorothy Kennedy**

*Indian Myths and Legends from the North Pacific Coast of America*. Talonbooks \$65.00

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Reviewed by Penny van Toorn

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It is easy to forget that Franz Boas, the father of modern North American anthropology, was once a young man with an uncertain future. In 1886, at the age of 28, he embarked on his first field trip to British Columbia. As a self-funded researcher, his budget was tight and his time limited. Nonetheless his early field trips to BC in 1886, 1888, 1889, and 1890 yielded 250 narratives in 15 First Nations languages. These findings were published in German scholarly journals in the early 1890s, and in 1895 were gathered and republished by Boas in a

single volume, *Indianische Sagen von der Nord-Pacifischen Küste Amerikas*. *Indian Myths and Legends from the North Pacific Coast of America* is the first English translation of Boas' complete *Indianische Sagen*.

Without doubt, the publication of this scholarly English language edition of the collected *Indian Myths and Legends* is a major achievement for all concerned in its making. Physically, as well as in its scholarship and presentation, this is a most impressive volume, well worth the long wait. The original translation from German to English was completed in 1977 by Dietrich Bertz of Victoria. Over a period of 25 years, as funding waxed and waned, the editors, Randy Bouchard and Dorothy Kennedy, Directors of the BC Indian Language Project, undertook the immense task of researching and annotating the text. This process involved extensive consultations with numerous members of BC First Nations, who are duly named in the acknowledgements and thanked for their assistance. The narratives are accompanied by an engaging, informative editorial introduction, as well as extensive footnotes, maps and appendices. Bouchard and Kennedy offer a balanced view of Boas' research methods. At times he appears to have cut corners, but when time permitted, he was able to find especially skilled storytellers, and he devoted more effort to checking his transcriptions and refining his understanding of the languages and narratives.

On the back cover flap of *Indian Myths and Legends* we are told that one of the manuscript assessors equated its publication to "the discovery of a group of 150-year-olds from these Native groups, all in full possession of their faculties and anxious to share their knowledge with anthropologists." While this is a nice thought, it upholds the essentialist assumption that "authentic" Native cultures are located entirely in the past, with Aboriginal cultures today being characterised as a debased, inauthentic ver-

sion of the real thing. The assessor's vignette also obscures the fact that even the most meticulously researched book is a poor substitute for a dynamic, living culture. That said, *Indian Myths and Legends* might facilitate Aboriginal peoples' re-appropriation of elements of Aboriginal culture from the academic sphere. The content and origins of a book do not necessarily predetermine its uses.

Editorial policies, however, may make a difference as to how, and by whom, a text can be used. As editors, Bouchard and Kennedy implicitly assert Eurocentric historical and ethnographic cultural values by choosing fidelity to Boas' original records above the need to bring his transcriptions into line with present day orthographic practices and standards. The editors retain Boas' original but sometimes inconsistent and idiosyncratic transcriptions, rather than updating them and making them more reader-friendly by using either an anglicized version or a standardized phonetic orthography in the texts. As Bouchard and Kennedy note, this decision carries a risk of alienating some readers. This is a serious issue, especially for lay Native readers who may wish to relearn the stories through Boas transcriptions. The editors' concern to reinforce Boas' status as a European culture hero risks compromising the texts' utility as a tool for Aboriginal cultural regeneration. Despite this risk, the publication of Boas' *Indian Myths and Legends* is a major achievement.



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## Wary of Angels

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**Anne Burke**

*Imprints and Casualties: Poets on Women and Language, Reinventing Memory.* Broken Jaw  
\$21.95

**Margo Button with Natasha Thorpe**

*The Elders' Palace: Iniqnirit Qalgiat.* Oolichan  
\$14.95

**Elizabeth Brewster**

*Jacob's Dream.* Oberon \$13.95

Reviewed by Marilyn Iwama

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Anne Burke titles her work “imprints,” because the volume reproduces texts that have “made their mark” elsewhere, mostly in the *Living Archives* series published by the Feminist Caucus of the League of Canadian Poets and “casualties” for the many there were: the deaths of contributors Bronwen Wallace and Anne Szumigalski, the lack of certain written records and a damaged friendship.

The first half of *Imprints and Casualties* reproduces two years’ worth of correspondence between poets Erin Mouré and Bronwen Wallace, largely concerning plans for a workshop at the next AGM of the League. Mouré floods Wallace with essays by feminist theorists and her critique of them in letters bristling with capital letters, strings of exclamations and interrogatives, and an insistence on what women must/should/have to do. Wallace sidesteps the questions, arguing for a narrative poetics of the particular that speaks to the larger experiences of “women.” In her foreword of 1993, Mouré has the final word: the letters represent “a struggle to know” and the friends’ parting was “amicable.”

It’s a tricky business, tying up loose textual ends for a friend who has passed on. Contra Mouré, Wallace’s final position in *Imprints and Casualties* is that this discussion of women and language alienated the two poets. At the very least, the vigour of their exchange echoes in the ensuing farrago of

poems, essays and reflections. Marie Annharte Baker’s “Raggedy Shawl” and “Circling Back Grandma-To-Be Writing” are bold reminders that racism is also a defining and slippery force in the production of Canadian women’s writing. While the entire text reaches for a symbolism that is up to the task of representing “women,” contributions by Penn Kemp and Lola Tostevin, especially, treat the contentions of language. Memory is the focus of the final section; in my reading, the reflections by Anne Szumigalski and Sarah Klassen particularly resonate. Taken whole, *Imprints and Casualties* is a provocative documentation of the growth of the Caucus and a helpful introduction to the work of its members.

*The Elders' Palace* is another collage. It emerged from three sources: stories and slides of Natasha Thorpe’s research into “elders’ knowledge,” the transcriptions of Thorpe’s interviews with the Kitikmeot elders of western Nunavut, and Margo Button’s own conversations with these elders. The volume also features ink drawings by artists Danny Aaluk, Mary Kilaodluk, Bella Kapolak and Natasha Naggie.

In the elders’ drop-in centre (the “palace”), Button’s encounters with Inuit elders who have lost children to various tragedies prompts in her both an identification—a desire to ease the pain of her own son’s suicide by pooling it with theirs—and a sense of separation from them that focuses her on the elders’ particular “soft / dry-eyed chant.” The visiting poet from the south also relates cultural practices in these poems: the raising of children by grandparents (“*Isn’t it a burden?* I ask the elders”), the best position for giving birth, how to eat raw caribou, the womanly art of tattooing, why one must avoid “the little people.”

Button and her collaborators take care to fashion a respectful telling. The elders have Button present the poems in Inuinnaqtun as well as in English. In the process of

translating, Mary Kaosoni advised Button on Inuit protocol. The tone of humility about this volume suggests that Button heeded her advice. Perhaps this collective inflection in *The Elders' Palace* is what recreates the elders' words as plainsong, a litany of lost children in shared accents of grief. Grief familiar in its origins: gut, bone, blood. "She and I are ancient / as the first woman who left her baby behind."

Some may criticize Button for crossing a line in her identification with the elders or for unwisely using "North" as a metaphor for barrenness and death. For seeing infants in the elders: "At eighty his eyes are milky like a newborn." Or too much "Nature" in a woman birthing a baby "like a calf on the caribou hide." Any such lapses are balanced by the translation on each facing page and by Button's ironic self-reflection in such poems as "The Children": "I should know better / . . . *But didn't it hurt to lose your child? I pry.*"

One of my favourite poems from an earlier volume (*The Shadows Fall Behind*) reappears here. In "Tuktu, the Wanderer," the speaker marvels at the "brief majesty" in a rack of caribou antlers—"tender-fingered tips flutter and reach— / sweet fruit the Inuit cut off and eat. Flesh / longs for flesh, bone for bone." The speaker is consoled by haunting images of life and death carried in startling language: antlers "like a mother's arms / embracing me in a barren season."

Less consolation than mischievous old friend is the part language plays in Elizabeth Brewster's *Jacob's Dream*. Both sections treat constancy: the first, the fickle constancy of change—seasons, language, senses, desire, life; the second, the steadfast originating source of it all.

Brewster begins the conversation with her readers on the night of the winter solstice: "Tomorrow the sun renews itself." Reassurance continues in her gloss on Waller's "Old Age" that "[w]eakness is sometimes

strength / . . . Visions . . . invade / *through chinks that Time has made.*" Concerned as she is with the architecture of language, Brewster also talks with poets throughout this first section, disagreeing, challenging, expanding. She forgoes Milton's celestial light for the comfort of shadows and "a small flashlight / flickering into corners." She looks for inspiration to Sidney's writing before her own "somewhat unreliable" heart that some days offers no more than gratitude to be "still alive / on a day without too much grief." Brewster teases Sidney in several poems, providing a gentle foil to his *Astrophel and Stella* with her own wry sonnets. Ever practical in her humility, she constructs an entire poem ("Images of Exile") from her "misreading" of Patrick Lane.

"The Rivalry of Angels" suggests a motive for the ribbing:

How to test voices?  
How to test dreams and visions?  
How to be wary of angels  
and yet keep the door open to them?

Since another reading always lurks in the page, be careful with your telling. In the Hebrew version of Jacob's dream, whether God is positioned "beside Jacob / or above him" depends on one letter and "letters create the world." Before letters? Sounds, smells, memories, and desires. Keep asking and you must eventually deal with the matter of creation.

And so Brewster seeks connections "to our once and future footprints" in the signifying power of myth ("Children Dancing," "In the Sukkah," "Rosh Hashanah")—that "reminder / of the old journey through the wilderness." At this point in her journey, Brewster is too aware that the rituals of myth also remind us that human existence is a temporary "shelter." Though not unafraid ("Dark Cottage"), she will not shirk from any part of the cycle of creation, accepting that death, though "never a tidy matter" at least deserves a good poem or two ("December Pigeon,"

“December Dreams of Spring,” “The Angel of Death,” for starters). And a good laugh—the angel of death, a wolf in grandma’s nightcap.

It may be too easy to cite the section “Amidah” as reason for such boldness, implying a confidence born of new faith. Yet, impelled as Brewster is toward the next threshold, by experiencing faith in a creator she sees beauty in death (“Blessing in Autumn”). How fitting, then, that Brewster would choose this most important of Jewish prayers for the poetic expression of her faith. A communal supplication, the Amidah also allows for private prayer. And so, in the midst of this prayerful reminder of Edenic ancestors, with its wonderful image of books being shaken from the branches of the tree of knowledge, the voice of “The Invisible” sounds in the “the whisper of infinite space / between the stars,” amid Brewster’s parenthetical puzzling over signification:

(There are so many nicknames,  
pet names for earth and sky,  
the universe beyond,  
indwelling spirit.)

And yet Brewster struggles with faith: “It’s difficult to bless winter.”

Like that other Amidah, these are poems to read while standing, stepping backward and forward, “on the solid floor” (“Midsummer Morning”). These are poems that rehearse the “difficult freedom” of redemption. Not the adamant redemption of the born again, quips Brewster, but just “maybe our prayers too / will be answered.”




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## Calling For New Readers

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**Helen M. Buss**

*Repossessing the World: Reading Memoirs by Contemporary Women.* Wilfrid Laurier UP \$39.95

**Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson**

*Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives.* U of Minnesota P \$22.95

Reviewed by Elizabeth Maurer

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Memoir has long deserved the careful attention Helen Buss gives it in *Repossessing the World: Reading Memoirs by Contemporary Women*, though in its reading of contemporary women’s memoirs “with attitude,” *Repossessing the World* takes risks that are not always successful. In this study, Buss returns to some of her previous work in *Mapping Our Selves: Canadian Women’s Autobiography in English* (1993), investigating the memoirist’s tripartite roles as witness, participant, and reflective/reflexive narrator. The strengths of this book lie in Buss’ engagement with the interplay between these roles, and in her exploration of how they allow women to resist narratives and restrictions inherited from patriarchal society. Her chapter on memoirs by female academics is perhaps the most successful of these explorations. Also worth a closer look is Buss’ chapter on trauma and memoir which examines the shift in the narratives of trauma victims from being possessed by the past toward possessing the past.

Buss’ aims in this book are firmly feminist, and geared to feminist readers of women’s writing: to allow women memoirists to repossess a place in history which she believes has been denied them, and to theorize ways that women memoirists avoid pitfalls of autobiographical writing such as the appearance of confession that often accompanies writing about sexual abuse. In addition to exploring women memoirists’ use of the genre, Buss pursues a feminist critical practice in which she seeks to read women’s memoirs “with attitude.”

That is, she performs a “gendered construction” of herself in relation to the narrator that draws on her emotional identifications with the text but which aims not to “colonize” or appropriate texts. However, her argument that critics and memoirists, through reading and writing “with attitude,” may together “repossess the world” that has been withheld from them because of their gender, is overly optimistic and raises a number of concerns.

In spite of her caution, Buss does tend to essentialize women’s needs and experiences, writing of women as “we”: “We learn to blame our mothers and our daughters because we have learned that being female means being blameworthy.” As well, Buss’ examples of how the memoir genre empowers women writers are not always persuasive. Can Maxine Hong Kingston break the “rule that insists upon a linear plot line of written narrative” solely “because of the permission [the memoir form] gives the narrator to defamiliarize the past,” as Buss contends? Some confusion also exists about what justifies the readings of women’s memoirs she performs. At one point, she suggests that because an individual author “rebels” against generic and stylistic conventions, the reader is therefore allowed to read rebelliously, to “risk reading intimately.” At other points, however, she offers a contradictory explanation, suggesting that it is the nature of the memoir genre—memoirs contextualize the individual life in a historical context—which permits readers to read “intimately” in “autocritical” ways.

In her promotion of a new reading practice, Buss is an example of the critic Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson call for in *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives* when they suggest readers “inventively contextualize” the strategies used in autobiographical texts. At many points, Buss’ work performs what Smith and Watson, in their useful glossary, call

“autocritique,” “a self-reflexive inclusion of one’s own autobiographical narrative with one’s reading of life narrative; the critic’s reading becomes a performance of ‘her own life and self.’” So Buss draws parallels between Hong Kingston’s aunt in *The Woman Warrior* and her own rebel aunts in the post-War period, with two goals. First, she suggests that she has insights into the text because she belongs to the same North American age group and gender as Hong Kingston. While often I do find her readings of Hong Kingston’s memoir and others to be insightful, I remain concerned by the way this approach allows her to invoke the authority of personal experience in her interpretation of different texts: for instance, she understands what Hong Kingston is doing because she, too, suffered the silences and oppressions faced by women of their generation. Second, she repeatedly moves from consideration of the text to consideration of her own life, her empathy with Hong Kingston’s female family members sparking questions about her own past. Buss finds *The Woman Warrior* valuable to her personally for the insight it gives her into her own past and the lives of women in her family. This looking to the text for insights about one’s life is hardly, however, a new approach to reading; neither does it seem especially more useful when applied to a woman’s memoir than, say, a work of fiction that excites moments of empathy and identification.

While *Repossessing the World* approaches autobiography looking at one gender, one goal, and one genre, Smith and Watson’s *Reading Autobiography* is much broader in scope: it surveys three waves of criticism, introduces readers to both canonical and contemporary autobiographies, argues for the consideration of texts as diverse as case studies and diaries, and offers a varied set of critical questions. *Reading Autobiography*’s breadth of coverage, including its acknowledgement of a wide historical sweep of texts

and approaches, is impressive. With its first chapter exploring the key terms used to discuss life writing, two introductory chapters on the autobiographical act and subject, three chapters tracing the historical development of the field, and four appendices (including a glossary of “Fifty-two Genres of Life Narrative”), *Reading Autobiography* can be used as a quick reference book, an introduction for non-specialists in autobiography, or a teaching aid. While the text is geared toward literary studies, it is pitched to a non-expert level, taking care to define terms such as “bildungsroman” and “postcolonial” for the beginner or interdisciplinary scholar. The guide’s organization makes it easy to search for quick definitions of key concepts and more detailed discussions of the critical questions that have been and can be asked of autobiography. Theoretical and practical sections overlap and are cross-referenced, particularly in the 20 reading strategies presented in Chapter Seven’s “Tool Kit.”

In laying out the basic distinctions and developments in approaches to life writing, *Reading Autobiography* is largely successful. Smith and Watson make a reasonable case for the “progress” of autobiography criticism from naïve theories of a real, unitary self represented through language to a “third wave” of criticism, though they tend to skim over some of the points of debate that have informed autobiography studies over the past 30 years. I would also query their contention that *innovation* in autobiography requires us to contextualize texts with postcolonial, feminist, and relational theories of subjectivity. *Reading Autobiography* does not show that there is innovation in autobiography, or explore what might lie behind innovation; rather, it suggests critical approaches to autobiography that permit readers to theorize a broader range of texts (such as case studies and rock band performances) under the rubric of “life narrative.”

Perhaps inevitably, the guide’s breadth and accessibility occasionally result in uneven or superficial treatments of complex topics, as in the numerous short entries in the second chapter, “The Autobiographical Subject.” Some of these, such as the entries which outline Smith and Watson’s view of the relationship between discursivity, the subject, and experience, draw too heavily on the work of one critic, presenting conclusions as given rather than matters of debate. Others, such as the entries summarizing different theories of subjects’ agency, do not commit to one position or comment sufficiently on the contradictions or similarities between theories. But with these cautions in mind, *Reading Autobiography* remains a handbook to keep on a nearby shelf for anyone beginning to engage with life writing.

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## Ontario Hauntings

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**Dave Carley**

*Walking on Water*. Signature Editions \$29.50

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**Claudia Dey**

*Beaver: A Play*. Blizzard \$12.95

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**Jason Sherman**

*An Acre of Time: The Play*. Playwrights Canada P \$29.50

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Reviewed by Ingrid Mündel

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While the plays gathered together in this review—ranging from a light, murder mystery spoof to a multi-layered meditation on the history of an acre of land in the Ottawa flats—contrast sharply on stylistic, structural, and thematic grounds, *An Acre of Time*, *Beaver*, and *Walking on Water*, are all plays that look at what it is to be haunted, both literally and figuratively, by either past memories, people, or spaces. These plays are “haunted” most overtly by collective, historical, and personal questions of what lies beyond either the edges of town or the edges of memory. In *Beaver*, the title character’s coming-of-age narrative emerges



from between the cracks of her mother's suicide and from within the confines of a small, Northern Ontario town. *Walking on Water* works to unravel the collective memory of a town in a murder mystery with an *Our Town* blend of humour and history. The third play, *An Acre of Time*, reveals the interconnectedness of personal and national histories in a story about a surveyor who, in the process of uncovering the history of a particular piece of land near the Ottawa River, is simultaneously forced to cope with the recent death of her daughter.

Claudia Dey's debut play, *Beaver*, unfolds in Timmins, Ontario "between a mother's suicide and a daughter's wedding." The play starts in the middle of winter at one of two graveyards in Timmins, the graveyard "for those who were quiet about their contributions to the town; it is for the un-addressed, the repossessed." In fact, Dey's entire play focuses on the un-addressed, the repossessed; Edna, the tipsy matriarch of the Jersey family, and her two daughters, Sima, a prostitute, and Nora, a spinster, establish an unholy trinity inside which the family's process of dealing with the suicide death of the third Jersey daughter, Rose, unfolds. Beatrice, Rose's daughter, emerges as the product of this strange, dysfunctional family dynamic; she is caught in a seemingly inescapable world of drunkenness and despair where the common understanding is that "outside o' this town, it's flat'n empty, it's like the surface o' the moon."

At the end of the play Beatrice does take a tentative step toward escaping Timmins; however, it is a move that is largely double-edged. On the one hand, Beatrice's decision to leave Timmins emerges as liberatory—she is the first in her family to venture beyond the edges of town. On the other hand, Beatrice's step *beyond* functions as an escape and a dismissal of the community of "un-addressed and repossessed" in Timmins. It seems that it is only by escaping both the confines of the small Ontario

town and the memory of her mother's death that Beatrice is able to undermine the shadows of her past. While on one level, Dey's chilling, hilarious, and surprising script seems, with its sympathetic construction of Beatrice, to challenge white trash stereotypes, her avoidance of any overt class analysis may, on another level, produce an essentialized depiction of Ontario "white trash," a depiction that is further reinforced through Beatrice's dismissive escape from the grittiness of her past.

Dave Carley's *Walking on Water* also begins in a graveyard, though without any of the chilliness of Dey's Timmins, Ontario. In a style similar to Thornton Wilder's *Our Town*, Carley's play focuses on important moments in the life of Ashburnham, a mid-sized Ontario town—moments that are narrated solely by the dead inhabitants of the Ashburnham Necropolis. To help navigate the journey up Water Street in 1949 to the Ashburnham graveyard in the present, Carley provides a verbose narrator, Neil Griffin, who is a dead wannabe novelist. Carley inventively fuses murder mystery with story theatre as the dead of Ashburnham together work to "solve" and re-enact the mysterious 1949 death of Lee Kwan, the chauffeur for the town's newspaper publisher. Carley's lively plot is constantly in threat of unraveling or swerving off course, as the various characters clamour to tell their parts of the story. In spite of the numerous detours and stalls however, Neil Griffin eventually manages to gather all the pertinent details related to Lee Kwan's death, simultaneously highlighting the relevance of the perspectives of the dead to the living. Through his unraveling, self-reflexive story-telling approach, direct audience address, and minimal set design, Carley has created a script that has the potential to playfully engage an audience even as what unfolds is a fairly conventional murder mystery plot, complete with stock characters and unsavoury motives.

Jason Sherman's *An Acre of Time* (based on Phil Jenkin's book of the same title) negotiates personal loss without any of the black humour that Dey and Carley use in their plays. While rich with humor throughout, *An Acre of Time* offers a thoughtful exploration of both human death and the death of place. Sherman takes us to what is now Ottawa's Le Breton Flats, providing inventive flashbacks (through the help of effective character doubling) and historical echoes that sketch out the history of an acre of the Le Breton Flats land, from its geological formation, to its indigenous, French, and Canadian inhabitants. Woven into this tumultuous historical trajectory is the personal story of Julia Wright, the woman leading the surveying project, who lost her daughter in a drowning incident only paces away from the land she has been asked to survey. *An Acre of Time* shows the difficulty of separating personal from political history, and questions the very possibility of measuring "place" in terms of what can be captured, calculated, and cut up. Like Dey's "un-addressed and repossessed" in Timmins and Carley's storytelling inhabitants of the Ashburnham Necropolis, Sherman's characters measure memories, telling a story about a shifting, haunted sense of community.

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## Telling Our Stories

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### J. Edward Chamberlin

*If This Is Your Land, Where Are Your Stories?*  
*Finding Common Ground.* Knopf Canada \$36.95

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### Rudy Wiebe

*Playing Dead: A Contemplation Concerning the Arctic.* NeWest P \$18.95

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### Jim Betts

*Colours in the Storm.* Playwrights Canada P \$25.75

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Reviewed by Sherrill Grace

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The question that Ted Chamberlin chooses for the title of his book is one that all three of these books address. The general point,

as Chamberlin insists, is that our common ground as human beings, regardless of time or place, is story: nothing is more human than the desire to tell and the need to listen to stories. But that common starting point has always led to a range of persistent problems. Lack of knowledge, a basic refusal to listen, a competition as to whose story becomes the official one—all these obstacles, as human-made as the stories themselves, fuel intolerance, genocidal wars, and the less violent but deadly advances of colonialism that characterize human history. In the face of such challenges to our willed deafness and hegemonic story-telling, however, we keep making stories in many forms and genres. Where Chamberlin reminds us of the role of story in bringing us together, Rudy Wiebe and Jim Betts give us explicitly Canadian stories that exemplify ways in which Canadians claim that this land is ours or, to put this claim more precisely, that we belong to this land.

*If This Is Your Land* is a highly personal narrative in which Chamberlin gives his readers his message in the very form he is discussing: story. He recounts autobiographical experiences from childhood and later life and he repeats others' stories, such as the Gitksan one about the origins of the world in their part of Canada or the Aboriginal elder's admonition about the need for song and story if one claims to belong to Australia. As he develops his reflection on language, the meaning of home, truth, and the significance of stories, he ranges widely over the vast territory of story to recall Greek epics and compare them with North American Indian sagas, to celebrate the poetry of contemporaries, like Patrick Lane, and to remember the story of a Yupik woman in Alaska.

But the stories Chamberlin tells are not only about places and how human beings come to belong in those places. They are also about physics, mathematics, the science of our world, and this may be the

juncture in his story that requires our greatest leap of faith because, in the West, we rarely think of such factual disciplines as telling stories. Systems like the law, scientific exploration (cartography for example), and government rely on truth claims, enforcement, monologic interpretation. Moreover, the rules and evidence of these systems are written down; it is the writing down in one authoritative language that gives such systems their power. Stories are something else—childish, oral, entertaining, fictional. But, as Chamberlin reminds us, this is a false dichotomy, and a dangerous one. We are, he insists, at all times surrounded by story, by competing stories, by contradictory stories, and until we can learn to listen more carefully and with greater acceptance of the contradictions, we will continue to be victimized by the barbarians at the gates who are *us*. We will continue to misunderstand that we belong through story to the human race.

Wiebe's *Playing Dead* is a classic Canadian narrative of belonging and, thus, an entirely appropriate choice for NeWest's first reprint in its Landmark Editions Series. First published in 1989, this reprint includes a number of additional illustrations, an Afterword by Robert Kroetsch, a 2003 note by Wiebe, and two new short essays. But *Playing Dead* remains a thoroughly personal story about Wiebe finding his own "true North." It is no surprise to find him meditating here on the meaning and importance of the North, on the stories of indigenous northerners and on the clash of cultures in the North that constitutes the northern history of European and southern Canadian exploration and exploitation of the land and its resources. His own travels in the Northwest Territories and his study of the history and mythology of the Dene, of Sir John Franklin's expeditions, and of numerous other events involving native and non-native northerners are familiar to readers from his splendid novel, *A Discovery*

*of Strangers*, and his captivating recreation of Albert Johnson in *The Mad Trapper*.

But here, in *Playing Dead*, Wiebe speaks to us directly in his own voice, and he critiques the Euro-Canadian history that is his story (and ours) to illustrate how all non-northerners have failed to understand the land, the people, and the place they encountered in their determined search for a passage through the North to riches and imperial glory elsewhere. Europeans came armed with stories in which the land was empty, the people barbarous, and the country waiting to be discovered and developed by white men with white history on their minds. The Dene, however, already had their stories (as did the Dogrib, the Yellowknives, the Chipewyan, the Netsilik Inuit from Pelly Bay) and in their stories the world was already full of histories, languages, and meaning. What Wiebe urges us to do is to listen to these stories and then to break through our smug ignorance about our own nordicity.

*Colours in the Storm* focuses even more specifically on one story about belonging and it does so in the form of a play. The subject is Tom Thomson, whose life and death form a quintessential Canadian story of claiming place by dying in it, even more than by painting it. The play premiered in 1990 and went through several revisions and productions before reaching this published form, which includes several pages of "leadsheets" with the basic lyrics and melodies for all the songs in the play. The play itself is as much musical—almost an *opéra comique*—as it is a traditional stage script, and this mixed form is crucial to its intention. Thomson himself appears as a ghostly presence conjured up along with the other characters in his story (friends, possible enemies, other painters) by a group who remembers his death after seeing what the Lawren Harris character describes as his spirit paddling on Canoe Lake: "those who depart before their time continue to

haunt the lands they loved,” he tells us. The memory play that unfolds from this opening gambit, however, is not Harris’ story or even the story of Canoe Lake and one painter so much as a collective story about Canada, and this is why I think Betts has called on the resources of music to help him create and celebrate a communal narrative of place and belonging—a “common ground,” to return to Chamberlin’s phrase—that includes as many participants and rememberers as possible.

I have not seen a live production of *Colours in the Storm* so I cannot say if this complex play works. Nevertheless, its existence as a play (rather than an essay or a scholarly study) means that it can only function fully in the communal space of a theatre, on the common ground that an audience shares during a performance. Insofar as it recapitulates in speech and song a well-known story about our land, it attempts to occupy that borderland of difference and contradiction that Chamberlin warns against, and it stages a story, as Wiebe might wish, about the North as here, as our place and home.

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## Problem Plays for Teens

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### Anne Chislett

*Flippin’ In* and *Then and Now*. Playwrights Canada P n.p.

### Chris Craddock

*Naked at School: Three Plays for Teens*. NeWest P \$16.95

### Edward Roy, Beth Goobie and

### Carmen Aguirre

*Rave: Young Adult Drama*. Blizzard \$18.95

Reviewed by Sue Fisher

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Theatre for young adults is a tricky business. Often plays for teens are produced within the context of a school system that requires an institutional and didactic sanction. The five playwrights here manage this didactic imperative in various ways.

Established Canadian playwright Anne Chislett presents two works for young adults: *Flippin’ In*, the story of two high school girls who attempt to unionize the burger joint where they work in order to improve conditions for their coworkers, and *Then and Now*, a play commissioned in part by the Office of the Commissioner for Official Languages, in which two girls and their fathers get sucked into a computer war game that forces them to relive the history of Anglo-French relations in Canada. The former is an impressive piece of theatre that relies on minimal props and set pieces and demands much innovation on the part of the company to bring the twin worlds of high school and the local burger joint to life. The characters for the most part are well-rounded, even if the manager at the fast food restaurant is a bit too easily vilified in the script. The issues the play touches on—the use of part-time workers as a management tactic to avoid paying benefits, surveillance and lack of trust in the workplace, employees being fired for holding down two jobs—are subtle, complex, and well worth introducing to teens. That the play shows the impact of these issues not just on the lives of teens but on those of adults who are trapped in the service industry and does so in a manner that reveals complex issues of power, shifting loyalties, and complicity with injustice is impressive indeed.

*Then and Now* is equally ambitious in intent. Five actors with very few props (mainly hats and signs) must render the multiple characters and historical situations that have led to the current relationship between French and English Canada. This is no easy feat and it soon becomes clear that the script demands far too much of its young actors and even more of its audience—most of whom will not be thoroughly immersed in the history that is given sweeping consideration. The play, a one-act no less, comes with twenty-eight

historical footnotes and covers a period of nearly four hundred years. The framing construct of the video game feels dated and awkward (references to Star Trek abound) and in the end the adult characters are dismissed as being narrow-minded simply because of their age.

In the three plays that make up *Naked at School*, Edmonton's Chris Craddock takes on the holy trinity of teen problems—suicide, alcoholism, and unplanned pregnancy—and throws in a peppering of sexuality for good measure. Given the abundance of teen literature on these subjects, it is nearly impossible to write without clichés. With only one exception, however, Craddock, a darling of the Canadian Fringe Theatre circuit, gives us fresh voices and scripts that can be flexibly updated to include current pop culture references.

*Wrecked*, the exception, centers on Lyle and Susy, a brother and sister trying to make sense of their mother's alcoholism. The play lacks theatrical innovation—there is nothing in the script to indicate why this piece was written for the stage. With its stereotypical characters and stock situations, its overall feel is that of an ABC after-school special. *The Day Billy Lived* depicts the aftermath of a young man's suicide attempt; in the space between life and death, Billy is processed by metaphysical civil servants who help him make an informed decision about whether he wishes to follow through with his suicide. The results are insightful and funny, and the resolution affirms life with mischievousness rather than heavy-handedness. The mixture of voices in *Do it Right*, a play about teen pregnancy and sexuality, make it the most varied and interesting work in the collection: two ten-year olds try to learn about sex through rumor and dirty magazines, a gay teenager forms a strong friendship with a girl not ready to become sexually active, and a young couple must sort through the options available when the girl discovers

she is pregnant. Craddock sidesteps the didacticism common to such "issue plays" by refusing easy closure; even though Jen makes a decision about her pregnancy, that decision is withheld and all the possible options are played out for the audience.

*Rave: Young Adult Drama* is a collection of three plays: *The Other Side of the Closet* by Edward Roy, *The Face is the Place* by Beth Goobie, and *Chile Con Carne* by Carmen Aguirre. Roy's script, that of a high-school boy outed by his friends, has the most natural dialogue of the three and builds to an invigorating climax as this natural dialogue gives way to a series of fractured, overlapping conversations. The play, however, is didactic and contrived in its handling of the issues it takes on. The key problem rests with poor characterization; for the most part, the characters are wooden representatives of differing points of view with little depth or nuance.

Perhaps because she is also a novelist (*Before Wings*) and poet (*The Girls Who Dream Me*), Beth Goobie has written the most literary of the plays reviewed here. *The Face is the Place*, though a bit stilted in its dialogue and a bit hectic in its scene changes, creates a theatrical world that is engaging and haunting. In a high school where a small band of girls maintains ruthless social control by slicing the faces of their classmates with razor blades, issues of social conformity and the deceptive nature of appearance vs reality become literal somatic concerns. Goobie uses the full potential of theatre as a distinct genre to support the themes of her work by using masks, mirrors, and flashlights to eerie effect.

Aguirre's *Chile Con Carne* is a one-person, multimedia piece that depicts the coming of age of a young Chilean refugee living in BC's lower mainland in the mid-1970s. With the use of music, recorded voices, and slides, the historical realities of Pinochet's Chile and the culture of the Chilean refugee community is evoked. The play's sole char-

acter, Manuelita, is eight years old but would need to be played by a much older actor to handle this complex script. What makes this play so engaging is the rich characterization of Manuelita, whose naïve voice reveals a number of complex issues slowly and with nuance: the historical plight of Chilean refugees in the mid-1970s, the struggles of race and culture for first generation Canadian children, immigrant poverty amidst the white middle class, and environmentalism in BC forests. The result is a mature and enjoyable play for teens and adults alike.

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## Revisiting Juno Beach

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**Terry Copp**

*Fields of Fire: The Canadians in Normandy.* U of Toronto P \$35.00

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Reviewed by Marlene Briggs

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Director Steven Spielberg won an Oscar for *Saving Private Ryan* (1998), a patriotic tribute to American volunteers who disembarked at Omaha Beach on June 6, 1944. No comparable epic dramatizes the fate of over one thousand Canadian citizen soldiers killed in action or wounded at Juno Beach.

Instead, the compelling documentary series *The Valour and the Horror* (1992) unleashed controversy, criticizing the inadequate training and incompetent leadership of the Canadians in Normandy. Challenging both official and unofficial versions of the campaign, Terry Copp champions the “extraordinary achievements” of the unsung Canadian army. In fact, *Fields of Fire* was released exactly 59 years after the D-day landings, a date coinciding with the opening of the Juno Beach Centre (2003), which commemorates Canadian contributions to the Second World War.

In his detailed, chronological military history, Copp bolsters national pride even as he confirms the legendary chaos of modern technological war. So-called friendly

fire strafes infantry desperately awaiting air support; reconnaissance oversights cost hundreds of lives in a matter of minutes; men surrender their weapons only to be executed after interrogation. In spite of such confusion and devastation, Copp emphasizes that resourceful Canadians realized many of their objectives against a formidable German enemy. The voices of individual soldiers emerge in occasional excerpts from letters or diaries, although the analysis focuses on collective fighting units ranging from company to division. Significantly, Copp reveals how colonial tensions divided the Allied camp, placing Canadian and British leaders at odds.

Although *Fields of Fire* originated as a public lecture series at the University of Western Ontario, Copp addresses his research to specialists in strategic studies, neglecting opportunities to cultivate a wider audience. The book introduces new sources but remains conventional in scope and approach, dwelling on the directives, rationales, and shortcomings of elite commanders. At the outset, the author pledges to investigate “what actually happened in combat” based on “the best available evidence.” What results, however, is a conservative work of history that aims to provide a comprehensive picture of battle closely allied with the tactical imperatives of leadership. An acknowledged expert in his field, Copp is passionate about changing the perception of national military history; regrettably, his account does little to change the perception of military history itself.



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## The Gospel of Grant

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Arthur Davis, ed.

*Collected Works of George Grant: Volume 2*  
(1951–1959). U of Toronto P \$80.00

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Reviewed by George Elliott Clarke

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*Collected Works of George Grant: Volume 2* (1951–1959) appeared, as if intuitively, one year before the Progressive Conservative Party of Canada expired, betrayed by its leader, Nova Scotian *gironardin* Peter MacKay, who let the US Republican Party's northern chapter, the Canadian Alliance, swallow up his once-proud, national party. Its publication also occurred a year prior to the death of Robert Lorne Stanfield (1914–2003), the Nova Scotian Red Tory who nearly won 24 Sussex Drive in 1972. Yet, the writings of Grant (1918–88)—that Nova Scotia-loving, irascible intellectual, instinctive Tory, and Christian *philosophe*, prophesy, already during the 1950s, well before his trenchant, poetic re-stating of the thesis in *Lament for a Nation: The Defeat of Canadian Nationalism* (1965), the inevitable demise of a distinctive, Canadian conservatism—and, thus, dominion. But the curious excellence of Grant's adult-education political science is its descent from philosophical speculation grounded in love of Christ, admiration of Plato, and suspicion of liberalism. If *Collected Works of George Grant: Volume I* (1933–1950) introduces us to the nascent discontent, whose apparent pessimism about modern usurpation of divine authority stems from the *theologia crucis*, a doctrine insisting one view the world *as is*, *Volume 2* further establishes Grant's estrangement from doctrines of "progress" as well as his abhorrence of its "scientific" but arrogant "will to mastery" of nature and human beings.

As a tyro professor of philosophy at Halifax's Dalhousie University in the 1950s, Grant's developing thought was fashioned in relation to the demands of lectures and

public education *via* journalistic articles, radio addresses, community engagements, and, ultimately, his first book, *Philosophy in the Mass Age* (1959). His style is almost always *deceptively* work-a-day, for he seeks understanding by an audience larger than those confined to his classroom or to his publication in journals. His *vox populi* aspirations make him one of our first contemporary public intellectuals (along with Marshall McLuhan), a point stressed by editor Arthur Davis' appending to this volume of a catalogue of Grant's Canadian Broadcasting Corporation radio and television broadcasts, from 1949 to, posthumously, 1989.

A quirk of Grant is his prolific use of such terms as "noble," "great," "tradition," "mystery," "strange," and "tragedy" (note: a medievalist vocabulary) as shorthand for concepts otherwise left unexplained. One may suss out implicit definitions, however, so that "noble" signifies a person or culture of faith, "tradition" religion (or classical philosophy), "mystery" the whims of divinity, and "tragedy" failure (i.e. acceptance of the destructive tenets of modernity). From the first substantial entry in *Volume 2*, Grant's writing of a 1951 Commission essay on the status of philosophical inquiry in English Canada, to the issuance of *Philosophy in the Mass Age*, these terms are leveraged incessantly to support the essential argument: the European philosophical tradition—Judeo-Christian and Greek—"with its faith in human reason's pursuit of the Good" underlies any notion of "human excellence" or, for that matter, Canadian sovereignty, in opposition to the sulling, corrosive effects of liberal "pragmatism," whose emphasis on technique and technology erases the basis for morality—and national borders. Grant states the argument directly: "The question is simply whether a society gains more from its MIT's or from its Institutes of Medieval Studies."

Grant's defence of classical *belief* requires

his scornful indictment of present-day scientism: "It has often been the way of modern men to laugh at the medieval student for discussing how many angels could stand on the point of a needle. Our modern laughter must be humbled by reading theses on the excreta of rats for which PhD's have been awarded." He attacks the "dogma of progress" by subjecting its supposed apostles—Marx, Russell, Sartre, Popper, Berlin, and a host of acolytes "lite"—to critiques enforced by the exacting strictures of Plato, the Bible, St. Augustine, Leo Strauss, and "a modern saint," Simone Weil. In Grant's own "gospel," the "Fall" is re-enacted as the West's choosing of modern freedom and will-power over "ancient" faith and virtue. The consequence of this fresh "sinning" is the triumph of an amoral social and biological engineering that dehumanizes us, leading to, in Grant's view, Auschwitz on one hand and abortion on the other. In contrast, there is "The truth of conservatism [i.e.] the truth of order and limits, both in social and personal life." Or, "The idea of limit is unavoidably the idea of God."

Though Grant's analyses of our nation, our civilization, and world history are impassioned, challenging, and visionary, intriguing lacunae appear. Apart from his appreciation for "the African" St. Augustine, peoples who are not British or European or Judeo-Christian are "Asiatics"—a Cold War, catchall phrase of Orwellian import. Likewise, while Grant comments on everyone's sex obsessions, and though his wife, Sheila, was a general, unacknowledged collaborator on these manuscripts, there is little commentary on women, save for chivalric nods to the Simones—De Beauvoir and Weil. Too, Grant's contemporary *belles-lettriste* thinkers—such as George Orwell and Julien Benda—are absent, as is any sustained treatment of "classical" liberal philosophers like Locke, Rousseau,

Macchiavelli, and Montesquieu, or of conservative scribes like Vico and Burke. His scrutiny of religious thought (and its "perversions") may have blinded him to pronouncedly secular political imagining. (True: he criticizes "change-the-world-now" Marxism as a secular religion.)

Nevertheless, the irrefutable strength of Grant's Christian classicism is its unflinching engagement with our world of poverty, disease, war, and suffering, *and* glamour, riches, technological achievement, and art. His magazine scanning, as it were, allows him to juxtapose Mrs. Nikita Krushev to Mrs. Jack Kennedy and to prefer the former to the latter. A university literature syllabus based on Grant's putative library (as evinced by his quotations) could range across Shakespeare (*Macbeth* and *King Lear*), Donne, Wordsworth, Emily Brontë, Hopkins, Dostoevsky, Wilfred Owen, Mauriac, Céline, and Sartre (*The Flies*). He also refers, frequently, feelingly, to Mozart. Editor Davis' notes are authoritatively researched and exquisitely written. His inclusion of such ephemera as Grant's lecture notes, notebook excerpts, one Wordsworthian lyric, and three Donne-styled sonnets is defensible, for it yields enlarged access to the dimensions of the man's thought.

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## Staging Alternative Albertas

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**Patricia Demers and Rosalind Kerr, eds.**

*Staging Alternative Albertas: Experimental Drama in Edmonton.* Playwrights Canada P \$35.00

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Reviewed by Ric Knowles

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The title to this provocative collection of short plays invites the question, "alternative to what?" Although the editors never answer directly, their brief introduction to the volume provides a clue: "Undermining the smugness of economic stability, [the plays] overturn the stereotypes of rugged



individualism and redneck bravado” that bedevil the province in the minds of easterners, for whom Albertans are seen to be “placid and self-satisfied.”

A second question is in what sense the plays are alternative? Aesthetic? Formal? Political? Sexual? The plays themselves answer in a variety of ways. Two of them, *Burnt Remains* by Scott Sharplin, and *Tales from the Hospital* by Trevor Schmidt, are alternative primarily in the formal sense. *Burnt Remains* is a genuinely experimental piece about violence, hatred, memory, technology, performance, and especially *writing*. It focuses on the morality of preserving Nazi hate literature and on the violence involved in putting marks on paper and on bodies. *Tales from the Hospital* consists of four monologues for women, offering another sort of alternative to “mainstream” theatre by providing leading roles for women, but also offering an alternative “environmental theatre” experience for audiences. It consists of a walking tour, room-by room, of a provincially mandated forced sterilization facility operating in Alberta between 1927 and 1973. The audience meets two patients and two nurses in what promises to be an incisive political critique, but it is perhaps ultimately too oblique to offer more than a staging alternative.

*My Perfect Heaven* by Jonathan Christenson and Joey Tremblay and *Sacred Time* by Brian Webb are alternative in both form and sexuality. *My Perfect Heaven* is a gay prairie gothic fantasia of abjection about cowboy homophobia transformed by dreams and visions into something of great queer beauty. On the other hand, as an interdisciplinary dance/theatre piece, *Sacred Time* offers a dance-of-death involving a hunter, an elk, and a gay man, followed by a movement-based urban stalker tale, the two halves linked by their focus on the “sacred time” between life and death and the sacred bond between the hunter and his [sic] prey. An intriguing formula-

tion of a sensibility that is both stereotypically gay and stereotypically Albertan, the piece relies on a violent dance that is only described and an improv that is only annotated, and, regrettably, much of the impact is lost in print.

Four of the plays in the collection are alternative primarily in their representation of “alternative” (to white malestream) Albertan cultures or ethnicities, two of them First Nations. “*As Long as the Sun Shines*,” by Christina Grant and Doug Dunn, is a somewhat clunky documentary about the signing of Treaty 8, while Anna Marie Sewell and Cathy Sewell’s sister act, *Love’s Kitchen*, takes the form of a musical comedy with a corpse. The songs, on the page, seem somewhat intrusive in an otherwise Drew Hayden Taylor-ish First Nations sitcom that turns mystical when the corpse comes back in the form of a baby; but the dialogue is witty and the message both positive and prophetic. Elyne Quan’s *Surface Tension* is a Chinese Canadian monologue in which the central autobiographical subject eventually sheds the white paper dress onto which her self-images are projected throughout and dons her grandmother’s wedding dress, which fits her perfectly. Finally, and perhaps most alternatively for Alberta, is *La Maison Rouge*, an evocative and poetic Franco-Albertan memory play about violence and loss by Manon Beaudoin, published here both in French and in an English “tradaptation” by the author.

Finally, all of these plays are, in some senses, politically alternative. As the editors note, they cumulatively “open up physical, psychological, and semiotic space,” provide a “deliberately fractured, splintered, jagged picture of Alberta,” and implicate audiences in the action, often brutal, abusive, or treacherous. The volume is also generously and helpfully, if not always beautifully, illustrated. My only regret is that the collection refers in its title to the alternative Alberta’s of the plays’ subject matter, but

only represents, as its subtitle says, “Experimental Drama in Edmonton.” Many of us from outside the province don’t know whether there are alternative Albertas in Lethbridge, Fort McMurray, or further afield, but I, for one, know that they exist in Calgary, and I miss them here.

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## Religious Quest

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**Robert D. Denham, ed.**

*Northrop Frye’s Notebooks and Lectures on the Bible and Other Religious Texts.* U of Toronto P  
\$125.00

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Reviewed by Barbara Pell

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This is Volume 13 in one of the largest and most impressive editorial projects ever undertaken in Canada: *The Collected Edition of the Works of Northrop Frye*. Robert Denham, one of the seven main editors and a specialist in Frye’s Notebooks and Diaries, has already edited seven of the previous twelve volumes in the series. His “Preface” outlines the contents of this volume: eleven holograph notebooks (photographs of Frye’s writing demonstrate how laborious the transcriptions must have been) and three sets of typed notes. Most of this material dates from the 1970s, when Frye was working on *The Great Code*, but the first notebook is from the late 1940s, and the last two are, respectively, from the mid-1980s (material for *Words with Power*) and the 1960s (readings of Dante’s *Purgatorio* and *Paradiso*). The volume concludes with a transcript of twenty-four lectures on “Symbolism in the Bible,” drawn from the famous Victoria College course that Frye taught from the mid-1940s until his death in 1991 and originally printed in a teaching manual to accompany a video series of Frye’s 1981–82 lectures.

Denham’s “Introduction” clearly outlines how the Notebooks reflect Frye’s mental processes of “convergent causation”: non-linear, often repetitive ideas that eventually

help him discover the imaginative patterns and links that order “the archetypes of his mental landscape.” Denham gives examples of Frye’s “elaborate organizing schemes” based on numerology, the Great Doodle (the monomyth), and the ogdoad (his “eight-book fantasy”). But, according to Denham, Frye’s “unity of vision,” his whole imaginative “superstructure” is based on his own “religious quest.” Though not conventionally religious, Frye opposed “what he spoke of as the century’s three A’s: alienation, anxiety, absurdity” with a belief in “the myth of God, which is the myth of identity.” While Frye’s “mythological framework” was “inescapably conditioned” by classical and Christian traditions, his notebooks indicate the wide variety of religious sources (including “Eastern myth and metaphor”) from which he drew his “grand narrative.”

Over two-thirds of Frye’s text is comprised of his Notebooks and Notes. Each Notebook begins with Denham’s literary detection (based on contemporary references and different pen nibs) to establish the dates of the entries and indicate their contribution to Frye’s concurrent scholarly project. While it is somewhat tedious to read straight through the 400 pages (consisting of short, unconnected paragraphs), this work is a treasure-trove for scholars who will study the parts to discover the whole of Frye’s literary genius and analyze the laborious and frequently-revised sources of his elaborate archetypal schemes. However, even a cursory reading reveals Frye’s prodigious intellect, encyclopedic knowledge (of literature, comparative religions, and popular culture), and delightfully iconoclastic (and frequently profane) personality. In these Notebooks one hears Frye’s honest, unpretentious voice and his wry, self-deprecating humour—on pedagogical integrity: “your primary duty is to plug the gaps in your reading as soon as possible and in the meantime avoid distracting your students’ attention from their

own ignorance to yours”; and on literary reputations: “imagine Frazer, undoubtedly one of the stupidest bastards who ever put pen to paper, getting *The Golden Bough* inspiration! And in this age of copyrights and private property we’re stuck with him.” Frye also demonstrates the wisdom of teaching and love of literature that his students (including myself) revered: “Doubtless some lectures do or don’t come off, but in the act of vision the response is unpredictable. Some see, some don’t see; some see something else, very intensely; some see nothing for hours and then suddenly come to.”

In the final third of this text, Frye’s “Lectures on the Bible” illustrate both the medium and the message (to borrow the words of his rival, Marshall McLuhan) of his life’s work and demonstrate the basis for *The Great Code*. His premise for the course, developed in the first twelve lectures, is “the unity of the narrative of the Bible and the unity formed by its recurrent imagery.” The second half of the course deals with the stages of biblical revelation: Creation, revolution, law, wisdom, prophesy, gospel, and apocalypse. While most of these archetypal structures are familiar to Frye scholars, his clear exposition, comprehensive literary and biblical allusions, cadences of oral delivery, and wry humour again make delightful reading.

The scholarly apparatus for this volume is clear and comprehensive (although the “Chronology” is oddly abbreviated). Denham has provided biblical references in brackets throughout the Notebooks, and the “Endnotes” connect Frye’s jottings to the vast body of his readings and writings. Although not intended at this price or length (740 pages) for casual perusal, this work fulfills its mandate as “an invaluable addition to any literary or religious scholar’s library.”




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## Romans de jeunesse

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**Sylvie Desrosiers**

*Je suis Thomas*. La courte échelle \$8.95

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**Bertrand Gauthier**

*Bonne année, Ani Croche*. La courte échelle

\$8.95

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**Marthe Pelletier**

*Une lettre pour Nakicha*. La courte échelle \$8.95

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Comptes rendus par Anne M. Rusnak

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Depuis la publication des *Histoires ou Contes du temps passé avec Moralités* de Charles Perrault en 1697, deux termes définissent les axes constitutifs de la littérature jeunesse, à savoir didactisme et divertissement. Aussi lit-on dans la préface: « pour les instruire et les divertir tout ensemble. » Ainsi, depuis ses origines, les œuvres destinées aux jeunes expriment ce double souci de la part des adultes. Les romans socioréalistes, qui sont en vogue au Québec depuis les années 1980, sont destinés à inculquer des connaissances et des valeurs aux jeunes tout en reflétant la société contemporaine dans laquelle ce jeune lectorat évolue. Ce n’est pas que l’œuvre destinée à la jeunesse doive être ouvertement éducative mais elle a une valeur formative. La littérature jeunesse a un rôle fondamental dans la formation intellectuelle, culturelle, morale et esthétique de l’enfant.

Les trois romans qui font l’objet de ce compte rendu—*Je suis Thomas* de Sylvie Desrosiers, *Bonne Année, Ani Croche* de Bertrand Gauthier et *Une lettre pour Nakicha* de Marthe Pelletier—sont empreints de ce didactisme parfois à peine voilé. Ils sont tous publiés par la maison d’édition La courte échelle, l’une des maisons d’édition les plus importantes au Québec en littérature jeunesse. Depuis les années 1980, la littérature jeunesse s’est inscrite dans le courant socioréaliste, favorisant une représentation dite « objective » de la réalité. En fait, l’étiquette « l’éditeur de

romans miroirs » a longtemps été apposée à La courte échelle. Par conséquent, au lieu de chercher l'*aventure* ailleurs, dans un pays lointain, un milieu étranger, un monde fantaisiste, les jeunes lecteurs la rencontrent dans leur foyer, à l'école, au coin de la rue. Puisque la famille et l'école constituent des aspects très importants du quotidien de l'enfant, l'histoire se déroule sinon à l'école, alors auprès d'un parent ou d'un grand-parent. Les thèmes, comme celui de la famille monoparentale, sont résolument d'actualité; les parents dans ces trois romans, qu'il s'agisse de parents biologiques ou adoptifs, sont divorcés. Les thématiques privilégiées sont les difficultés des relations familiales, la vie à l'école, la quête de l'identité et l'amitié. Les trois romans sont des romans intimistes qui prennent pour sujets les sentiments confus de leurs personnages principaux. Le temps est celui des vacances, temps privilégié qui convient mieux que tout autre à la poursuite de l'*aventure*. L'heureuse fin est caractéristique de ces romans publiés au Québec pour les enfants âgés de sept à douze ans, puisqu'elle renvoie à un souci d'éducation.

Ce qui est aussi caractéristique des enfants de cet âge-là, c'est leur engouement pour le héros sériel. Loin de se lasser des similitudes d'un récit à l'autre, le lecteur est très content de retrouver son héros préféré. Par conséquent, les séries sont particulièrement fréquentes dans les collections destinées aux jeunes de sept à douze ans, l'âge auquel les enfants collectionnent tout. Bien qu'ils puissent être lus indépendamment les uns des autres, les romans sériels présentent le(s) même(s) personnages dans des intrigues ou des situations différentes. A quelques exceptions près, tous les romans publiés aux éditions La courte échelle font partie d'une série.

La lisibilité de ces romans tient à leur rythme narratif, c'est-à-dire à l'alternance des dialogues et des monologues avec les commentaires et les descriptions. Dialogues

et monologues occupent une place importante dans les récits destinés à la jeunesse. Ils encouragent l'identification du lecteur au narrateur-personnage en réduisant la distance entre les deux. Deuxièmement, par le style direct, ils permettent au personnage principal de se faire connaître, se confier ses points de vue, ce qui facilite l'adhésion du jeune lecteur à son héros. Inutile d'insister sur le fait que le jeune lecteur, attaché aux personnages romanesques auxquels il s'identifie le plus, attend avec impatience le prochain épisode.

Alors, regardons de plus près chacun de ces trois romans.

Sylvie Desrosiers sait écrire des romans dont les jeunes raffolent. Sa célèbre série *Notdog*, traduite en plusieurs langues, se lit en Chine et en Grèce. Avec le premier titre de la série *Thomas*, intitulé *Au revoir, Camille!*, Sylvie Desrosiers a remporté en l'an 2000 le prix international remis par la Fondation Espace-Enfants, en Suisse, qui couronne « le livre que chaque enfant devrait pouvoir offrir à ses parents. »

*Je suis Thomas*, le quatrième titre de cette série, paraît dans la collection « Premier Roman », destinée aux lecteurs de sept à neuf ans. La courte échelle a lancé cette collection dans les années 1980 pour combler le vide entre l'album et un récit d'une centaine de pages. Grâce à une mise en page aérée, des chapitres courts, des phrases simples et de nombreuses illustrations, cette collection est un grand succès en librairie et en bibliothèque.

Dans ce quatrième roman, Thomas, un jeune garçon âgé de huit ans, est à la recherche de son identité. « Qui est vraiment Thomas? » se demande-t-il. Son corps est en train de changer, de se transformer; sa sexualité s'éveille. En se fixant sur ses cheveux qui poussent « anormalement », il se demande s'il ne se transformera pas « en quelque monstre ou personnage bizarre. » Ressemblerait-il à Samson, ce personnage biblique qui devait sa force surhumaine à sa

longue chevelure? Où qu'il aille, au dépanneur, au restaurant, en bateau, on le prend pour une fille. Ne sachant plus quoi faire, il rêve d'un « garçon sirène » et d'une « fille avec moustache ».

Ses questions ne se limitent pas à son corps mais touchent aussi à son âme. En vacances avec sa mère et sa petite sœur à Tadoussac, il avoue à sa mère qu'il ressent en lui le bien et le mal. « Les baleines auraient-elles une âme aussi? », lui demande-t-il. Allusions aux problèmes existentiels. Il s'identifie avec une baleine, surnommée « Loca, » dont la tête n'est pas bien formée. Sans prétendre tout savoir, sa mère répond de son mieux tout en admirant chez son fils la qualité d'avoir « le courage de poser des questions importantes. » Il finit pas demander à sa « bonne petite sœur » de lui couper les cheveux, ne craignant point que ce soit une Dalilia qui le livrera à ses ennemis.

La narration à la première personne dans le ton du journal intime, le style assez simple, l'emploi du présent, les personnages sympathiques, l'importance du dialogue : « Moi? Embrasser une fille? Jamais! », voilà les caractéristiques du « Premier Roman. » Les lecteurs débutants, aussi bien que leurs parents et leurs enseignants, seront contents de lire le quatrième mini-roman de cette série.

*Bonne Année, Ani Croche* est le septième roman de la série *Ani Croche* de Bertrand Gauthier, publié dans la collection « Roman Jeunesse. » Fondateur de la maison d'édition La courte échelle, Bertrand Gauthier écrit pour les jeunes depuis plus de vingt-cinq ans. Pour l'ensemble de sa carrière et sa contribution au monde de l'édition jeunesse au Canada, on lui a décerné en l'an 2003 le prix Claude-Aubry, la prestigieuse distinction d'IBBY-Canada, la section nationale canadienne de l'Union internationale pour les livres jeunesse. Auteur renommé, son œuvre attire des jeunes lecteurs partout à travers le monde. Ani Croche, personnage créé en 1985, est un favori auprès des jeunes de neuf à douze ans.

Il n'est pas étonnant qu'Ani Croche peuplé l'univers de la littérature québécoise depuis presque vingt ans. Cette Ani Croche dont les aventures ont été traduites en plusieurs langues et adaptées pour la télévision est une jeune fille drôle, déterminée et possessive. Puisque sa mère s'en va dans Les Grenadines avec son « Godzilla mal léché », Ani est obligée de fêter Noël et le Nouvel An avec son père et « la despotique Elizabeth », « l'insupportable mère de son enfant ». Les jeunes de famille divorcée reconnaîtront sans doute quelques-unes de leurs peurs face aux nouvelles liaisons qui menacent leurs relations avec leurs parents. Dans ce roman, c'est le père qui est le parent éducatif.

L'intérêt est maintenu du début à la fin par des descriptions originales et amusantes. Un style humoristique savoureux revêt les paroles et les actes les plus ordinaires d'une dimension romanesque. On s'en rend compte dès la première page. Ani, assise dans la salle de classe en fin d'après-midi, regarde l'aiguille de l'horloge : « Cette lambineuse se déplace au rythme des tortues géantes et plusieurs fois centenaires des îles Galápagos. » L'intention humoristique s'établit à travers l'usage de l'hyperbole. Face à l'école avec ses contraintes et ses impératifs surgit la force de l'imaginaire. L'école Les Rayons de Soleil devient Le Repaire des Primates où rôdent des « brutanosures » qui sentent mauvais. Depuis les années 1980, l'humour a pris une grande place dans la littérature jeunesse au Québec. Bertrand Gauthier a très bien compris que c'est un outil qui permet de donner du plaisir aux enfants tout en les initiant aux réalités du monde.

Comme on l'a déjà constaté, la littérature jeunesse est toujours à quelque degré formative. Dans ce roman, Bertrand Gauthier a aussi adopté une stratégie culturelle. Grâce à son père, Ani commence à comprendre l'importance de la tradition québécoise. A l'approche de Noël, elle

l'accompagne à une cabane en bois rond « où la fête bat son plein » : une de ces fêtes « du bon vieux temps si chères à mon père et à ses ancêtres ». Des leçons d'histoire s'ensuivent accompagnées de la cuisine québécoise. En matière de linguistique, elle se demande si c'est « typique de la tradition québécoise de remplacer les 'r' par des 'x' à la fin de certains mots ». À son avis, si l'on peut dire violoneux, chanceux ou ratoureux, « il serait illogique que coureux ne soit pas autorisé ». Le didactisme est à peine déguisé.

*Une lettre pour Nakicha* de Marthe Pelletier est le troisième titre d'une série qui connaît, lui aussi, un grand succès auprès des jeunes lecteurs. Professionnelle du cinéma documentaire, Marthe Pelletier s'est essayée avec succès à un public plus jeune. Le premier roman de cette série, *Chante pour moi, Charlotte*, publié dans la collection « Roman Jeunesse » de La courte échelle, a été mis en nomination pour le prix du Gouverneur général du Canada, ainsi que pour le prix Cécile-Gagnon en 2001.

À l'encontre des deux autres romans, la narration est à la troisième personne, ce qui permet aux trois personnages de confier plus facilement leurs émotions au jeune lecteur et ce qui permet un texte plus riche. Chaque personnage est bien individualisé et tous sont très attachants. La grand-mère Rosa a vécu un grand amour avec Sylvio, dont elle est maintenant veuve. Pour aider Max à accepter ses propres sentiments amoureux pour sa petite-fille Nakicha, la vieille dame lui demande de lui relire les lettres que son amoureux lui a écrites autrefois. Max, personnage principal de la série, est atteint de dystrophie musculaire. Il vit ses premiers émois amoureux. Quant à Nakicha, elle semble avoir hérité d'un don pour la clairvoyance.

Dans ce récit non linéaire, la ligne entre le rêve et la réalité se brouille parfois. C'est un roman d'amour aux accents poétiques. Le premier mot de ce roman—« Bleu »—qui est d'ailleurs la première phrase elliptique

est un mot tout à fait susceptible de provoquer des connotations multiples, des évocations. À travers la lecture, on découvre le plaisir savoureux de la langue. Plaisir subtil de la figure de style sur laquelle on s'arrête, qu'on décrypte et qui fait passer à un niveau plus profond de la lecture. Métaphores, comparaisons, allitérations, personnifications abondent. Nakicha a l'impression que « le rêve rôde dans la maison »; quand elle ferme les yeux, « le sifflement d'un train assassine le silence », « ce train bizarre qui prend mon esprit pour une gare ». La musique de la langue, la richesse des images rendent ce texte très beau. Marthe Pelletier fait ressortir la magie du verbe.

Un dernier mot sur les illustrations. Ces trois romans au format de poche séduisent dès l'abord par l'éclat des couleurs de leur couverture. À l'intérieur, les illustrations sont en noir et blanc; celles-ci suivent pour la plupart le souci du réalisme et de la conformité au texte. Chose étonnante, elles sont aussi nombreuses dans la collection « Roman Jeunesse » que dans la collection « Premier Roman. »

À en juger par ces trois romans, La courte échelle a bien compris que la littérature jeunesse a un rôle fondamental dans la formation intellectuelle, culturelle, morale et esthétique de l'enfant.

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## Seeds in the Wind

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**James Doyle**

*Progressive Heritage: The Evolution of a Politically Radical Literary Tradition in Canada.* Wilfrid Laurier UP \$39.95

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Reviewed by Roxanne Rimstead

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The voices of writers from the Left in Canada have too often been lost to cultural memory, dispersed and forgotten like so many seeds in the wind. James Doyle addresses that forgetting in an unprecedented recovery of books, poems, and plays

written in a communist or anti-capitalist bent. As a reader's guide, *Progressive Heritage* is superb at contextualising literary works because it is informed by a sweeping knowledge of the Communist movement (especially in Canada, Russia and Eastern Europe), the Spanish Civil War, Stalinism, the Cold War, the persecution of members of the Communist Party in Canada, debates about literature within the Party, and the rise and fall of engaged leftwing journals (for instance, *Masses*, *New Masses*, *New Frontiers*, *Worker*, *Young Worker*, *Clarté*, *Canadian Labour Defender*, *The Rebel*, *New Provinces*, *Clarion*, *Canadian Tribune*, and *Canadian Forum*). Though wishing to redress an imbalance in Canadian literary criticism resulting from the exclusion of a number of these voices "who were unjustly condemned or ignored because of their political beliefs" (298), the author wastes little time on bitterness. He is more interested in undoing misconceptions that resulted from the reign of "art-for-art's-sake" than in berating the source of these normative literary values. (But there are a few well-aimed swipes at Northrop Frye's reactionary stance toward social realism and Marxist criticism in Canada.)

Younger scholars will be interested in this work because it has its finger on the pulse of what was and still is one of the most taboo subjects in Canadian culture: the silencing and devaluing of voices speaking out against capitalist and corporate hegemony. Veteran scholars will welcome Doyle's counter history and draw up a list of books and poems we should know more about. My own begins with poems by Joe Wallace (*Night is Ended*), two novels by Jean-Jules Richard (*Le Journal d'un hobo* and *Neuf jours de haine*), and a novel and play by Trevor Maguire (*O Canada: A Tale of Canadian Workers' Life* and *Unemployed*), a social realist novel by Tom Allen (*This Time a Better Earth*), and anthologies of non-fiction and an oral his-

tory by Margaret Fairley (*The Spirit of Canadian Democracy* and "The Autobiography of a Working Woman").

A unifying thread throughout the study is the retrieval of lesser-known voices from the Communist Party (Wallace, Carter, Ryan, for instance) or among communist sympathizers in order to place them beside better-known figures (for example, Machar, Livesay, Callaghan, Ryerson, Klein, Kreisel, Lemelin, Roy, Acorn, Mathews, Salutin, and Ryga). Not all these "progressive" writers portrayed communism as the solution to social injustice—some were "fellow travellers"—but Doyle traces the cross-fertilization of ideology among them and their shared radical project of cultural critique. The corpus includes genres of anti-capitalist writing above and beyond the standard proletarian fare: for example, male adventure novels, pacifist and anti-war literature, modernist poetry, satire, essays on political and historical thought, social gospel novels, working-class women's writing, agitprop workers' theatre, memoirs, a wide range of varieties of social realism, travel writing, and biographical material on rebels such as Norman Bethune and Louis Riel. Some of the most sensitive passages are reserved for readings of works by favourites such as Dorothy Livesay and Milton Acorn, but fully half of the study is devoted to recovering the work of lesser-known writers in historical context. True, there are some surprising absences of writers who launched powerful critiques against class privilege and materialism in Canadian writing, Marxist or not: for example, Hugh Garner, Adele Wiseman, Mavis Gallant, Margaret Laurence, David Adams Richards, Makeda Silvera, Pierre Vallières, Rolf Knight, and Sheldon Currie, to name just a few. But the study is an overview, not an index. Oddly, the cover art (*Talking Union*) imprints on the text a somewhat dated image of Marxist discourse as a closed circle of men in a darkened tavern, talking

politics over beer. Yet the study itself opens to works by numerous women writers and critics (for instance, Margaret Fairley, Irene Baird, Helen Potrebenko, Pat Lowther, Dorothy Livesay, Miriam Waddington, and Sharon Stevenson), noting the impact of feminists on the New Left.

With a sincere and engaged writing style, Doyle renders this version of a radical tradition accessible to the uninitiated and unconverted. He describes with theoretical sophistication ongoing debates about cultural politics and literature (the role of intellectuals, artists, and populism in revolution, the aesthetics of introspection versus didacticism and social awareness, individualism versus collectivism, and the wide range in practices of social realism). He also describes the choices made by writers such as Livesay and Acorn over the span of a lifetime, including the waning of their belief in party politics. When the lens turns toward writers of the New Left in the final chapter (for example, Mathews, Potrebenko, Acorn, Salutin, and Ryga), Doyle concludes that although they eschewed party politics, they raised doubts, explored questions central to radical politics, and offered new possibilities. In reading literary texts and styles across the decades, he strives not to reprimand authors who strayed from a fixed radical credo, but rather to discuss the ideological implications of their literary choices in the context of their times. We need a retrospective such as this one in the context of our own times to trace where the winds of change have blown the seeds of radicalism.




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## Strategic Orientalisms

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**Dominika Ferens**

*Edith & Winnifred Eaton: Chinatown Missions and Japanese Romances.* U of Illinois P \$57.75

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**Onoto Watanna, author; Linda Trinh Moser and Elizabeth Rooney, eds.**

*"A Half Caste" and Other Writings.* U of Illinois P \$28.95

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Reviewed by Janice Brown

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The Eaton sisters, Edith and Winnifred, born to a Chinese mother and English father and raised in Canada, are the focus of inquiry for Dominika Ferens in her excellent critical study, *Chinatown Missions and Japanese Romances*, while Linda Trinh Moser and Elizabeth Rooney (Winnifred's great-granddaughter) have assembled the first ever selection of stories and essays by the flamboyant Winnifred (aka Onoto Watanna) in *"A Half Caste" and Other Writings*.

Despite the early twentieth-century successes of the two sisters who wrote against racial and cultural discrimination, their work was largely forgotten until re-discovery in the early 1980s. In an ironic reversal of fortunes, the formerly wildly popular Winnifred fared less well at the hands of late twentieth-century critics than her more sober sister, Edith. Contemporary critics found entirely praiseworthy Edith's serious-minded melodramas treating the plight of Chinese immigrants while Winnifred, who chose to deny her Chinese origins and pass as Japanese with the weirdly concocted name of Onoto Watanna, was accused of falseness and "inauthenticity." Even though Winnifred was the first novelist of Asian descent to be published in North America, Edith came to be known as the "mother of Asian American fiction."

Moser and Rooney's selections of Onoto Watanna's texts highlight the irony of a writer who invoked racial stereotype to sell her work and make a living for herself and



her family yet at the same time managed to undercut, satirize, and critique the orientalist discourse she elected to employ.

The title story, "A Half-Caste" (1899), for example, might be read today as a proto-feminist parody of *Madame Butterfly*.

Winnifred devises her own Butterfly, a half-American, half-Japanese geisha, sent to perform for a wealthy American businessman. Unlike *Madame Butterfly*, however, Kiku-san is outspoken, stubborn, and rude; once she sets eyes on the American, she refuses to dance. In the surprising denouement, we learn that the businessman is none other than Kiku-san's father, who had abandoned her Japanese mother many years before. What the story lacks in depth, and accuracy (the attempt to reproduce Kiku's Japanese accent reads like someone with a serious head cold speaking bad pidgin: "I nod lig' to danze for you") is offset by the feisty heroine and her resistance to assumptions about race, family, gender, and culture.

Moser's introduction is first-rate, detailing Winnifred's simultaneous support and subversion of Asian stereotypes; indispensable is Rooney's unearthing of manuscripts at the University of Calgary as well as in her family's possession. Given such fine work, one does wonder at the inattention to the Japanese language and other cultural information as presented by Winnifred. The numerous outrageous mistakes and glaring inaccuracies, some perhaps the result of Winnifred's misreadings of handwritten texts (e.g., Kawalake instead of Kawatake), require some explanation in a volume dedicated to the presentation of this writer's "Japanese" persona.

Readers wanting more will be able to turn to Dominika Ferens' excellent re-evaluation of each sisters' contribution to Asian American literature. Writing against the current notion that Edith was the more "authentic" and less commercially driven than her sister, Ferens develops a thesis of

the two Eatons' writings based on anthropological theories of ethnography and cultural salvage. Noting that both sisters made use of ethnic noms de plume (Edith wrote as Sui Sin Far), Ferens shows how the Eaton sisters sought acceptance and monetary compensation through their performance as "native" Asians. According to Ferens, the sisters' works were viewed by their contemporaries as writing that provided "a source of authentic knowledge about . . . an exotic 'race'" (i.e., China and Japan), and attempted to record that which was about to be erased by western technology and colonialism.

Despite their identification with China and Japan, neither Edith nor Winnifred ever visited Asia. Instead, the sisters borrowed from contemporary writings by missionaries (Edith) and travelers (Winnifred), the most prominent sources at the time for such information. Ferens discusses in wonderful detail the development and construction of western conceptualizations of "China" and "Japan" as well as concomitant notions of "race" and "culture," which grew out of writings by missionaries in China and travelers to Japan. Travel narratives about Japan, for example, displayed "an idealizing, feminizing, and occasionally eroticizing vision of the Japanese," which, according to Ferens, helped create a space for Winnifred as a "Japanese" writer, allowing her to step into "an already scripted role, that of an exotic female entertainer."

Ferens and Moser and Rooney are to be heartily congratulated for these two superb volumes on the Eatons. Informative and reflective, thoughtful and thought-provoking, both volumes open new possibilities for reading and writing about Asian American literature, and for (re)considering the discourse of orientalism and its role in the development of personal and literary strategies for self-expression, social critique, and survival.

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## Oublis à réparer

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**Jacques Fortin**

*L'Aventure: Récit d'un éditeur.* Québec Amérique  
\$24.95

**Chantale Gingras**

*Victor Barbeau: Un réseau d'influences littéraires.*  
L'Hexagone \$24.95

**Catherine Bouchard**

*Les Nations québécoises dans L'Action nationale:  
De la décolonisation à la mondialisation.* PU  
\$18.00

**Daniel Chartier**

*Les Études québécoises à l'étranger Problèmes et  
perspectives.* Nota bene \$8.95

Comptes rendus par Réjean Beaudoin

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Les quatre livres appartiennent à la catégorie des bilans ou des inventaires, mais la diversité des lieux revisités n'offre pas d'autre convergence que celle de leur voisinage sur ma table de lecture. Ce sont les réalisations d'un éditeur présentées par lui-même; des hommages à la mémoire d'un écrivain oublié; la compilation des discours relatifs à l'émergence de l'idée de la nation québécoise dans les pages d'une revue nationaliste depuis 1960; enfin un guide des études québécoises à l'étranger. De prime abord, le rapport n'a rien d'évident. Mais qui sait ce qui peut se cacher sous la couverture d'un livre?

Jacques Fortin préside aux destinées de la maison Québec/ Amérique depuis qu'il l'a fondée, il y a trente ans. L'éditeur ne fait pas montre de modestie exagérée dans son livre (*L'Aventure. Récit d'un éditeur*). L'homme d'affaires a fait une fructueuse carrière en mettant l'industrie québécoise du livre à l'heure du *best seller* et de l'organisation mondiale du commerce transfrontalier.

Le génie d'un grand éditeur consiste à savoir choisir ses poulains et servir le succès de leurs livres. Il faut être à l'affût de tous les courants qui passent et se trouver au bon endroit au bon moment. Affaire de pot et de flair. Esprit aguerri et échine souple.

S'oublier soi-même dans la poursuite inlassable du nouveau souffle et de l'inédit à mettre en vente. Jacques Fortin a propulsé et promu une brochette de vedettes, auteurs à grands tirages et à la prolixité intarissable, plumes qui vendent gros et qui s'adaptent aux lois changeantes du marché, c'est-à-dire aux interfaces des chaînes multimedia. Ici le livre se plie à la série télévisée comme au cinéma. C'est la littérature de grande surface et personne ne songe à bouder le succès populaire. C'est une tempête de publicité dans une goutte d'encre. Cent mille dollars d'avance en droits d'auteur pour un manuscrit qui n'existe pas encore, ce n'est pas une chose exorbitante pour Jacques Fortin. C'est comme cela qu'il a publié les mémoires de René Lévesque (*Attendez que je me rappelle*) qui trouvait la somme un peu ... rondelette. Céline Dion, elle, a eu le culot de refuser sa biographie à Québec/Amérique.

Pour Jacques Fortin, les lecteurs ne se définissent pas comme une caste secrète, tapie dans l'ombre du cabinet. Non. Hors du placard. Le public est vaste et il a l'estomac robuste. L'éditeur raconte ses coups d'éclat réussis ou ratés; il ne nous laisse rien ignorer de ses rapports avec ses collègues et ses auteurs. Il devient lyrique à détailler, année après année, l'histoire de la croissance de sa maison, ce qui se pardonne aisément à tous les pères fondateurs. Au fait, quelle est la conception de la littérature qui se dégage de l'entreprise de Jacques Fortin? Sur ce point, le livre se fait plutôt discret.

Chantale Gingras pose une question pertinente en se demandant pourquoi une figure majeure du vingtième siècle québécois, qui s'est éteinte en 1994, pourquoi un écrivain consacré et influent jusqu'à la Révolution tranquille, un agent institutionnel des plus respectés, pourquoi, en somme, le nom de Victor Barbeau n'a-t-il pas été retenu au nombre des gloires littéraires du siècle dernier. L'homme appartient à la génération de Ringuet, d'Alfred DesRochers et

de Claude-Henri Grignon. La même question s'appliquerait avec autant d'intérêt à ceux-ci qu'à Émile Coderre et à Berthelot Brunet. L'enquête qu'a menée Chantale Gingras sur la correspondance de Victor Barbeau fait clairement ressortir l'envergure du personnage et l'autorité exercée par le critique du *Nationaliste* et le chroniqueur des *Cahiers de Turc*. Cette étude montre également quel rôle de conseiller écouté et de premier lecteur il a joué auprès d'un grand nombre d'écrivains comme Marie LeFranc, Rina Lasnier et Gabrielle Roy, pour ne retenir que les noms consacrés.

Le portrait de l'homme et du professeur (Victor Barbeau enseignait à l'École des Hautes Études commerciales), de l'essayiste et de l'animateur social compose la figure d'un personnage complexe et contrasté, paradoxal et tranchant, parfois sévère, souvent chaleureux, jamais complaisant, toujours d'une franchise à la fois attendue et redoutée. Il a été l'arbitre des doutes et des ambitions intimes de ses pairs et de ses disciples. Il savait user de délicatesse et de ménagement dans les rapports personnels tout en conservant son franc parler sur la place publique. Le statut de sa magistrature lettrée semble avoir reposé essentiellement sur le respect consenti par les acteurs du milieu intellectuel. Fondateur de revues et de sociétés littéraires (il a fondé l'Académie canadienne-française en 1944), homme à tout faire de l'institution, conférencier en demande, émule laïque des abbés Camille Roy et Lionel Groulx, il a peu apprécié, comme ce dernier, l'héritage de la Révolution tranquille. Comme lui aussi, il expie maintenant ce crime au purgatoire.

Presque cinquante ans de prose nationaliste dans une revue qui se nomme *L'Action nationale* et dont l'origine remonte à *L'Action française* de Lionel Groulx, il va sans dire qu'une telle quantité de pages ne peut être que féconde en définitions de la nation en question. Celle-ci se montre d'autant plus définissable qu'elle hésite

indéfiniment sur le point délicat de son statut politique, ce qui n'est pas un détail négligeable, il faut bien l'admettre, pour une nation. Cette enquête de Catherine Bouchardeau (*Les Nations québécoises dans L'Action nationale*) se fonde sur l'évolution rapide des recherches les plus actuelles en science politique. Les études récentes tendent à reconfigurer substantiellement le concept de nation, qui ne peut plus se contenter de reposer sur la mémoire collective d'un seul groupe homogène, fût-il saisi en termes linguistiques, ethnologiques, ou culturels. Dans le nouveau contexte d'un monde sans frontières politiques au plan du commerce, du transport, et des communications, la nation (re)devient une notion problématique.

L'auteure veut comprendre "comment les intellectuels des années 1960 à 1990, publiant des textes dans *L'Action nationale*, ont . . . pensé la nation québécoise." Les discours recensés sur le sujet sont classés et analysés selon des variables qui correspondent aux différentes modulations suivantes: communautarisme ou libéralisme, selon le choix de privilégier la collectivité ou les droits individuels dans la définition retenue de la nation; primordialisme ou modernisme, selon le rapport que celle-ci entretient avec la tradition et le passé historique. Telles sont les catégories du cadre théorique qui permet la comparaison et l'interprétation du corpus. L'ouvrage confère ainsi une grande cohérence aux textes étudiés tout en produisant un effet de rapprochement certain entre les intellectuels québécois qui élaborent le discours nationaliste et ce que la recherche actuelle nous apprend des rapides transformations de l'idée de nation dans le monde. On en retient l'impression frappante que les promoteurs du souverainisme québécois ont eu généralement les yeux tournés vers la lanterne éclairée des sciences politiques. C'est sans doute une déformation inhérente à toute recherche bien menée et fermement arrimée à ses postulats.

L'enquête débouche graduellement sur la constatation du caractère polymorphe, sans perversité apparente, du nationalisme québécois de la dernière décennie du xx<sup>e</sup> siècle. Le pluralisme relevé dans les idées en circulation cherche à solutionner une question malaisée: comment concilier l'inévitable qualité inclusive d'une conception moderne de la nation avec le récit de fondation lié à la seule mémoire collective des Québécois francophones? Tel est l'enjeu récurrent de tous les discours sur le sujet.

Ce compte rendu ne prétend pas faire justice à une enquête qui exigerait plus d'espace que nous ne pouvons lui en accorder dans ces pages. On notera en terminant que les travaux sur la question nationale se sont fait nombreux et denses depuis quelque temps. Cet achalandage trahit-il une crise de la pensée nationaliste ou manifeste-t-il, au contraire, sa réactualisation dans le nouveau contexte de la mondialisation? Si les recherches ne résolvent pas cette question, ce n'est pas qu'elles tentent de l'esquiver. Notons en passant le livre de Jacques Beauchemin (*L'Histoire en trop La mauvaise conscience des souverainistes québécois*, vlb éditeur, 2002) et celui de Dorval Brunelle (*Dérive globale*, Boréal, 2003), deux éclairages qui contribuent à la compréhension du débat.

Pour compléter ces bilans de divers ordres, je mentionne finalement un petit livre d'une incontestable utilité: *Les Études québécoises à l'étranger* de Daniel Chartier offre un répertoire des lieux et un carnet d'adresses des centres de recherches en études québécoises partout dans le monde. L'auteur présente aussi une intéressante synthèse du développement de ces études hors-Québec, une réflexion sur leur évolution, et une analyse des différents contextes qui les favorisent ou les limitent aux plans institutionnel, méthodologique, et parfois politique. On peut regretter l'absence d'un index et d'une bibliographie, ce qui aurait certainement facilité la

consultation, mais la composition et la présentation matérielle de l'ouvrage sont, par contre, d'une commodité exemplaire.

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## Lost in Transit

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**Douglas Glover**

*Elle*. Goose Lane \$21.95

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Reviewed by Herb Wylie

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Among my favourite parts of historical novels is the acknowledgments, and Douglas Glover, in his Governor-General's-Award-winning *Elle*, does not disappoint. After crediting a wide array of ethnographic sources and contemporary travel journals that fed the imaginative fire for this ribald, irreverent tale of French explorers in the New World in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, Glover adds, "Otherwise, I have tried to distort and mangle the facts as best I can." And what a delightful mangling it is.

The majority of the historical fiction published in Canada over the last few decades has by and large striven to preserve a sense of narrative and historical plausibility, sticking if not to what ostensibly did happen in the past, then at least to what might have happened. Glover's *Elle*, in contrast, is a wild, bawdy, allegorical, and conspicuously anachronistic chronicle of the experience of contact during French exploration of Eastern Canada during the 16<sup>th</sup> century, a kind of cross between Susan Swan's *The Biggest Modern Woman of the World* and John Steffler's *The Afterlife of George Cartwright*. Taking the rough outlines of his narrative from the story of the historical Sieur de Roberval's abandonment of his wayward niece on the Isle of Demons in the St. Lawrence River, Glover etches a tale of contact as a mutual infection, a reciprocal destabilization of New World and Old World cosmologies.

Dreaming of creative revenge against her rigid and doctrinaire Calvinist uncle, Glover's eponymous heroine watches her

lover, nurse, and newborn son perish, while she herself, a parodic Crusoe, stubbornly persists. The novel is rich in postcolonial allegory, with Glover deftly satirizing Elle's colonizing inclinations as she ineptly struggles to survive the harsh Canadian winter with the help of her impassive indigenous rescuer and lover, Itslk. Elle, however, is also transmogrified, shamanistically imbued with a bear-spirit, an experience that challenges Itslk's cosmology but also leaves Elle in a liminal space upon her rescue and return to France (where presiding over her recovery is none other than François Rabelais, clearly the resident muse of Glover's novel). Hers, as Elle observes, is "the anti-quest: You go on a journey, but instead of returning you find yourself frozen on the periphery, the place between places, in a state of being neither one nor the other."

Glover thus portrays contact as a transaction much more complicated than a simple, unilateral imposition of colonial power, but the particular appeal of *Elle* is Glover's evocation of the simultaneous, tumultuous transformation of the Old World—the philosophical, spiritual and political turmoil of France at the cusp of modernity, a phantasmagorical vision of inquisitorial violence, barbarity, lust and carnage. Riotously funny and iconoclastic, Glover's novel is also a profound meditation on the politics of belief—how belief shapes our view of the world and ourselves but also shapes our oppression of others.

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## War, Story, and Polemic

**J.L. Granatstein and Desmond Morton**

*Canada and the Two World Wars*. Key Porter

\$42.00

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Reviewed by Marlene Briggs

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Milestones such as the sixtieth anniversary of the Normandy landings (1944) guarantee brisk sales for publishers of timely books

on military subjects. Accordingly, *Canada and the Two World Wars* brings together two historical surveys first published in 1989, namely *Marching to Armageddon* and *A Nation Forged in Fire*. J. L. Granatstein and Desmond Morton specialize in research on the Second and First World Wars, respectively. Echoing accepted wisdom, these prolific collaborators pronounce the Second World War "a just war." They qualify views which regard the First World War as the redemptive occasion for Canadian nationhood. Throughout, Granatstein and Morton juxtapose domestic and international developments: their attention to local detail captures the nuances of total mobilization in Canada. For example, during the Second World War, German U-boats prowled the Gulf of St Lawrence and the fear of Japanese invasion galvanized British Columbians; in the previous war, soldiers in Berlin, Ontario (Kitchener) toppled the statue of Kaiser Wilhelm II and Russian internee Leon Trotsky awaited his release in Nova Scotia. Shifting from notorious ground battles such as Vimy Ridge (1917) and Verrières Ridge (1944), to the feats of air ace Billy Bishop and his successor George Beurling, who shot down almost 30 planes over Malta, *Canada and the Two World Wars* outlines the pivotal events and influential personalities which shaped the national contribution to the Allied cause.

In a new introduction, the outspoken historians urge closer military cooperation between Canada and the United States, a topical concern more appropriate to Granatstein's strident bestseller *Who Killed the Canadian Military?* In a similar vein, Granatstein and Morton reaffirm the necessity of Canadian participation in both World Wars. However, their invitation to debate this moot issue remains disingenuous: unlike many other popular histories for general audiences, *Canada and the Two World Wars* provides no explanatory notes.

And while dozens of remarkable black and white photographs enhance the text, formal credits for these images are missing from the appendix. Perhaps the co-authors exclude their scholarly apparatus in a bid to position themselves as accessible storytellers rather than arcane academics; *Marching to Armageddon* features many canonical writers including Ralph Connor, Charles Yale Harrison, Stephen Leacock, Nellie McClung, and John McCrae. Yet synoptic versions of the past necessarily privilege some events over others: for example, *A Nation Forged in Fire* devotes little space to the Nazi genocide or the Japanese internment, subjects which merit more substantial commentary. Unlike the comprehensive narrative produced by Granatstein and Morton, contemporary Canadian novels on the Second World War by Martha Blum, Dennis Bock, Kerri Sakamoto and others prioritize historical trauma and its unresolved legacies. At this juncture, then, the reissue of a general account, however informative or engaging, is both understandable and puzzling. Increasingly, the partial truths of fiction and the self-reflexive methods of scholarship supplant the undisclosed assumptions and the sweeping claims of conventional historiography on the World Wars.

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## Northeast of King

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**Kenneth J. Harvey**

*The Town That Forgot How to Breathe.*

Raincoast \$24.95

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Reviewed by Lawrence Mathews

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Ken Harvey is one of Newfoundland's most protean writers, as well as being one of its most prolific. Dipping into the pages of a new Harvey novel is like opening Forrest Gump's box of chocolates: you never know what you're going to get. And sometimes—to pursue the comparison—the information on the box is confusing.

In the case of *The Town That Forgot How to Breathe*, back-cover blurbs reference to Hitchcock, Garcia Marquez, Stephen King, *Beowulf*, and Virginia Woolf, a gamut running from the exaltedly literary to the unabashedly popular. This novel is closer to King's work than to that of the others. Readers looking for thematic profundity, depth and complexity of characterization, or language that transcends the efficiently utilitarian will be disappointed. But this is not to say that *The Town That Forgot How to Breathe* is unsuccessful on its own terms; it's a well-designed page-turner that has the makings of a big-time movie.

Set in the small fishing community of Bareneed, Newfoundland, the narrative begins innocuously enough. Some local residents are attacked by a mysterious respiratory disorder which baffles the local doctor whose patients become alarmingly disoriented, losing all sense of identity. Then other strange events begin to occur. Bizarre species of fish (such as a huge albino shark) show up in the harbour. A fisherman jigging for cod in his dory sees a mermaid. The well-preserved bodies of people drowned in earlier decades—and centuries—are washed up onto the beach. The military shows up in force and takes over the town. A fisheries officer from St. John's on holiday with his young daughter experiences an inexplicable urge to commit murder. The daughter makes friends with the girl next door, who turns out to be a ghost. And so on.

Harvey paces the narrative effectively, using about a dozen characters as focalizers, cutting from one story-line to another, gradually making the plot more complicated and baffling, until a cataclysmic natural disaster looms. The characters are, necessarily, somewhat simplistically conceived, but believable and sympathetic enough for this sort of fiction. And in the end, everything makes sense, a tribute to the author's ingenuity. If the explanation is somewhat

disappointing, that's not really Harvey's fault—such explanations, simply because they are required to “make sense,” invariably pale beside the mysteries they must demystify. It's a flaw intrinsic to the genre.

Unfortunately, the novel does fail at another level. A smugly Luddite epilogue expresses the naïve view that communal salvation for Bareneed (and, presumably, the rest of Newfoundland) lies in turning back the clock. But that material will disappear when *The Town That Forgot How to Breathe* hits the big screen. If the myriad opportunities for spectacular visual effects are properly exploited, they are what viewers will remember.

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## The Reel Deal

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**Elizabeth Hay**

*Garbo Laughs*. McClelland and Stewart, \$34.99

Reviewed by Donna Coates

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In *Garbo Laughs*, Elizabeth Hay's central character Harriet Browning, a struggling writer, teaches creative writing part-time. During a class discussion about what constitutes “good” fiction, one of her students asserts that readers want stories that appear to be, paradoxically, “not invented,” but drawn from “real life,” whether they are or not. That student might well be describing *Garbo Laughs*, for the characters and their dilemmas have a familiar ring. Children are bullied at school; unwelcome relatives arrive for extended stays; friends succumb to cancer; others suffer unrequited love and/or are tempted to have affairs. In a further emulation of “real life,” the novel also lacks a plot, for as Harriet, who is dubious of the convention, tells her students, “One thing often leads to the same thing. Or back to an earlier one. Or, more likely, to nothing at all.” Yet the story is far from static; within eighteen months of Hay's opening scene in November 1997, characters fall in and out of love, best friends move away,

loved ones die. Technology—especially the invention of the video, which allows for multiple viewings of movies (and which is now nearly obsolete)—plays a vital role in shaping lives. And this being Canada (the novel is set in Ottawa) and Hay's admission that she has “snow on the brain,” the weather—specifically the ice storm of 1998—also contributes to the events. Although “this most beautiful catastrophe” does not wreak the devastation it did in Quebec, it takes its toll nevertheless.

Like Chekhov, a writer Harriet admires, Hay does not make “too much or too little” of the changes her characters undergo; she merely “fits them into the ebb and flow of life.” Harriet also observes that the predictable patterns—tragedies must end in death and comedies in weddings—are mere artifice: Buster Keaton's comedies, for example, ended with a tombstone. Hay, too, subverts convention by ending her comic novel with death, but not in Hollywood tear-jerker fashion.

At first glance, however, Hay's central characters, the Gold family, appear to lead idyllic lives. Lew, a Jewish forty-something heritage architect whose work often takes him (and his lucky family) to exotic places such as Cuba is, as his name suggests, as “good as gold”: he is an excellent father, sex partner, and provider. But Lew worries that his adolescent son and daughter, both film addicts like their mother, are following the “same brainless path.” His fears prove unfounded, however, for movie mania has rendered his offspring precocious (although not in unctuous Hollywood fashion). Lew's other concern, that Harriet is so saturated with old movies, especially romances, that she no longer fits into this world—she refuses to do email, but writes dozens of unsent letters to her idol, Pauline Kael—is closer to the mark. Because he cannot compete with Gene, or Cary, or Sean, he cannot make his wife fall in love with him, and hence suffers from “Rhett

Butler's disease." Lew concurs, then, with Kael's comment, which serves as epigraph to the novel, that "We will never know the extent of the damage movies are doing to us." (As an avid film-goer, that statement gave me pause; as an untenured academic, so did Hay's observation that Lew and Harriet "look like the kind of professors who will never get tenure.")

But Hay also suggests that film deprivation leads to problems, for Harriet's "mournful countenance," her inability to relax or enjoy a good laugh, stem in large part from her stern Scottish parents' refusal to let her go to the pictures. Harriet thus resembles Greta Garbo (who took the name Harriet Brown whenever she wanted to go incognito). Garbo laughed infrequently—on film only once—and even then it had to be dubbed because no sound came out. For all of Harriet's gloominess (she wants to write a book titled *Mapping Canadian Self Doubt*) and her insomnia, an affliction she shares with a number of her eccentric (and equally movie-mad) neighbours (the novel might have been titled *Sleepless in Ottawa*), her observations on love, technology, Ottawa, Canadian politicians, teaching as a profession, and movie stars are droll, astute, and wickedly funny. I especially love her description of Jack Nicholson, an actor I, too, dislike: "he looks as if he is about to pick his nose and then show you the results." While comedies often lack sustaining power, this classic, by a real "writing star," deserves to be read and re-read.




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## Renegotiating the Peaceable Kingdom

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**Gabriele Helms**

*Challenging Canada: Dialogism and Narrative Techniques in Canadian Novels.* McGill-Queen's UP \$65.00

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Reviewed by Gordon Bölling

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When Julia Kristeva, Tzvetan Todorov, and other literary theoreticians introduced the writings of Mikhail M. Bakhtin to Western readers in the 1970s, they could not have foreseen just how influential the ideas of the Russian critic were very soon to become. The concepts of dialogism, the carnivalesque, heteroglossia, chronotope and other terms that are at the heart of Bakhtin's theories of literature are now central to modern literary theory and a plethora of studies apply Bakhtin's theoretical frameworks to literary texts; however, with the exception of a small number of articles, an in-depth analysis of Bakhtinian thought has so far been missing from the field of Canadian studies. This gap is now closed by Gabriele Helms' outstanding contribution to Canadian literary criticism. In *Challenging Canada: Dialogism and Narrative Techniques in Canadian Novels*, Helms combines a critical reading of Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of dialogism with the methodological framework of cultural narratology. At the center of the book are challenging interpretations of contemporary Canadian novels by Joy Kogawa, Sky Lee, Daphne Marlatt, Aritha van Herk, Jeanette Armstrong, Thomas King, and Margaret Sweatman.

Helms' point of departure is the observation that numerous "contemporary Canadian novels call into question ideas of Canada as a benign and tolerant country, 'a peaceable kingdom,' a country without a history of oppression, violence, or discrimination." Instead of defining Canada as a homogeneous entity, these recent novels



participate in a form of nation-building that represents Canada as a “multifaceted” and often “ambivalent” construction. In her lucid introduction, Helms convincingly argues that “novels are not simply reflections of social attitudes, caught in a one-directional relationship; rather, novels themselves contribute significantly to cultural attitudes and references and thus help to consolidate social visions or encourage resistance.” Drawing on Bakhtin’s concept of dialogism, she explores how contemporary Canadian novels stage the interaction of a multiplicity of voices and how this plurality of discursive practices leads to multi-centric and alternative literary constructions of Canada. In her readings of these texts as “resistance literature,” Helms supplements her critical engagement with Bakhtin’s theory of the novel with a narratological approach, an approach that is emphasized in her strategic use of the term “cultural narratology.” In its emphasis on the cultural embeddedness of narrative structures, a cultural narratology seeks to overcome the limitations of a more traditional analysis of narrative techniques: as Helms states, “The point is that, once narrative forms are seen as socially constructed, novels become valuable sources for cultural studies because their narrative forms provide information about ideological concepts and world views. Thus, the narratology conceptualized here is not an end in itself. In alliance with a cultural view, it enables us to identify and understand cultural experiences translated into, and meanings produced by, particular formal narrative practices.” Helms follows her introductory remarks with a chapter on Bakhtin’s theory of the novel and its reception by literary critics. This brief overview is to be commended for the clarity with which it outlines Helms’ understanding of Bakhtin’s key concepts. However, despite her enthusiasm for the work of Bakhtin, Helms always maintains a healthy critical distance, a distance that is

conspicuously missing from many other publications on the Russian theoretician.

Helms begins her insightful analysis of dialogism in the contemporary Canadian novel by examining the reconstruction of family histories in Kogawa’s *Obasan* and Lee’s *Disappearing Moon Cafe*. Engaging in dialogic relations with a multiplicity of perspectives, both novels extensively reflect on the process of storifying histories. *Obasan* challenges the truth-claims of written documents on the treatment of Japanese Canadians during and after the Second World War. In contrast, in its retelling of the history of the Wong family, Lee’s novel focuses primarily on a multitude of oral narratives. As Helms argues, the use of dialogism is in both cases intricately linked to the respective concepts of history underlying these two novels. Whereas *Obasan* is to be read as a revisionist novel that nevertheless accepts the possibility of writing the true version of historical events, *Disappearing Moon Cafe* is informed by a pluralistic understanding of historical knowledge. In her discussions of Marlatt’s *Ana Historic* and van Herk’s *Places Far from Ellesmere*, Helms focuses on processes of un/reading: “Both texts challenge fixed categories of reality, fiction, genre, gender, sexuality, and social discourse, showing how they have determined representations of women in history and literature. In their attempt to cross established borders, they deconstruct naturalized categories and offer alternative constructions from new perspectives.” Reading these experimental novels through the lens of such Bakhtinian concepts as dialogism and the chronotope, Helms concludes that Marlatt as well as van Herk perform “double movements in which every un/reading becomes a new reading, every untelling a new telling.” Acts of re-reading and the search for alternative self-representations are also at the heart of Armstrong’s *Slash* and King’s *Green Grass, Running Water*. Both Aboriginal writers employ a

variety of narrative strategies such as double-voicing and incorporating elements of oral storytelling to engage the reader dialogically. As Helms writes, “it is primarily the dialogism of these texts that counts on readers to be active in the process of locating choices beyond the familiar binaries and recognizing opportunities for Aboriginal self-determination.” In her reading of Sweatman’s fictionalized account of the Winnipeg General Strike of 1919, Helms stresses the aspect of the performative. As a polyphonic and hybrid historical novel, *Fox* “interrupts the pre-given, monumental narrative of the pedagogical by challenging its causality and monologism. In an open-ended, at times even careless, way the performative intervenes in the gaps, in the reaccentuations of incorporated genres, and speaks from in-between times and places.”

In her conclusion, Helms argues convincingly for the application of her methodological framework to the interpretation of additional novels such as Thomas Wharton’s *Icefields* and Tomson Highway’s *Kiss of the Fur Queen*. Rejecting Bakhtin’s pejorative views on poetry and drama, Helms further sketches the usefulness of dialogism in readings of Canadian verse, drama, and even cross-generic texts. *Challenging Canada* offers fascinating readings of Canadian fiction and is a significant contribution to the field of Bakhtinian studies.

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## Feminist Paradoxes

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**Jennifer Henderson**

*Settler Feminism and Race Making in Canada.*

U of Toronto P \$60.00

Reviewed by Marie-Thérèse Blanc

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Jennifer Henderson’s *Settler Feminism and Race Making in Canada* traces the textual and political positions of settler feminists Anna Jameson, author of *Winter Studies and Summer Rambles*; Theresa Gowanlock and Theresa Delaney, two captives during

the 1885 North-West Rebellion and the authors of *Two Months in the Camp of Big Bear*; and Emily Murphy, magistrate, author of the *Janey Canuck* books, and one of five women who successfully challenged women’s lack of personhood under Canadian law. The sole unpleasant element of Henderson’s work is its hardcover jacket, which features a black-and-white photograph of Murphy atop a horse, dressed as a spear-carrying and helmeted early Saxon. The image, captured at the 1919 Edmonton horse show, suggests a smug, albeit theatrical, superiority that may invite the derision of today’s readers. Yet as Henderson notes in her epilogue, the photograph is emblematic of the complex and, at times, paradoxical views of first-wave Canadian feminists.

Murphy’s battle for the personhood of Canadian women ended in 1929, when England’s Privy Council declared that the term “person” must include women. Although this facet of Murphy’s life is familiar to contemporary Canadians, what may be less well documented is her “benevolent imperialist feminis[m].” Henderson’s gloss on the photograph of Murphy dressed as an early Saxon clarifies Murphy’s views: Murphy’s Edmonton horse show costume “la[ys] claim to a double logic of sexual difference and racial superiority, signifying female difference in terms of the conquering might of the Saxons, and appropriating the biological heroism of the ‘Men of the North,’ by way of an ancestral association with a virile tribe.” Murphy’s nationalistic and somewhat paradoxical feminism is further reflected in her work. The mandate of her Edmonton Women’s Court, for instance, was to “protect” errant women who lacked “propriety,” a concept that Murphy’s *Janey Canuck* books identified with white, Anglo-Saxon Protestant liberalism.

Henderson infuses her study with a Foucauldian sense that the norms of a liberal and male-dominated society and government inevitably influence and regulate

liberating movements like feminism. Like Murphy, Anna Jameson, Theresa Gowanlock, and Theresa Delaney, are associated with normative liberalism and its Canadian outcome: self-government. They are known, as well, for their occasionally paradoxical feminism. For instance, Jameson seemingly negates female subjectivity when she sees in Canada an “arctic zone” that represents a natural opportunity for the re-education of the overly sensitive, frivolous European woman who can be of little use in a colonial setting. Henderson then delineates the debt that Theresa Gowanlock felt she must pay for her freedom from Métis captivity during the 1885 Rebellion. Following her insightful analysis of the 1886 Act for the Protection of Women and Girls, which required that victims of seduction prove their own chaste character, Henderson shows that Gowanlock’s published text amounts in fact to a seduction trial testimony. Although Gowanlock was spared sexual assault, her momentary slavery and confusion during captivity must be shown to have never marred her innocence or purity. Yet as Henderson argues, Gowanlock’s reluctant narrative ironically turns into a veritable act of agency as she insists on thus paying her debt to the white liberal society that freed, consoled, and protected her after her ordeal.

Henderson further demonstrates that early feminists at times failed to show solidarity with those in equally marginal positions. The nationalist settler feminists she studies can be condescending to First Nations people or to the Chinese in Canada, for instance. Their involvement in “race making” liberalism nonetheless fails to discredit them. Jameson, Gowanlock, Delaney, and Murphy are introduced as astute thinking women. Jameson ends her narrative in *Winter Studies and Summer Rambles* with the descent by canoe of a cataract that leaves her breathless and exhilarated. The descent symbolizes her decision to free herself at

last from the “politics of virtue” and the prohibitions with which women are faced in a liberal society. As part of the Famous Five, Emily Murphy, in turn, wrenches personhood from imperial law and hands it to Canadian women.

*Settler Feminism and Race Making in Canada* entrenches Canadian literary criticism in a new era. Henderson studies Canadian feminist texts in light of historical and archival documents of a legal and political nature. Although rigorously textual, her interdisciplinary project steers clear of thematic criticism, just as it avoids trendy theoretical paradigms. Her combined intrinsic and extrinsic approaches herald a nascent and welcome form of Canadian literary history, one that is courageously complex and respectfully critical of certain national institutions.

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## Community or Class in Ladysmith?

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**John R. Hinde**

*When Coal Was King: Ladysmith and the Coal-Mining Industry on Vancouver Island.* U British Columbia P \$29.95

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Reviewed by Sean T. Cadigan

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This book rejects western exceptionalism and cultural autonomy as useful in understanding the history of coal miners in Ladysmith between 1900 and 1914. Hinde emphasizes that complex relationships based on ethnicity and gender were as important as class in defining community in Ladysmith. He argues that miners’ skills and the shared dangers of the mines underwrote their solidarity and determination to unionize in confrontation with the mine operators of Ladysmith, the Dunsmuir. A strike in 1903, arising from their efforts to join the Western Federation of Miners, revealed that the miners desired improvement in their status in the community more than the overthrow of capitalism.

Rather than being members of a town polarized along class lines, coal miners lived alongside a middle class that also struggled against the Dunsmuirs in a company town. Although living in separate neighbourhoods, miners, particularly if English Protestants, found that their status as labour aristocrats allowed them some respectability in common with the middle class. Their quest for local respectability through better wages and working conditions led miners to support unions, but also made them exclusionary racists, who refused to organize Chinese workers at the mines. Miners pursued respectability by treating the Chinese as despicable lumpen proletarians.

This racism flared in the Great Strike of 1912–1914, as miners struggled for recognition of the United Mine Workers of America. The basic issue of the strike remained miners' desire for better incomes and working conditions. But a new moral consensus, defined by coal mining women's greater activism, identified strike breakers as one of the greatest threats to miners' efforts to improve their respectability in the community. Riots began in August 1913, and targeted Chinese workers. The riots misdirected miners' energy, offended middle-class notions of respectability, and provided the state with an excuse to overreact by using the military to crack down on the strikers, and to break the strike.

Hinde's community study is well researched and well grounded in Canadian working-class historiography. However, this book isolates the community of Ladysmith from the broader structures of capitalism. Hinde simplifies the relationship between European and Chinese workers as instances of the former's "cultural and, to a lesser extent, biological racism." He argues that the Chinese were no threat to miners, but provides abundant evidence that the Dunsmuirs wanted to use Chinese labour to lower their labour costs and serve as strike breakers. Racism was an intrinsic

part of late nineteenth-century capitalism and imperialism. It is unclear what in the community of Ladysmith should have allowed its workers to rise above such racism, or what warrants their blame for the crackdown that ended the Great Strike. This book's argument that Ladysmith coal miners did not have a socialist program for the end of capitalism overshadows its documentation of an impressive, community-based fight by miners and their women against capitalist exploitation. This fight foundered on community divisions, which reflected the structural problems of capitalism as much as problems within the working-class solidarity of Ladysmith.

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## Baroness Elsa and FPG

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**Paul Hjartarson and Tracy Kulba, eds.**

*The Politics of Cultural Mediation. Baroness Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven and Felix Paul Greve.*  
U of Alberta P \$29.95

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Reviewed by Rosmarin Heidenreich

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This handsome volume offers a systematic and coherent examination of cultural mediation that draws on contemporary critical theory as well as on the philosophical and aesthetic concepts of the nineteenth century relevant to the two "cultural mediators" on whom it is centred: New York Dada queen Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven and German writer and translator Felix Paul Greve, alias Canadian novelist Frederick Philip Grove.

The parameters of cultural mediation laid out in the introduction, namely translation, migration and institutional and social factors, illuminate both its synchronic and diachronic dimensions. The works of Greve/Grove and Elsa, emerge as paradigms of the "translated" individuals described by Rushdie in the singularly well-chosen epigraph (from *Imaginary Homelands*): both were diasporic in the cultural as well as the spatial sense; the

works of both were mediated by translation; and for both Elsa and Greve/Grove, the social conditions and political events experienced in North America determine the unfolding of their personal lives as well as the production of their works.

Hjartarson's and Kulba's invocation of Clifford Geertz's concept of "thick description" to characterize the complex interrelationships that come into play in cultural exchanges is extremely useful in identifying the various elements of the "contact zone" of diverse cultures as these elements pertain to the life and work of "the Baroness" and Greve/Grove.

The contributions on the Baroness focus on influences that gave rise to her extraordinary art, which Irene Gammel sees as an aggressive contesting of patriarchal bourgeois norms, a thesis supported not only by Elsa's biography (her rebellious mother) but also by the coherence of Gammel's interpretation of Elsa's work as a whole, for which she draws on feminist critical theory as well as on her impressive familiarity with the various European and North American art movements.

Richard Cavell's essay discusses Elsa's art following Robert Vischer's ideas of an aesthetics of "empathy," "a transference of our personal ego, one in which our whole personality . . . merges with the object," and argues that the architect August Endell, Elsa's first husband, was a more profound and immediate influence on his former pupil and wife than has hitherto been acknowledged.

In his contribution, Klaus Martens proposes another source for Elsa's work, arguing against the reductiveness of situating her artistic productions exclusively in the context of New York's Dada scene. Martens' systematic on-site research yields compelling evidence that Elsa's grounding in various types of theatrical performance, ranging from variety shows in Berlin to serious roles in classical dramas profession-

ally staged in Cottbus, equipped her to assume the striking poses and enact the parodic and highly allusive performances that characterized her work in New York. Martens further suggests that her linguistic shortcomings in English would have been turned to advantage in the *non-sens* of her Dada writings, which exhibit the same qualities of parody and allusiveness as her visual art and body performances. Given that Elsa moved in Berlin circles that overlapped with those of the poet, dramatist and painter Else Lasker-Schüler, Martens sees another important influence in the androgynous "orientalism" that characterized the latter's work. Further, Elsa's radical feminism, like that of her celebrated namesake, was no doubt influenced by German feminist movements of the time.

Jutta Ernst shows how Felix Paul Greve used literary magazines to promote his career, the ultimate goal of which, however, was not to gain "influence" in literature but rather in "life," as he put it in a letter to André Gide. Ernst demonstrates that Greve's periodical publications followed a specific pattern, using reviews and self-reviews to interest publishers not only in his literary translations but also, and above all, in his own original works and critical writings. His strategy, however, met with only moderate success, and his writing and translation career, prolific as it was, yielded neither the affluence nor the influence he so ardently sought.

In his analysis of Wildean elements in Grove's novel *Settlers of the Marsh*, Paul Morris identifies parallels and divergences in the life, work and aesthetics of the two writers, arguing that while Grove reproached Wilde for his dismissal of "life" in art, nonetheless his quest, in the Canadian novels, was for the kind of "Truth" Wilde describes in "The Truth of Masks": the goal is not verisimilitude, but an "ability to represent 'pure concepts' in living form." Specifically, Morris sees manifestations of

Wildean influence in the figures of Niels Lindstedt and Clara Vogel, invoking Greve's discussion of the *déraciné* in *Randarabesken zu Oscar Wilde* and applying it to Grove's protagonist, a Swedish immigrant, "uprooted" from his native soil and "transplanted" into the Canadian wilderness, a pioneer with an artist's sensibilities. Wilde's image of the mask as portrayed in *Dorian Gray* underlies Grove's depiction of the female *décadente* Clara Vogel, whose hedonistic "mask" and artifice in her seduction of Niels causes him to abandon his life-affirming vision.

Paul Hjartarson's account of the socio-historical context in which Grove found himself on coming to Canada and how it manifested itself not only in Grove's novels but also in his personal life is nothing short of a documentary *tour de force*. His point of departure is the strange formulation Grove uses to describe the status of the immigrant protagonist of *Settlers of the Marsh*: "He looked upon himself as belonging to a special race—a race not comprised in any limited nation, but one that cross-sectioned all nations: a race doomed to everlasting extinction and yet recruited out of the wastage of all other nations." Hjartarson's subsequent description of the social, political and institutional realities that governed Canadian life in the early- to mid-twentieth century, eloquently documented, allows us to recognize to what degree not only many of Grove's protagonists, but also Grove himself were paradigmatic of the status of "non-preferred" (non-British) immigrants in the Dominion of Canada before, during and after the two world wars. The "cultural acceptability" of these "non-preferred" immigrants hinged on their assimilation into Anglo-Canadian culture. Hjartarson's contention that Grove deliberately cast himself as a Canadian writer and public speaker representing European immigrants assimilated into this Anglo-Canadian culture, to demonstrate that they "could

be transformed into intelligent and loyal citizens of the nation," is irrefutable. Hjartarson's impressive contribution to this volume allows the significance of its title to emerge in its fullest sense.

The volume concludes with Paul Morris' translation of Greve's *Randarabesken zu Oscar Wilde*, arguably the most crucial of Greve/Grove's non-fictional texts to determine its author's perspective on the debate on aesthetics raging in Europe at the turn of the last century, a perspective which manifested itself not only in his German texts but also in his Canadian works. The context is a complex cultural "contact zone," involving the multiple literary movements of the late nineteenth century, including, of course, the *décadence* emblemized by Oscar Wilde. The publication of this translation, printed opposite the original German, represents a significant contribution to literary studies of the period in which it was written. While the translation, generally, is faithful and competent, it would have benefited from more intensive editing to eliminate a few inaccuracies and the occasional error.

This book represents an important expansion of the debate on cultural mediation launched by Klaus Martens in a preceding volume titled *Pioneering North America. Mediators of European Literature and Culture*. Its significance for postcolonial theory and research goes well beyond the life and works of the figures who constitute its thematic focus.

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## Shrink-wrapped

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**David Homel**

*The Speaking Cure*. Douglas & McIntyre \$24.95

Reviewed by Robert Amussen

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For the narrator of his novel, David Homel has imagined Aleksandar Jovic, a Belgrade clinical psychologist. The time is early in the breakup of the former Yugoslavia.

Jovic's wife of 20 years is a psychologist as well who teaches at the University. They have a teenage son more devoted to listening to turbo rock than attending to his studies. Since the boy is afflicted with an incurable form of kidney disease, his parents are inclined to indulge him. As a government employee, Jovic is forbidden from having a private practice. However, like many of his colleagues, he gets around the prohibition by seeing his private patients in his apartment. One day, a man he takes to be a new patient turns out instead to be a government emissary. He tells Jovic not only that the government knows of his illegal private practice but that he must now report to work at the hospital treating veterans of the war suffering from post traumatic stress.

Jovic's new job assignment as a metaphor for the plight of the people of the former Yugoslavia makes sense as does the choice to dress him as a jaded east European intellectual with a world view of bemused irony at finding himself a passenger on a ship of fools and knaves. The difficulty with the novel is that neither Jovic nor the other principals emerge from behind their assigned roles to take on lives of their own. Their words and actions seem scripted. The narrative as a result becomes equally predetermined. When the novel ends with Jovic boarding a plane for Canada, it bears the unmistakable signature of the god out of the machine.

The novel's prose is serviceable enough and Homel's impressive understanding of the political and cultural dynamics works in its favour. While his sympathies are clearly on the side of the good guys, his fiction is not equal to the task he has set before it. It may be that in the present circumstances it is best to leave it to writers native to the region to tell us of their land's malaise without necessarily providing a remedy or a cure. One thinks of the likes of Aleksandar Tisma, Imre Kertés, and Danilo Kis.

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## Ghosts of the Past

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**Khaled Hosseini**

*The Kite Runner*. Doubleday \$34.95

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Reviewed by Stella Algoo-Baksh

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*The Kite Runner* is a haunting and quite extraordinary first novel by Khaled Hosseini, an Afghan medical doctor now residing in the United States. The novel launches readers into the realities of Afghan society, using the political events of Afghanistan from the 1970s to 2001 to foreground a touching and memorable story of the friendship between two boys of differing social class and ethnic backgrounds. The boys—the protagonist Amir and his friend Hassan—live in Kabul, where they have been tended to by the same wet-nurse and have been reared in the same household. Since Amir springs from the elite while Hassan emerges from a marginalized ethnic minority, the boys inhabit contrasting worlds. Their symbiotic relationship and their intertwined lives and fates—in particular the critical incident of the racist attack on Hassan by the half-caste Assef while Amir silently looks on—are cleverly but unobtrusively utilized by Hosseini to mirror Afghanistan's political, social and religious tensions and complexities. Lucky to escape an Afghanistan besieged by the Russians and their local allies, the Talibans, Amir embarks on a new life in California, convinced that his soul can be at peace now that he has left his past behind. Yet, like Morag Gunn in Laurence's *The Diviners* and Dunstan Ramsay in Davies' *Fifth Business*, Amir soon discovers that such a release is not easily achieved.

*The Kite Runner* attests to Hosseini's distaste for self-conscious fiction, to his belief that story-telling must be privileged in the novel, for it is a riveting page-turner that continuously engages readers in the unfolding events it depicts. Replete with surprising twists and turns, it is as tightly and intricately

woven as a rich tapestry. If the author's intent, also, is to keep Afghanistan and its travails in the public's consciousness, he succeeds. At the same time, the novel transcends time, place, and the immediate locale, for it may be read as an ethical parable for all peoples who are confronted daily with personal struggles pertaining to family, love, betrayal, guilt, fear, and redemption. It foregrounds the complexity and difficulty of the achievement of personal salvation and the recognition of self. *The Kite Runner* is a remarkable novel well worth the attention of a general readership and it is certainly a rewarding addition to readings in Postcolonial or Cultural Studies courses at the university level.

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## Revelations of Illegitimacy

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**Coral Ann Howells**

*Contemporary Canadian Women's Fiction: Refiguring Identities*. Palgrave Macmillan \$87.95

Reviewed by Cynthia Sugars

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In her essay "Negotiating with the Dead," Margaret Atwood suggests that all writing is motivated by a desire to "bring something or someone back from the dead." Her proposition can be interpreted literally, in the sense of an author (particularly an author of historical fictions) wanting to resurrect past events or personages. It might also be understood metaphorically, as a means of uncovering something (a family secret, a national fiction, a personal repression) that has long remained hidden. Coral Ann Howells's latest study of Canadian literature uses Atwood's metaphor as a way of unifying her own inquiry into recent, post-1990 fiction by Canadian women. Howells' central concern is the ways various Canadian women writers interrogate inherited notions of national and individual identity. More specifically, she is interested in the ways their works function as "revelations of illegitimacy," a form, in itself, of

negotiating the tenacious hold of the still all-too-powerful dead.

According to Howells, Canada's literary profile since the early 1990s has been marked by a significant shift in "discourses of nationhood, heritage, and identity in Canada." In what ways, she asks, does "*Canadian*" mean something substantially different from what it did in the preceding decades? Making use of the notable theoretical interventions on nation and identity by such critics as Smaro Kamboureli and Stuart Hall, Howells focuses on the ways contemporary Canadian women's narratives explore the incommensurability of fixed identity constructs, especially the ways white, masculine colonial authority is "coded into a territorial representation of Canadian identity." Contemporary Canadian women writers, she maintains, "are engaged in writing and rewriting history across generations . . . [in order to] uncover secrets hidden in the past." These novels are symptomatic of a larger social and global context, "representing a nation in the process of unearthing deliberately forgotten secrets and scandals, as they share in the enterprise of telling stories that recognize the differences concealed within constructions of identity in contemporary multicultural Canada."

The study focuses on the recent fiction of eight writers, containing a chapter dedicated to each. Beginning very consciously with an iconic Canadian writer, Howells explores Margaret Atwood's inquiry into Canadian discourses of nationalism and identity in *Alias Grace* and *The Blind Assassin*. These novels, she argues, "question the heritage myths of white Anglo-Canadian history, prising open 'the locked box of our inheritance.'" In Atwood's hands, this Pandora's box of history begins to feel like a Gothic treasure trove as she plumbs the secret, unspoken depths of Canada's colonial past. If "the dead are in the hands of the living," as Grace Marks in



*Alias Grace* maintains, then there is room for a contemporary writer to negotiate with them and intervene in the sway they continue to have over contemporary socio-cultural constructions. Both novels, says Howells, are “Atwood’s own elaborate alias for her broad socio-historical project aimed at uncovering scandalous secrets, which may be a necessary state in refiguring nation and identity.”

Subsequent chapters take us through the recent writings of Alice Munro, Carol Shields, Ann-Marie MacDonald, Kerri Sakamoto, Shani Mootoo, Gail Anderson-Dargatz, and Eden Robinson. Howells’ study of *The Stone Diaries* is particularly astute in its exploration of Shields’ own fascination with the fictive nature of identity. Coining the phrase “foundational fictions of identity” (as an echo of Judith Butler’s “foundational illusions of identity”), Howells provides a fascinating and sensitive analysis of the ways Daisy Goodwill in *The Stone Diaries* strives to be “intelligible” by constructing an originary sense of loss as her foundational fiction.

Throughout, Howells’ textual analyses are evocative. She unifies her study by focusing on the “exorcism of ghosts” in the novels she considers, from the tortured family history in MacDonald’s *Fall on Your Knees*, to the uncanny shadow of history in Sakamoto’s *The Electrical Field*, to the ghosts of colonialism and patriarchy in Mootoo’s *Cereus Blooms at Night* and Anderson-Dargatz’s *The Cure for Death by Lightning*, to the reinscription of authenticating spirits in Robinson’s *Monkey Beach*. Throughout, Howells is concerned with the ways these writers address the instability of national and cultural signification. If anything weakens the book, it is that the chapters read like individual essays rather than parts of an integrated study. Nevertheless, reading these essays is well worth the effort. Together, Howells, and the writers she considers, engage Atwood’s prescient and

multi-levelled question in “In Search of *Alias Grace*”: “How do we know we are who we think we are?” The answer might be *we don’t or we’re not*. It is this condition of illegitimacy, whether in terms of genealogy (MacDonald), personal identity (Shields), national history (Sakamoto), or cultural heritage (Robinson), that is central to this study.

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## The Sincerity Test

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### Crystal Hurdle

*After Ted & Sylvia*. Ronsdale P \$14.95

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### Philip Kevin Paul

*Taking the Names Down from the Hill*.

Nightwood Editions \$15.95

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### John O. Thompson

*The Gates of Even*. Ekstasis Editions \$16.95

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Reviewed by Bert Almon

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Ted Hughes used to complain about what he called the “Plath Fantasia,” the attempts by outsiders to exploit the tragedy of Sylvia Plath, no matter what emotional damage might be done to him and their children. The American poet Robin Morgan once published a poem about her desire to castrate Hughes and “liberate” his children. Now that Hughes is dead and has no way to defend himself in the courts, there are no limits to the exploitation of this painful story. Hurdle’s poems assume that she can speak for the living children, who are adults and could speak for themselves. The book is described by her publisher as incorporating a literary ménage à trois. Necro-voyeurism would be a better term. “The Sylvias: a Fantasy” imagines father-daughter incest in disgusting detail. There is no evidence that incest took place between Otto and Sylvia Plath, but anything can be said if it is called a fantasy. The poems rely on hectoring rhetorical questions about facts and blame rather than on sympathetic identification. Hurdle’s verse is undistinguished, the best images coming from

Plath's work in a kind of pastiche. Those battered old symbols, Ken and Barbie, are dragged out of the toy box to make a feminist point. Taste aside, Ezra Pound once observed that technique is the test of sincerity, and *After Ted & Sylvia* fails that test. This poet has not earned the right to address Plath as "Sivvy."

Kevin Paul's book meets the test of technique. His poems are superbly crafted and show an extraordinary lyric tact. The tone is sometimes celebratory, sometimes elegiac (which is another kind of celebration). He is a member of the WSÁ,NEC (Wsanec, or Saanich) Nation. His poems explore a web of relationships with family and with nature. He can recreate a traditional dream vision ("Deer Medicine") or recreate the flight of a bird ("Pheasant on Deer Mountain"). He shows equal skill in evoking the lives of human beings. He is aware of the inevitable pain that attachment to fragile lives entails, but as he says in the refrain of "The Cost: a song," "love outweighs the cost." He also has a sense of humor, as demonstrated in "Belly Button," a poem about his mother's discomforts during her pregnancy with him. The book has not been assembled hastily: he was one of the stars in the 1995 anthology, *Breathing Fire*. The wait was worth it: the poems manifest stylistic maturity, succeeding through superb images and a grasp of form (he is especially skilled in the use of stanzas). One of the most interesting poems, "What We Call Life," explores the meanings of three important words in Wsanec, words with spiritual and moral weight, thereby revealing the cultural wealth that he can draw on for his English poems.

John O. Thompson's first book, *Echo and Montana*, appeared in 1980. This second book is a curious mixture of the academic and the lyrical. The poems are often jottings or notations. It is possible that the hesitant, laboured technique of many of the poems shows the uncertainty of a poet

starting to write again—or perhaps he has assembled occasional efforts at writing over the last 20 years. He doesn't hesitate to lecture the reader on film, postindustrial society and the thought of Fredric Jameson: hence the academic label. Tutorials, conferences, threatened Departments and PhD theses are possibly subjects for poetry, but not in this collection. Some of the poems are rhymed, though Thompson assures his readers in a superfluous afterword that his allegiances are not traditionalist: he likes the Pound-Zukofsky-language poetry lineage and the Tish poets. There is a wavering line in postmodernism between the creative word game and the contrivance. Thompson is often on the wrong side of the line, showing misguided technique: archness that doesn't go anywhere. Once in a while lyric poetry asserts its presence, as in "Dryden, Ontario":

White water, and a long freight train  
inching above it; I on a rock watching  
the water gash itself on its own rocks,  
the white  
wounds healing as it winds beyond my  
sight.

It would perhaps be academic to trace this poem back to a fine predecessor, A. J. M. Smith's "The Lonely Land" ("This is the beauty / of strength / broken by strength / and still strong"). Thompson has real talent both as a lyric poet and an intellectual satirist, but neither talent gets properly exercised in most of these poems. Now that the poet has cranked up the old machinery, something better might be produced.



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## The Reader's Challenge

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**Nancy Huston**

*An Adoration*. McArthur and Company \$29.95

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**Marie-Claire Blais**

*Thunder and Light*. Translated by Nigel Spencer.

Anansi \$24.95

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Reviewed by Catherine Khordoc

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In Huston's novel, *An Adoration*, which was first published in French and translated by the author, the reader is at the centre of the story as he is called upon to act as judge in a strange and surreal trial. The reader in the role of judge is somewhat reminiscent of Camus' *La Chute*. What might be somewhat unsettling for the reader—at least it was the case for this reviewer—is that she is placed in a position in which she must judge the various characters' testimonies and decide whether they might be guilty of murder. The story being that Cosmo, a local celebrity, was stabbed to death, the characters, who are not all human or alive, take turns narrating their sides of the story and answering the judge's questions. In the end—and this is not giving away the ending—the crime is not resolved. Let us be clear, this is not a detective novel or a mystery. It is more about how characters' lives become intertwined, how they live their lives in relation to each other, and how despite the connections, they never really know one another. And of course, it is also about the relationship between the reader, the text, the author, and the creative process, a recurring theme in Huston's *oeuvre*.

If being at the fore in Huston's novel places readers in an unusual situation, the discomfort one might experience in reading Marie-Claire Blais' *Thunder and Light* is on an entirely different level as they may wonder whether there is any room for them at all in this work. Blais' novel is so dense with its multiple characters and its single, continuous paragraph running through the 188 pages of the novel, that the reader is, to

a greater extent than in other novels, an intruder who may feel unwelcome in this tightly-knit, self-contained universe. *Thunder and Light* received the Governor General's Award for Translation from French to English in 2002. And indeed, translator Nigel Spencer must be commended for rendering Blais' novel as fluid and poetic as the original, a task that could not have been easy. For Blais' novel is difficult, partly because there are no paragraphs and punctuation is minimal. But it is also hermetic because the story flows, without any transition or warning, from one character and narrative to another, from one part of the world to another, addressing diverse themes such as human rights, poverty, artistic creation, aging, and death. Some of the characters already made a first appearance in the first volume, *Soifs* (translated as *These Festive Nights*), of this trilogy. Contrary to Huston's novels, where the links between characters are for the most part evident, in this novel it is unclear why these characters' lives are so deeply intertwined at the narrative level while they do not appear so at the level of the story, at least until the end. The narrative requires the reader to make an extra effort in order to be able to infiltrate this universe and understand the characters. These observations are not meant to put off a reader, but rather, to warn that this book commands full and undivided attention. However, if one accords it such a reading, the reader will have experienced a most unusual and mystical novel.



## E. Pauline Johnson, Tekahionwake: The Texts

Carole Gerson and Veronica Strong-Boag

*E. Pauline Johnson, Tekahionwake: Collected Poems and Selected Prose.* U of Toronto P, \$25.95

Reviewed by Cecily Devereux

The work of Mohawk and English Canadian writer E. Pauline Johnson (1861–1913) has never been entirely out of print, and Johnson has been a familiar figure on the nation’s popular and literary cultural landscape at least since the 1890s when she began her costumed poetry performances. The appearance, then, of the volume, *E. Pauline Johnson, Tekahionwake: Collected Poems and Selected Prose* does not have to do with the return of a lost writer to canonical status or with the feminist recovery that volume editors Carole Gerson and Veronica Strong-Boag are so widely recognized for making in English Canadian literature and history. At one level a companion-piece for the biographical study produced by Strong-Boag and Gerson (*Paddling Her Own Canoe: The Times and Texts of E. Pauline Johnson*), the new volume rather works to correct some misconceptions of Johnson and her work— notably, that she wrote mostly “Indian” poetry, and that she wrote mostly poetry for her whole career—and to provide a good, well-researched, usable resource for students and scholars of Johnson, of First Nations writing in English, women’s writing, and of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century English-Canadian literary and cultural studies. Gerson and Strong-Boag’s book collects Johnson’s poetry for the first time: the popular and much-reprinted *Flint and Feather* (1912) does not, as the editors note here, include all the poems, something that is a relatively common problem for early “complete” editions of the works of English-Canadian poets. In addition to the collected verse, this new volume also

includes a selection of prose writings from the early collections *The Shagganappi* and *The Moccasin Maker* (both 1913) as well as from uncollected and manuscript material. As the editors point out, a collection of Johnson’s prose would take many more pages than are possible in this single volume; thus the pairing of the collected verse with the selected prose. Gerson and Strong-Boag’s comprehensive bibliography of Johnson’s prose was published in the biography, and is not included in the *Collected Poems and Selected Prose*.

The verse is organized chronologically, and further divided into periods: “The Early Years: Beginnings to 1888,” “The Prolific Years: 1889–1898,” and “The Later Years: 1899–1913,” with an additional section of “Anonymous and Pseudonymous Poems.” The poetry’s periodization is not explicit in the organizing of the selected prose, although it is implicit: the prose pieces are presented in order of publication, rather than thematically or with reference to categories such as “fiction” or “non-fiction.” Although broadly representative, the prose selections tend toward writing concerned with First Nations gendered identities and with ideologies of imperial maternalism as they interpellate—or do not interpellate—Native women. For both the poetry and the prose, the editors have provided detailed notes that are placed unobtrusively at the back of the book. They elegantly fulfill the obligation of a scholarly edition to include information about the writing and publishing of texts and about copy texts, as well as about other contextual matters. Indeed, the notes for this volume represent an enormously valuable resource for scholars in many areas, such as nineteenth-century poetry, popular media, and gender and professional writing.

This is a very good book for a number of reasons, the most obvious of which might be simply the fact of the collection of

Johnson's poems. The collection, however, is greatly enhanced by the editors' careful attention to the texts, to their establishing a chronology in tandem with their detailed notes, and of course to the concise, readable introduction, incorporating the biographical narrative of Johnson, a lucid and informative account of the publication history of her works, and the gendered and racialized politics surrounding Johnson's writing. *Flint and Feather*, arguably, did a particular kind of work, presenting Johnson as a poet of simultaneous and unconflicted "Indianness" and "Canadianness," something that has suited white settler canon constructions for many years; this volume intervenes in the national fantasies that have continued to circulate around Johnson to complicate this literary figure in interesting and important ways.

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## Kalman's History

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**Harold Kalman**

*A Concise History of Canadian Architecture.*  
Oxford UP \$65.00

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Reviewed by C.D. Moorhead

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This shortened version of the two-volume *A History of Canadian Architecture* (1994) is intended to be a more selective, convenient, and affordable edition. The historical text has been reduced, some buildings and photographs have been deleted, and sections on town planning and the north have been eliminated. Extensive endnotes are also not included; the two-volume set should be used for more detailed study.

The author makes a point of turning away from the notion of "high" architecture as the only subject matter, and embraces vernacular and utilitarian structures such as bridges, grain silos, forts, and First Nations buildings as being an integral part of our "architectural" heritage. Archaeological investigations are considered and included in the text, leading to a

"history of the built environment" as opposed to one simply of architecture.

Kalman demonstrates his extensive knowledge of and interest in the built environment through carefully considered text that is clear, concise, and closely connected to the numerous photos. The chapters are well-organized, focusing on various historical periods or types of structures. A vast range of fascinating constructions is presented, whether built for human habitation, transportation networks, agriculture, education, or governance. Together, they present an insightful history of Canada and Canadians.

Despite its title, the book is not obviously "concise," and therefore raises the question as to whether the current version is an improvement over the previous two-volume publication. This condensed edition can be seen as a fascinating guide to the construction of a nation, and as an invitation to the ordinary Canadian to read and become involved in retaining heritage buildings in their communities. The power and drama of structures such as the CN and CP Hotels that grace the major urban centres in Canada provide valuable lessons in siting, massing, and detailing to contemporary city planners and architects. Yet, as recently as 15 years ago, the appreciation of architectural heritage was so minimal that the Empress Hotel in Victoria was seriously being considered for demolition, despite being a landmark in one of Canada's greatest urban settings.

Robert Venturi in *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture* states that "as an architect, [he tries] to be guided not by habit but by a conscious sense of the past, by precedent, thoughtfully considered." For Venturi, and similarly for any practising architect, architectural history is a source of inspiration and integral to the architectural practice of their work. The author should be complimented for assisting us to appreciate this lineage in Canada.

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## Midnight's Grandchildren

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**Chelva Kanaganayakam**

*Counterrealism and Indo-Anglian Fiction.* Wilfrid Laurier UP \$66.00

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Reviewed by Terri Tomskey

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Kanaganayakam addresses the problematic status of Indian writers writing in English within the genre of what he terms Indo-Anglian fiction. This book began as a response to Subha Roa's 1976 monograph *Indian Writing in English: Is There Any Worth in It?*, and explores the political and cultural implications of Indian writing in English, though most insistently and impressively in the first chapter. Kanaganayakam's opening engages the many cultural problems associated with English, in particular, its positioning as a hegemonic language removed from the specificity of indigenous cultures and the nuances of Indian social realities. He charts the range of critical views, varying from nativism to scepticism, that would follow Roa's rejection of Indo-Anglian writing as compromised by "mimicry, complicity and subservience to an alien culture." Despite the critical breadth of this spectrum, all indict the status of English in Indian history and their politics may be categorized as anti- rather than post-colonial. Against this, Kanaganayakam posits approaches that embrace hybridity in writing, approaches that he supports albeit with an awareness of the risk of essentialization when writers utilize the globalized English language. Tackling both the emerging globalism and the legacy of colonialism, Kanaganayakam proposes Indo-Anglian writing as a productive critical apparatus able to acknowledge the "artifice [and] . . . constructedness of the worlds" and he suggests counterrealism characterizes a new "tradition" epitomized by the Indo-Anglian cultural intersection. Counterrealism engages a wide-ranging series of issues,

from history and exile to modernity and identity, and is notable for the way it challenges and subverts reality, often through pastiche and parody.

Though Kanaganayakam presents a genealogy of the counterrealist mode by profiling six Indo-Anglian writers in individual chapters, his argument is compromised by an over reliance on Salman Rushdie, the "culminating point of the counterrealist tradition." Analyzing *Shame* (1983), Kanaganayakam assiduously explicates an array of critical writing on Rushdie's ideology and his appropriation of the magic realist genre. While Kanaganayakam limns the political dimension of Rushdie's writing, he also emphasizes its uniqueness and disparity, which prevent simple categorizations. Consequently, Kanaganayakam reads *Shame* as a syncretism that melds form and narrative with reality and allegory to enable Rushdie's playful yet subversive anti-establishment gestures. The difficulty appears when, despite defining counterrealism as a tradition, Kanaganayakam claims that its preeminent author, Rushdie, has produced an unclassifiable, and therefore unrepeatable, corpus, leaving counterrealism as a genre without a clear paradigmatic pattern. In this analysis, there is little to distinguish counterrealism beyond its status as a particular yet non-specific branch of postmodernism or postcolonialism.

The final chapter, appropriately titled "Midnight's Grandchildren," however, takes a step towards populating the genre with diverse examples from recent Indian literature. Kanaganayakam simultaneously re-evaluates the six Indo-Anglian writers, including Narayan, Desai, and, of course, Rushdie, in terms of their impact on the global stage, offering them as representatives of an independent tradition capable of demonstrating a "particular kind of reality" in the Indian subcontinent, "not about surfaces, but about ruptures and fissures."

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## Romans oniriques

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**Patricia Lamontagne**

*Somnolences*. Triptyque \$18.00

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**Gilles Tibo**

*Le mangeur de pierres*. Québec Amérique \$22.95

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Comptes rendus par Natasha Nobell

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Patricia Lamontagne est peut-être connue d'abord et avant tout comme poète, ayant été finaliste au prix Émile-Nelligan pour son recueil de poésie *Rush papier ciseau* (1992). La poésie de Lamontagne, caractérisée par une écriture débridée, explore une problématique artistique, à la fois fondamentale et universelle : comment communiquer la réalité, la vie, les émotions? Dans son premier roman, intitulé *Somnolences* et paru en 2001, l'auteure poursuit cette question. Le roman repose en grande partie sur le thème de la communication ou plutôt, le manque de communication. Le personnage principal du roman, Alice, travaille dans un camp de jour pour jeunes autistes. Le fait de juxtaposer des enfants autistes à une adulte insomniaque qui ne semble pas avoir accès à la réalité, souligne parfaitement l'ironie de la situation diégétique de *Somnolences*. Ces jeunes protagonistes, sensés être difficiles, voire impossibles à comprendre, dépendent d'Alice pour interpréter leur monde. Mais les énoncés d'Alice ne sont parfois qu'un mélange incohérent de mots et de bouts de phrases : « comme des nuages à cause de la séparation mais qui attend le brouillard passe la bougie viendra de loin, tant qu'à faire. . . »

*Somnolences* est truffé de longs monologues intérieurs et de dialogues entre le personnage principal et les enfants autistes; dialogues qui mettent en relief une absence de communication. Il n'y a pas de véritable échange quand les deux interlocuteurs ne se comprennent pas. Alice et les enfants, cherchant tous à comprendre leur univers, ne réussissent pas à manier l'outil de

communication le plus fondamental : le langage parlé. Le dédoublement des voix d'Alice et d'une jeune autiste en particulier, souligne cette confusion expressive : leurs voix se mélangent et se ressemblent mais n'aboutissent à aucune transmission.

Poétique, imagé, et marqué par une syntaxe complexe et parfois lourde, le style de Lamontagne se prête bien à l'expression des difficultés de compréhension vécues par tous ses protagonistes. C'est par le biais de faillites langagières ou verbales que l'auteure réussit le mieux à démontrer la portée thématique et symbolique du langage dans son premier roman.

Alice vogue entre le réel et le rêve, et elle vit une sorte de « décalage » horaire et de lieu. Elle souffre d'insomnie, ce qui provoque de nombreux épisodes hallucinatoires et lui confirme qu'elle se trouve hors-temps et hors-lieu : « Je tourne en rond dans le sens du vide. » Les épisodes hallucinatoires d'Alice apportent une touche surréaliste au roman tout en dévoilant la fragilité de son état mental et physique. Ces divagations entre la réalité et le rêve rappellent une autre Alice, celle du conte de Lewis Carroll, *Alice au pays des merveilles*. Le lien symbolique entre les deux ouvrages s'affirme dans le dernier chapitre de *Somnolences*, « Alice au pays vermeil », un pastiche du style onirique et hallucinatoire du célèbre premier chapitre de Lewis Carroll. L'importance de cet intertexte est liée à la remise en question de l'(in)-cohérence de la réalité, thème inhérent à l'œuvre de Lamontagne.

Illustrateur et écrivain depuis plus de vingt-cinq ans, Gilles Tibo jouit d'une renommée internationale dans le domaine de la littérature pour la jeunesse. Les images dans sa série *Simon*, par exemple, sont d'une beauté pacifique et possèdent une dimension fortement onirique. Dans son premier roman destiné au grand public, Tibo traduit en mots cet onirisme de ses images. *Le mangeur de pierres*, paru

en 2001, entraîne le lecteur dans un monde de rêve : une île qui semble être hors-temps et hors-lieu.

Le personnage principal du *Mangeur de pierres*, Gravelin, est mis au ban de la société insulaire à cause de sa fascination démesurée pour les pierres. En fait, Gravelin mange les pierres et se nourrit littéralement de terre. Tibo établit dès le début du roman un ton allégorique, ce qui est mis en évidence par un personnage comme Gravelin, ainsi que par un style d'écriture visuel, métaphorique et pur. Le réseau symbolique qui sous-tend le roman de Tibo lui fournit une structure chargée d'images et de métaphores autour de pierres, de plumes et de sang. *Le mangeur de pierres* repose sur l'écriture graphique de Tibo car tout le récit est présenté en style indirect : il n'y a aucun dialogue. L'évocation du rejet violent subi par Gravelin devient paradoxalement plus saisissante lorsque les bruits, les hurlements et toute la cacophonie de l'île (les oiseaux de mer, les vagues, les tempêtes, les êtres humains, leur violence) nous sont transmis en silence et, pour ainsi dire, filtrés par le mutisme du héros.

Intimement lié à la terre, le personnage Gravelin est mis en contraste net avec les insulaires marins, qui eux sont des pêcheurs : « Il était rempli de cailloux dans la caboche, dans les yeux, dans le corps tout entier et jusque dans son sang, où s'égrenait sans doute un sable rouge. » Il ne semble y avoir ni de place ni de fonction pour cet être minéral sur une île « perdue dans la multitude des eaux. » En outre, Gravelin est doublement marginalisé parce qu'il est incapable de communiquer. Il ne sait pas parler et il demeure muet, se fiant plutôt aux hochements de tête et aux gestes en guise de langage. Son niveau langagier reflète l'état primitif de son île natale, laquelle incarne la loi darwinienne de la sélection naturelle. La juxtaposition de ce personnage « sauvage » avec les habitants

de l'île qui le rejettent est ironique : la société insulaire en est une d'inceste, de violence et de sauvagerie, et c'est Gravelin finalement qui est le plus humain.

Tout en étant des romans différents à plusieurs niveaux, il y a quand même quelques similarités surprenantes qui parcourent les ouvrages de Lamontagne et de Tibo : la dimension onirique, le rôle primordial de la communication, des personnages qui ne réussissent pas à s'intégrer à leur société. En fin de compte, les auteurs s'interrogent tous les deux sur l'incohérence de la réalité et de cette interrogation s'ensuit dans leurs œuvres respectives un brouillage de la ligne de démarcation entre le réel, le rêve et l'imaginaire.

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## L'Amérique imaginaire

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**Maurice Lemire**

*Le Mythe de l'Amérique dans l'imaginaire "canadien."* Nota bene \$23.95

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**Pierre-Joseph-Olivier Chauveau**

*De Québec à Montréal Journal de la seconde session, 1846 suivi de Sept jours aux États-Unis, 1850 (Introduction et notes de Georges Aubin).*

Nota bene \$10.95

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Comptes rendus par Réjean Beaudoin

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Ces deux livres ajoutent leur éclairage au passé d'un peuple dont la cohésion est aujourd'hui dissoute en une foule de communautés éparses, minoritaires et, pour beaucoup d'entre elles, en voie d'extinction. Je ne saurais mieux le dire qu'en rappelant la première phrase qu'Yves Frenette a placée au début de sa *Brève Histoire des Canadiens français* (1998). La voici cette phrase : « Ce livre raconte l'histoire d'un peuple qui n'existe plus. » Il ne s'agit pourtant pas de cet ouvrage et je n'en cite l'incipit cinglant que pour l'effet de la perspective qu'il ouvre en la refermant d'entrée de jeu. Ce n'est pas des Québécois dont il est question, mais de leurs proches



parents qui s'appelaient, il y a cinquante ans à peine, les Canadiens français. On s'en souvient peut-être mieux hors-Québec où les francophones de toutes les provinces sont encore assez souvent qualifiés de Canadiens français. Depuis la Révolution tranquille, cette identification n'a plus cours au Québec qui a relégué cette appellation aux exilés de la diaspora nord-américaine. Leur migration continentale a commencé dès le berceau de la Nouvelle-France et s'est développée jusqu'aux dimensions d'un véritable exode entre 1840 et 1920.

La mobilité géographique des Canadiens français et les traces de leur exploration du continent sont partout répandues à la grandeur de l'Amérique, mais ces vestiges sont aussi inscrits profondément dans leur imaginaire collectif. Tel est l'objet du livre de Maurice Lemire. Comme il nous y a habitués dans son entreprise érudite, ce chercheur qui se passe de toute présentation dans les milieux des études littéraires québécoises, fonde son enquête sur des assises théoriques solides. C'est aux travaux de Gaston Bachelard, de Gilbert Durant, et de Carl Gustav Jung que l'ouvrage de Maurice Lemire emprunte sa conception de l'incidence anthropologique de son étude. Il s'agit de savoir ce que les écrivains canadiens-français du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle ont fait dans leurs écrits de la tradition orale séculaire qui témoignait encore, de leur temps, de l'épopée américaine des aventuriers de toutes sortes—explorateurs, pionniers, marchands ou coureurs de bois—qui avaient balisé l'Amérique du Nord en tous sens et jusqu'aux confins les plus éloignés de la forêt, au nom de la liberté irrésistible de se soustraire au regard des autorités coloniales, ce qui ne les a pas empêchés de servir, d'une façon dérogatoire, l'expansionnisme de la France.

Cet ouvrage repose une question fondamentale dont la solution reste à trouver, plus de trente-cinq ans après le

livre incontournable de Jack Warwick, *The Long Journey* (1968). De quelle façon la littérature canadienne-française a pu transformer ou récupérer les archives populaires de l'oralité demeure un grand sujet d'interrogation. Il devient de plus en plus couramment admis maintenant que les élites dirigeantes du milieu du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle canadien-français ont imposé assez radicalement leur cadre de référence moral et idéologique au milieu littéraire de l'époque. Maurice Lemire le confirme en relisant de fort près les oeuvres des Taché, Philippe Aubert de Gaspé (père et fils), Lacombe, Gérin-Lajoie, Fréchette, et Beaugrand. Il remonte d'abord beaucoup plus loin en arrière, jusqu'aux voyages de Samuel de Champlain, navigateur et fondateur de Québec, cartographe et homme de sang-froid qui ne nourrissait pas ses écrits de fables exotiques. L'essayiste étend son analyse aux romanciers du vingtième siècle, tels Félix-Antoine Savard et Léo-Paul Desrosiers, qui ont relayé jusqu'à nous, pour ainsi dire, l'inspiration des voyageurs qui ont arpenté les sentiers non battus de l'Amérique.

Les écrivains québécois ne semblent pas avoir tiré tout le profit littéraire qu'on aurait pu attendre d'une aventure si grandiose et si originale. Pourquoi? Parce que le héros de cette quête sans pareille est un personnage ambigu, réprouvé par les lois et condamné par la morale. Les premiers grands seigneurs de la traite des fourrures sont des pirates et des brigands dont les exploits montrent l'audace et la témérité sans frein, comme Pierre-Esprit Radisson et Pierre Le Moine d'Iberville. Leurs descendants sous le régime anglais sont des hommes rudes et sans scrupules, au services des compagnies dirigées par les Écossais. Ce sont tous de très mauvais garçons qui font leurs coups loin des mœurs traditionnelles qu'on observe dans les bonnes paroisses rurales. Pis encore, loin de se repentir de leur vie libre et

dissolue, ils s'en vantent et leurs récits débauchent la jeunesse qui leur sert de bassin de recrutement. Telle est la légende de ceux qu'on appelle les voyageurs, la fraction de population nomade qui ressemble si peu aux "habitants", les sédentaires de la colonie laurentienne. Ils ont acquis la réputation d'une bande de joyeux déviants qui séduisent les jeunes gens des campagnes avec des contes et des chansons, pour ne rien dire de l'alcool. Quand la littérature s'empare tardivement de cette légende, c'est pour la corriger en la banalisant, en la noyant dans l'eau bénite et la peur du diable, car le clergé tout-puissant veille au grain désormais.

Tout en nous offrant une relecture palpitante de cette saga populaire, Maurice Lemire tourne parfois les coins un peu rondement. Comme lorsqu'il écrit ce qui suit, par exemple, à propos du dénouement d'un roman de Gabrielle Roy, *La Montagne secrète*:

Le héros, Pierre Cadorai, [...] se résout donc à aller étudier en Europe pour arriver à rendre justice à la beauté de sa montagne. Mais aux Beaux-Arts de Paris, on ne lui enseigne que l'académisme. Plus il acquiert de métier, plus il perd de l'originalité au profit de la convention. Cadorai revient donc au pays déçu de son expérience européenne, mais convaincu que chaque sujet exige une forme qui lui soit propre.

Or les lecteurs de ce roman se rappelleront que le peintre Pierre Cadorai meurt d'épuisement dans son studio parisien. Il ne rentre jamais "au pays", sauf dans un sens tout imaginaire, en brossant son dernier tableau, une vue inachevée de sa fameuse montagne du grand Nord canadien. Ce retour au bercail est à lire à plusieurs degrés d'abstraction au-delà du rapatriement littéral que suggère la phrase de l'essayiste qui n'entend évidemment pas dire le contraire. L'ouvrage mise, par conséquent, sur un lecteur averti. C'est tout à son honneur.

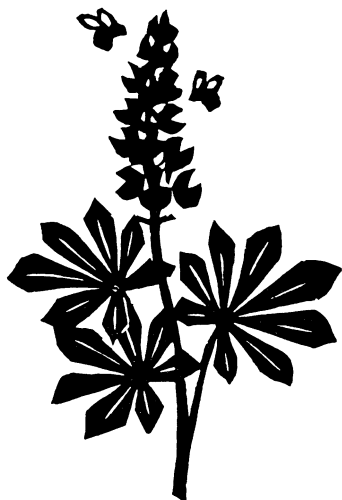
Pierre-Joseph-Olivier Chauveau (1820–1890) est un écrivain (il est l'auteur du roman *Charles Guérin* [1853]) et un homme politique (il fut premier ministre de la province de Québec de 1867 à 1873). Il a tenu un journal personnel, inédit jusqu'à ce jour. Il y a noté ses observations détaillées de la session parlementaire de 1846. Quelques années plus tard, il a rédigé ses impressions de voyage à l'occasion d'un court séjour aux Etats-Unis en 1850. Les deux documents sont duement annotés et présentés par Georges Aubin dans un format-poche qui rend le livre à la fois accessible et fort bien matériellement présenté. Les spécialistes ne pourront que s'en réjouir, mais aussi les lecteurs simplement curieux de se renseigner, à travers les yeux d'un observateur de première main, sur la vie quotidienne, les moeurs politiques, les moyens de transport, et les services d'hôtellerie de l'époque. Chauveau a l'oeil vif et l'esprit alerte. Certaines de ses remarques sont délectables. Il entretenait des relations sociales très étendues avec l'élite intellectuelle et politique. Il fait la connaissance de Louis-Joseph Papineau à son retour d'exil. Il est un ami intime de Patrice Lacombe, l'auteur de *La terre paternelle* (1846). Il profite de son passage à Albany et à New York pour rendre visite à d'éminents intellectuels américains qui le reçoivent avec tous les égards dus à un collègue respecté.

Quand il mûrit les stratégies parlementaires de son parti dont il discute les coups fumants avec ses collègues dans sa chambre d'hôtel, le politicien expose tous les rouages de la vie politique. Faut-il prononcer un discours en chambre et l'improviser en anglais, le tribun en a des sueurs froides mais il ne ménage pas ses peines. Les anecdotes et les indiscretions ne manquent pas dans ces notes rapidement ébauchées. Le ton est souvent piquant, même si le style n'est pas toujours soigné.

En route vers New York sur un bateau à vapeur nommé l'Isaac-Newton, Chauveau fait la rencontre d'un jeune graveur français:

En nous entendant parler français, un jeune homme assez bien mis s'approcha de nous et nous demanda de quelle partie de la France nous étions. C'était un Français de New York, un graveur que le museum d'Albany avait fait venir précisément pour ces planches dont j'ai parlé plus haut. J'ai causé quelque temps avec lui. Il m'a fait l'effet d'un jeune homme bien sensé, assez instruit pour son état et très raisonnable et comme il faut pour un artiste français.

Un rien de condescendance, n'est-ce pas, dans cette appréciation toute spontanée du dandy parisien. La prose sans apprêt de Chauveau admet sa part d'impropriétés et de tournures plus que familières, mais si l'on veut bien lui passer certaines indécidatesses de langue, on trouvera un franc parler croustillant dans ces pages qui n'étaient pas destinées au public, il faut se le rappeler. C'est justement la saveur des écrits intimes et ce qui fait tout leur suc.



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## Telling a Story

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**Donald Luxton, ed.**

*Building the West: The Early Architects of British Columbia.* Talonbooks \$50.00

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**John Punter**

*The Vancouver Achievement: Urban Planning and Design.* U of British Columbia P \$29.95

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Reviewed by Jill Wade

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Any historian faces the challenge of balancing a story with its significance in history. Ideally, but not always necessarily, the important details of the narrative should point to the larger historical context. The authors of *The Vancouver Achievement* and *Building the West* tell their stories, often superbly, but fall short of clarifying their historical importance from the perspective of some academics.

John Punter argues convincingly that, since the early 1970s, this West Coast city has devised and implemented a distinctive approach to urban planning and design based upon discretionary zoning, cooperative megaproject schemes, development levies, managed neighbourhood change, and building intensification. The success of these strategies has created Vancouver's outstanding reputation in international planning circles. While his history is generally laudatory, Punter, an urban design professor at Cardiff University in Wales, assesses, sometimes rigorously, all the initiatives he describes.

*The Vancouver Achievement* emerges from Punter's thorough research of the document collection of the City of Vancouver, from his interviews with 43 influential, although nowhere fully identified, professionals, politicians, and developers, and from his internet access to the city planning department. The insights of Larry Beasley, the current Co-Director of Planning for the city, the publications of David Ley, Harold Kalman, Donald Gutstein, and Robin Ward, all well-known

for their work on Vancouver, and some comparative evaluation with other jurisdictions in the United States, the United Kingdom, and Europe shape Punter's analysis.

This well-designed, edited and illustrated book, which may be tough going for ordinary readers, will serve admirably as a reference and teaching tool for professional planners and urban designers and for academics in Canadian planning schools. Still, it may disconcert some historians and geographers to find that the significance of Vancouver's story within the larger context of social history and urban geography is missing. Punter is correct to assert that the influence of the TEAM council elected in 1972 and the appointment of Ray Spaxman in 1973 led to a participatory planning process. But citizen participation in the planning process is distinct from, and may have been created in response to, the long tradition of social, labour, and political activism so well documented in the city's history. Moreover, Punter does not adequately square the Vancouver planning achievement with some newer theories of urban gentrification and neighbourhood decline applied most recently to the Downtown Eastside in the series of essays entitled *Stan Douglas: Every Building on 100 West Hastings*. While acknowledged, the critical roles of the Canadian and British Columbia governments in the areas of housing and regional planning and the broad influence of Canada's planning and architectural schools, particularly the programs at the University of British Columbia, go largely unexplored despite the availability of secondary literature.

As the title implies, the theme of *Building the West* is, put simply, "building" British Columbia. The book is a collection of chronologically organized biographies about the major and minor architects active in British Columbia from contact through to the beginnings of Modernism.

Donald Luxton, the compiler, editor, and critical force behind this immense initiative, and over 50 other contributors researched and wrote the entries for these early architects who worked before 1938 in Vancouver and Victoria, on Vancouver Island and the North and South Coasts, and in the vast Interior of the province. However, *Building the West* goes far beyond a standard biographical dictionary. Interspersed with the entries are many short essays about topics of interest in British Columbia's architectural history, such as Aboriginal buildings, land surveyors, professional organizations, pattern books, ready-cut houses, home ownership, government policies and programs, and the traditional styles so beloved by British Columbians. Indeed, for those familiar with British Columbia books, *Building the West* is a curious blend of approaches: probably unconsciously, the authors adopted the "zinger" format of *Working Lives*, the labour history written collectively for Vancouver's Centenary, to transform the conventions of the biographical dictionary.

With photographs of individual architects, facsimiles of their signatures, and plates of their buildings and drawings, *Building the West* is a helpful reference tool for students of British Columbia architecture. The three indexes, bibliography, and summary of the contributors' sources make it an art librarian's dream. It is also a handsome, engaging book for the lay reader. Pick it up, read Catherine Barford's entertaining sketch of her grandfather Ross Lort, David Monteyne's informative account of the McCarter and Nairne partnership, and Hal Kalman's perceptive biography of T.C. Sorby, and then put it down until next time. Unlike a formal biographical dictionary, the writing styles of the contributors vary so widely as to lend energy, character, and interest to the book.

*Building the West* does not, however, reveal the “big picture” of particular concern to academic historians. The significance of “building” British Columbia within the larger historical and architectural historical context is absent from its pages. As an example, the book, to its credit, includes many architects who broke the barriers of class, race, ethnicity, and gender but makes no reference to the wealth of scholarly studies now available that might explain the historical importance of these individuals. Similarly, the old debate in Canadian architectural and cultural history about regionalism versus nationalism, which is surely relevant to the modification and transformation of national and international styles in British Columbia, receives no attention. Yet the overview introducing each chapter offers a splendid opportunity to forge a tight connection between historical significance and the narrative of the biographies and essays that follow.

Whether or not the significance of the authors’ stories is ever told, both *The Vancouver Achievement* and *Building the West* are solid books promising a long shelf life for anyone wishing to learn about the history of planning and architecture in British Columbia.

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## Gender, Race, and Adventure

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### Henning Mankell

*Secrets in the Fire*. Annick \$10.95

### Anne Metikosh

*Terra Incognita*. Ronsdale \$8.95

### Laura Scandiffio

*Escapes!* Annick \$9.95

Reviewed by Darlene Abreu-Ferreira

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An adventure can differ considerably from a story of survival. The former implies choice and excitement, while the latter sug-

gests circumstances imposed on individuals by seemingly irresistible forces, or resulting from accidental events that can suddenly transform people’s lives. Sometimes the line between the two can blur, but adventures generally conjure up romantic ideas, whereas survival has the more negative connotation of desperation and suffering.

Desperate living conditions and relentless suffering to ensure basic survival are especially present in Henning Mankell’s *Secrets in the Fire*. Based on a true story, the book showcases the life of a young girl living in Mozambique, who, with her mother and two siblings, narrowly escapes the slaughter of her village during that country’s civil war. Following an extremely harsh trek through the countryside looking for a safe place to live, the four refugees finally arrive at a camp where they start to recreate their lives, only to have tragedy befall them once again. On their way to help their mother in the fields, at 6 a.m., Sofia and her sister Maria play a children’s game and inadvertently step on a landmine. Sofia loses her two legs, and her sister.

Sofia’s excruciating struggle for survival is a far cry from the adventures of Madeleine, the fictional heroine of *Terra Incognita*. Indeed, the two stories are worlds apart, temporally and geographically. Madeleine is a romantic figure who, with her big brother, travels across the Atlantic in 1670 to settle in her father’s seigneurie in New France. Although Madeleine experiences some precarious moments as she canoes and portages to reach her father temporarily located in the Great Lakes region, the decision to undertake the life of a *coureur de bois* is hers. She is protected and helped by her big brother and their new friend, Gabriel.

The third book, Laura Scandiffio’s *Escapes!*, with its ten stories of narrow escapes from an array of harrowing situations, offers further insights into the fine line between adventure and survival. The

accounts, all based on historical events, contain the necessary ingredients for an enjoyable tale of adventure: danger, intelligence, cunning, risk, and co-operation, with a little dash of good fortune. Few of Scandifio's protagonists, however, would have chosen the circumstances in which they found themselves, and all faced dire repercussions, including death. They took enormous risks to survive, not for the sake of fun and excitement.

These nuances between adventure and survival are also connected to questions of gender and race. Madeleine is a member of the new ruling class, a representative of France's imperial project in North America. Sofia is an African girl whose family has been torn by violence that is a result of, at least in part, Portuguese imperialism. One represents the dawn of European overseas colonization in the seventeenth century; the other lives its aftermath in the twentieth. Both girls endure certain difficulties because of their gender, but Madeleine's privileged position allows her to overcome the limitations imposed on her sex through cross-dressing. Sofia, for her part, can only hope to scrounge enough cloth for a skirt to cover her artificial legs and allow her to eke out a living.

In *Escapes!* too, cross-dressing and other forms of disguise play an important role in escaping certain dangers. Lord Nithsdale escaped imprisonment in the Tower of London in 1716 dressed as a lady visitor escorted by his wife, Winifred; Ellen Craft impersonated a white gentleman slave owner as she bought train tickets to freedom for herself and her husband William in the American south in 1848; the medieval English Empress Matilda and her attendants eluded King Stephen's attack on her castle by dressing in white and blending in with the snowstorm; and six American diplomats left Iran in 1979 pretending to be Canadian.

All three books provide intriguing stories for young readers. The narrative in *Secrets*

*in the Fire* is at times tedious—perhaps because of the translation from the original Swedish—but it tells a compelling story about the horrors of war and landmines. *Terra Incognita* is a bit farfetched—there is too much modern projection of feminist ideas in the heroine's world view—but Anne Metikosh does a splendid job in highlighting Canadian history in a literary form. The ten stories in *Escapes!* fascinate and educate as they cover events from the Roman Empire in 73 BCE, to the Berlin Wall in the 1970s, although a few maps would have better contextualized these sketches. Each book has its own agenda but all three succeed where it counts: making reading fun for inquiring minds.

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## Transatlantic Backyard

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**Stephanie McKenzie and John Ennis, eds.**

*The Backyards of Heaven*. WIT School of Humanities P and Scop Productions \$22.00

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Reviewed by Lawrence Mathews

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This book radiates the distinctive pong of the academic make-work project. Does the world really need an anthology that mixes contemporary Newfoundland and Irish poetry? The editors' one-page Introduction is short on rationale, long on blarney: "Indeed, the poetry of Ireland and Newfoundland and Labrador is united by matters rich in things of the heart and spirit." Indeed.

Publication is underwritten in part by "the Department of Tourism, Culture and Recreation (Government of Newfoundland and Labrador)," and an effusive back-cover blurb appears, coincidentally enough, over the name of the then-minister of that very department.

Of course the circumstances of the book's production shouldn't be held against the poets and their poems. And there's plenty of both—229 poems by 167 poets, 109 of whom are Irish, the other 67 from

Newfoundland and Labrador. (That ubiquitous and tedious phrase “and Labrador” is a sop to local political correctness; the actual Labrador content is minimal, and nearly all of it awful.) Sixty-seven may seem a lot, but there’s one astonishing omission from the Newfoundland side: Sue Sinclair, the best younger poet to have emerged in the last several years.

Those quibbles aside, I come away with three dominant impressions. First, the poems are of generally high quality. Second, the Irish and Newfoundland poets, by and large, write the same kinds of poem, which, apart from idiom (and with certain exceptions), seem to have a borderless North American flavour to them. Perhaps this shouldn’t be surprising, since many of the Irish poets are employed by American universities, and in any case the short anecdotal free-verse lyric using casual diction with the occasional dash of relatively erudite vocabulary for seasoning is pretty much the default option for anyone writing poetry in English these days.

Third, while most of the Newfoundland poets perform on the same level as their Irish counterparts, the contributions of some of the younger Newfoundlanders significantly weaken the anthology. In five or ten years’ time some may look back at what they’ve published here and cringe. The editors have done them no favour by including their work, however much of a thrill it may now be for them to appear in the same book as Seamus Heaney.

But what is probably of most interest to the readers of this journal is that *The Backyards of Heaven* provides strong evidence that there are many Newfoundland poets whose work deserves national recognition. True, some are already well-known, such as Ken Babstock, Mary Dalton, John Steffler, and Michael Crummey, though in the case of latter two mostly because of their fiction. But others, just as worthy, have only local reputations.

Relatively few mainland readers will be aware of most of the following ten: Tom Dawe, Philip Gardner, Richard Greene, Susan Ingersoll, Alastair Macdonald, Camelita McGrath, Randall Maggs, Agnes Walsh, Patrick Warner, and Enos Watts. Half are native Newfoundlanders, half are from “away” but with long-term connections to the place. What they have in common is the authorship of one or more strong books published in Newfoundland. Each is represented here by one to five poems, not nearly enough. One thinks, wistfully, that a better use of the Newfoundland public funds used to co-produce the present volume would have been to publish an anthology devoting about 20 pages to each.

But of course then I wouldn’t have had the pleasure of encountering, however briefly, many fine and hitherto unknown (to me) Irish poets, who are equally deserving of more space than they get here.

No single quotation can accurately represent the work of 67 poets, but the closing lines of “Great Harbour Deep” by Carol Hobbs, describing the permanent evacuation of a community made desolate by the failure of the fishery, effectively evoke something central to the psyche of contemporary Newfoundland:

The ferry doubles its run across the  
expanse of bay.  
Fishermen, ungentle and resigned,  
families with fidgeting children, the  
adamant  
formulas of sentimental legends, all  
shuffle aboard,  
become nothing they ever considered  
(as if any settlement were permanent).  
In far off places, the talk is rife  
with accounts of what was left there—  
nothing,  
nothing.



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## Challenging Boundaries

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**Lorie Miseck**

*A Promise of Salt*. Coteau \$16.95

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**Robert Richard**

*A Johnny Novel*. Mercury \$15.50

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**Richard Cumyn**

*The View from Tamischeira*. Beach Holme \$15.95

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Reviewed by Allan Weiss

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It would be difficult to find three contemporary prose texts that cover as wide a spectrum of styles and subject matters as these. Lorie Miseck's *A Promise of Salt* is a meditation on the real events and ramifications of the murder of Miseck's sister Sheila. Richard Cumyn's *The View from Tamischeira* and Robert Richard's *A Johnny Novel* are both novellas, but differ dramatically in their narrative techniques.

Miseck's book is extremely difficult to review. If it were a work of fiction, one could perhaps evaluate its handling of language and characterization. But Miseck's experiences—both external and emotional—are real, and one cannot help being swept along by its expression of almost unbearable grief. Much of the book portrays Miseck's sense of pain, anger, and loss, feelings that cannot be assuaged by all the efforts of friends and family to offer comfort; at the end of the day, she is still without her sister. What makes the book literary rather than purely autobiographical is Miseck's use of metaphor and symbol. Motifs like the wallpaper in her daughter's room and the title metaphor referring to the effort to capture birds by sprinkling salt on their tails unify and enrich the text.

*A Johnny Novel* is a surreal, fragmented narrative of a child's apparent death and resurrection. The work is metafictional, as Johnny tells his classmates an incredible tale about himself. The main focus of Johnny's relationships with his sister, his teacher, his confessor, and his classmates is

language: the novella refers throughout to words and books. Richard appears to be exploring the connections between physical experiences and how we turn them into creative language. On the whole, however, the work is more puzzling than interesting. While pushing the bounds of fictional form, it fails to engage even at the imagistic level on which surrealist fiction largely operates.

At the other end of the narrative spectrum—at least at first—is *The View from Tamischeira*. The first half of Cumyn's evocative novella is a fairly straightforward account, in a pastiche of nineteenth-century narrative voices, of an expedition to the heart of the Caucasus Mountains. Cumyn portrays both historical figures and fictional characters in the novella, establishing immediately its theme of the hazy boundaries between truth or reality and myth or fiction. Richard Fessenden, an engineer whose work on radio actually predated Marconi's, is convinced that he has determined the exact geographical location of the Garden of Eden. He brings with him on his quest Katherine Waddell, Archibald Lampman's lover. Accompanying them is Henry Norman, a British Member of Parliament and the first of the book's narrators. Norman struggles to maintain a stance of cold-blooded distance toward the others; in his class-based and very Victorian reserve he emerges as someone who is better at crossing national boundaries than human ones. Sergei, their Russian guide, draws Waddell deeper into the heart of his land, and she becomes the not entirely reluctant "victim" of his romantic abduction. The novella's second half presents her story; through her own words we learn of her independent spirit, which is difficult to maintain in Victorian Canada. Like Richard's, Cumyn's novella questions language's ability to convey the transcendent, as we see when Lampman writes to Fessenden of his efforts to turn



one of his experiences into poetry: “That was how he knew it was divine: words could not be made to fit.”

All three texts concern the effort to express the inexpressible. The speakers face boundaries, either geographical or metaphorical: particularly the line between life and death and life beyond death. We see the authors’ and characters’ more or less successful attempts to convey their visions. These authors have taken on great artistic challenges, and while Richard’s reach may have exceeded his grasp, Miseck and Cumyn unquestionably meet those challenges successfully, producing texts that speak to us even, and maybe especially, when they are consciously inarticulate.

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## Canadian History Revisited

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**James E. Moran**

*Committed to the State Asylum: Insanity and Society in Nineteenth-Century Quebec and Ontario.* McGill-Queen’s UP \$27.95

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**Aimée Laberge**

*Where the River Narrows.* Harper Flamingo/ A Phyllis Bruce Book \$34.95

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Reviewed by Gordon Bölling

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Since the publication of Michel Foucault’s seminal *Folie et déraison: Histoire de la folie à l’âge classique* in 1961 interest in the history of insanity has increased. Foucault’s revisionist study portrayed the institution of the asylum as an instrument of social control and thereby criticized conservative accounts of the rise of the asylum as a progressive and humanitarian enterprise. Building not only on Foucault’s work but also on a larger number of more recent approaches towards asylum historiography, *Committed to the State Asylum* “traces the social history of the lunatic asylum in Ontario and Quebec in the course of the nineteenth century.” In his introduction, James E. Moran calls for a contextualized

history of the asylum that considers “a complex synthesis of pressures generated by the conflicting interactions of people from a hierarchy of social and economic circumstances—government inspector, asylum superintendent, local legal or religious authority, jail surgeon, and relatives or neighbours of the person considered to be insane.” Moran’s well-written and comprehensive history relies on his extensive analysis of primary documents. The great number of individual case studies resulting from the author’s meticulous research are particularly interesting to read. *Committed to the State Asylum* also benefits from repeated comparisons between the evolution of the asylum in nineteenth-century Canada and asylum development in the United States and England. Moran thereby places the rise of the asylum in Quebec and Ontario in a larger international context.

The first two chapters examine the state’s responses to insanity in nineteenth-century Quebec and Ontario respectively. In Quebec, the state negotiated a series of contracts with a group of powerful physicians for the institutional management and care of those considered to be insane. This so-called “farming-out system” is peculiar to the history of the state asylum in Quebec and led to the creation of a monopoly with the proprietors of the Beauport Lunatic Asylum. In contrast, the development of the state asylum in Ontario is characterized by a seemingly endless series of power struggles between the medical superintendent, government officials, and the community. In his third chapter, Moran looks at nineteenth-century treatment strategies. Often these therapeutic efforts consisted of a combination of patient work, entertainment, and the regular delivery of religious services. The following chapter focuses on the politics of committal. It delineates in detail the diverse social, economic, and political contexts of committal to the state asylum. The changing attitude toward

those classified as criminally insane is at the centre of the final chapter of Moran's study. The recognition of criminal insanity as a separate category resulted in the establishment of the Rockwood Criminal Lunatic Asylum in 1855. However, in the course of the nineteenth century, officials such as medical superintendent John Palmer Litchfield altered their perspective on criminal insanity as a specialized psychiatric disorder. Subsequently the criminally insane were no longer regarded as a distinct group in need of a specific form of medical institutional treatment. *Committed to the State Asylum* is not only of interest to readers of medical history. In its broad approach to questions of insanity and society in nineteenth-century Quebec and Ontario, Moran's important study is likely to appeal to a much wider audience.

Aimée Laberge's début novel, *Where the River Narrows*, takes its title from the Mi'kmaq place name guébeg. The historical novel tells the story of the Tremblay family, at the center of which is the enigmatic and elusive Antonio Tremblay. Although the *coureur de bois* disappears into the woods near Chicoutimi during the Spanish influenza epidemic in late 1918, his legacy continues to haunt the members of his family. In particular Antonio's great-granddaughter Lucie Des Ruisseaux is obsessed with her family's past. While living in London with her husband and her two children in the late 1990s, she works as a part-time librarian at Canada House and carries out historical research for graduate students and university teachers at the British Library. It is during her visits to the library that Lucie comes to realize the subjectivity and selectivity of traditional historical accounts: "But what brings me to the library is not only my research of the early history of Quebec. Because it's not all there, is it? The past is not contained within the library's subterranean stacks, frozen in an immovable alphabetical order. History is

rewritten every day, and the more I read, the more voices I hear whispering between the lines." The recovery of the past serves Laberge's protagonist as a place of refuge from her tumultuous present. Lucie's marriage to Laurent, an industrial designer, is falling apart, she is having a brief affair with an ex-lover, and her mother is dying back home in Quebec.

*Where the River Narrows* is much more than a compelling family saga. Like Mordecai Richler's *Solomon Gursky Was Here*, Laberge's novel also covers the larger histories of Quebec and Canada. Longer parts of the narrative recount historical events such as the explorations of Jacques Cartier and the story of the nearly eight hundred filles du roi, who were sent to the French colony in the seventeenth century. In addition, *Where the River Narrows* raises questions about constructions of Canadian identity and nationhood: "What is it, Canada? . . . It's also just a word, six letters trying to hold all the granite, the grain, the timber, the fish scales, and the fur together. A word with a shifty meaning, a name for a shifting place." The successful reconciliation of a wider national history with the private history of the Tremblay family makes Aimée Laberge's story a pleasure to read.

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## Turn it all "About"

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**W.H. New**

*Grandchild of Empire: About Irony, Mainly in the Commonwealth.* Ronsdale \$12.95

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Reviewed by Gary Boire

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Delivered originally as the 2002 Garnett Sedgewick Memorial Lecture at the University of British Columbia, *Grandchild of Empire* is a short autobiographical meditation "about" irony as it is deployed in examples taken mainly from the literatures of Canada, Australia, India, the Caribbean and Africa. The operative word here is

“about,” for as New explains in the first of his nine sections, the lecture “is a critical exercise not just in examining inheritance and imitation but also in the art of indirection . . . . *About*: from OE *onbutan*, “on the outside.” What follows is a series of insightful observations about specific examples of postcolonial irony, coupled with intellectual forays into colonial social history, literary and cultural theory, topics such as exile, alienation and identity, as well as a number of comic autobiographical digressions concerning New’s father (a witty patriarch in his own right). The result is a small gem of a book that provides much upon which to meditate and debate.

One of New’s more interesting strengths is his ability to enact what he praises most strongly; throughout his entire argument he deftly synthesizes his many critical and theoretical inheritances without ever dwindling into an unquestioning imitation or repetition. New is never so quixotic as to attempt an unprecedented *definition* of irony; rather, he obliquely consolidates what have become the many truisms concerning its *strategies* and then, with admirable aplomb, applies the arising theory to examples taken from Pope Alexander VI through Kipling and Brontë, to Atwood and Ihimaera. His argument retraces the many contours of irony as a disruptive force; an anti-authoritarian form of discursive resistance; a way of saying two things at once; a method of indirection; “a weapon in the arsenal of change” and so on.

New’s *use* of such truisms valuably teases out some fairly sinewy truths within the truisms; to wit: that irony *simultaneously* functions as a resistant voice as well as “a covert affirmation of some of the intricate ways in which the generations of Empire and Independence relate”; and the idea that “irony often means saying what you mean at a slant . . . . *oversetting*: so that a reader might hear (through the *performance* of a given set of words) not only their split lev-

els of *implication* but also the divergent *relation* between an apparent surface intent and an often political undertow.” With this kind of razor-sharp distinction, New delivers a series of astute readings of literary examples from across the commonwealth—readings which convincingly reveal that postcolonial irony can often be “a route towards self-esteem.” In short, irony demystifies ideology and, as such, creates power/knowledge: the indirect “slow work of attitudinal reform.”

Another of New’s many strengths is his ability to pressurize a point, to beg a question which is then left to his readers to wrestle with on their own. For example, there is a question that floats *about* the entire enterprise, a niggling question which is, perhaps, not this little book’s job to answer. But New begs that it be asked when he remarks that “there remains a connection between political ends and literary techniques . . . the rhetoric of literary protest *can* resonate beyond the specific circumstances to which it refers.” I think I disagree “about” the trajectory of this resonance for I cannot share the optimistic faith that literary publications effect any positive material changes in the social and political realms. To put the question more bluntly (as did an anonymous spectator years ago at an ACCUTE conference in Victoria), who can *afford* irony? *Who* actually benefits in a material way from a writer’s use of irony? The majority of the oppressed or the writer him or herself, the publisher, the academic industry, advertisers, pulp mills, ink salesman, and printers?

As New rightly points out, to be effective irony “depends upon context and shared knowledge.” A crucial part of that shared knowledge is the ability to read and write; because if you cannot read you cannot possibly benefit from the pyrotechnical ironic brilliance of Walcott, Selvon, Lamming, Ghose—whoever. The question is: *how*

does a literary protest—which may be read by a minuscule percentage of the earth's population—“resonate beyond the specific circumstances to which it refers?” Is it rather not so much that irony liberates, but that the social freedom afforded by publishing royalties permits a writer like Achebe to participate materially in truly liberating *political action*? Perhaps the connection that New speaks of has a third term—that there is a connection, not *between*, but *among* literary protest, publication, money and social capital, international elitist recognition, fundraising, mobilization and, finally, material political achievement at the micro level.

Make no mistake. *Grandchild of Empire* is no elitist fluff; it *is*, quite the contrary, a charming, witty, accessible, and intelligent book that shares its insights (and teaches its lessons) to both professionals and students alike. The book contains a wealth of information about irony, about colonial history and, finally, “about” the postcolonial relationship that exists between the two. That it can inspire precisely the debate I have proposed is a mark of its integrity, strength, and intellectual challenge.

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## The Shape of Events

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**Sharon Pollock**

*Blood Relations and Other Plays*. NeWest \$19.95

**Joan MacLeod**

*The Shape of a Girl and Jewel*. Talonbooks \$16.95

Reviewed by Shannon Hengen

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Anne Nothof and Diane Bessai contribute introductions to this grouping of four of Sharon Pollock's early plays. Bessai observes rightly that Pollock is “more interested in examining character in a social or political context than through the intimacies of psychological interiorization” in the “epic-documentary theatrical tradition.” When characters are subordinated to social

or political issues, or in fact to staging, and not made equal to them, then the characters can seem lifeless, their dialogue wooden.

In *Generations*, Pollock changes the pattern of the other plays and introduces us to characters before issues, with the pleasing result that we can come to empathize with the members of this Alberta farming family and so experience at the emotional level, as well as at the intellectual level, their conflicts over how best to tend both to the land and to themselves. But this play otherwise fits with those collected here in its main motifs: among them, passionate but unthinking devotion to ideals on one hand, and soulless opportunism on another; the overarching power of human interconnection, especially love; and the working out of gender and/or sexual and other identities.

Nothof points towards the deliberate ambiguity in Pollock's limning of her characters—“No one is wholly innocent or completely powerless”—and we as readers/viewers feel that ambiguity so keenly that we might indeed at times wish for more clarity, more symmetry in the characterizations. We might feel confused rather than satisfied by, for example, Pollock's Lizzie Borden, the main character in the Governor General's Award-winning *Blood Relations*, a woman charged with but never convicted of murdering her parents in late nineteenth-century New England. Nothof reminds us, however, that “*Blood Relations* remains the most popular of Pollock's plays,” having been “produced around the world,” for Pollock's fine critical intelligence and lively dramatic imagination colour this and all of these plays.

Perhaps the most insightful politically is the second piece collected here, *One Tiger to a Hill*, concerning the hostage-taking in a maximum security prison, with a Métis inmate named Tommy Paul as the central figure. Produced at Stratford and the National Arts Centre, this play has in fact earned even better success in the USA than

in Canada, with Denzel Washington, for example, having played Tommy Paul in the Manhattan Theatre Club's production (Nothof, "Introduction"). Characters align themselves on the familiar Pollock axis of idealistic/opportunistic, but here with more serious consequences as the lives of prisoners, guards, and hostages are at stake. As we read we want to care about the question of reform—is it possible and, if so, through what agents?—and yet the characters who flesh out these questions are difficult to connect with, for although they divulge information about themselves freely, they never surprise us. Nonetheless, Pollock's apparent thesis, that progressive change can and must occur even through the agency of conflicted, improbable beings, remains compelling and powerful.

In *Whiskey Six Cadenza*, a main character's view that freedom of choice must be defended at any cost in order to preserve what is most human—including, in his case, the freedom to provide strong, illegal liquor to the citizens of a disadvantaged mining town—is, like issues in the other plays, profoundly significant, and yet coming out of the mouth of the bombastic, violent, and corrupt Mr. Big, this view is degraded. We come to know another main character first through her jingoistic temperance beliefs, never really sensing her as a complex being until late in the play, if at all.

Pollock's early plays collected here represent important moments in North American history and as such deserve the productions and praise they have received. Her deliberate subordination of character to issue and spectacle may in fact work very well on stage, however it may disappoint on paper.

Character, on the other hand, provides the only focus in MacLeod's two plays, but the importance of past events links MacLeod's and Pollock's work, as does the frequency of a Western Canadian setting. The killing of teenager Reena Virk in Victoria in 1997

by other teenagers informs the action of *The Shape of a Girl*, while the female speaker herself is located on an island near Vancouver, and the sinking of an oil rig off the coast of Newfoundland in 1982 informs that of *Jewel* while the female speaker is located in the Peace River Valley. Both plays are monologues, the first by a teenage girl and the second by a young widow.

In *The Shape of a Girl*, MacLeod creates a compelling and complex teenager, Braidie, who uses the murder of Reena Virk by females her age as an occasion to reflect on her own identity. An aspiring poet, Braidie should perhaps speak in language more distinguished by figures of speech and unusual diction in this piece meant as a letter to her brother; her voice seems, nevertheless, authentically that of a difficult teenager. She engages us fully with her unambiguous irritation with her mother, her conflicted love for her friend, Adrienne, and her inability to defend the young woman to whom Adrienne is viciously cruel. In this potentially very powerful play, MacLeod might have made clearer any implied resonances between the poetic and the violent, particularly since a recurring moment is this paraphrased quotation from Adrienne Rich: "A girl in the shape of a monster / A monster in the shape of a girl" (see Rich's "Planetarium").

In the second play, *Jewel*, we have motifs similar to those in the first in a tale equally well told: drowning, speaking hard things, and behaving badly. As well, both of these women are funny, their humour somehow underscoring rather than mitigating the harshness, sadness, and dumb cruelty around them. Marjorie, the young widow, addresses her monologue to her dead husband on Valentine's Day and recalls other of those holidays since she was a girl. As honest as the teenager from the first play, Marjorie engages and moves us fully, her language appropriately spare and her emotions clear three years after the death.

In MacLeod's plays, important Canadian tragedies take hold of us in ways that make us perceive how the tragedies might have occurred. Highly evocative, the plays do not call us to action in the epic tradition as do Pollock's, but they provide us with stimulating theatre nevertheless.

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## Of Movies and Clichés

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**David Adams Richards**

*River of the Brokenhearted*. Doubleday \$21.00

Reviewed by Marta Dvorak

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David Adams Richards has been a major figure of social realism on the Canadian literary scene since 1974 when he published his first novel at the age of 24. His naturalist depiction of the poor underclass in New Brunswick, whether it be in his Miramichi trilogy or his Giller Prize-winning *Mercy Among the Children*, models itself on the European tradition of the social fresco practised by writers from Dickens and Victor Hugo to Balzac and Zola. *River of the Brokenhearted* (2003) moreover foregrounds a cultural continuum that reaches back to the Old World by delving into the mode of historical fiction favoured by Maritime predecessors such as Hugh MacLennan and Thomas Raddall. The novel constructs a family history with a strong biographical and autobiographical dimension that traces the landmarks of regional, national, and transnational societal evolution. The nineteenth-century Irish parochialism and clan hatreds transplanted to New Brunswick and nursed by generations of the fictional feuding McLearys and Druken unfold against a backdrop of local history embodied by figures such as Max Aitken (Lord Beaverbrook), serving to connect the microcosm of the Miramichi River area with geopolitical events and key players on the international political scene such as Churchill. As with Richard Wright's *Clara*

*Callan*, which chronicled early twentieth-century social mores in a binary mode through sister protagonists, Richards' portrayals of the early twentieth-century Irish community and the development of the entertainment industry are most likely to generate readerly appeal.

Richards centers his saga on a spirited woman who runs a movie theatre and initially accompanies the silent pictures with her violin, allowing the author to concretize the undeniable technological progress manifest in the shift to the talking pictures, the rise of the major studios, and, ultimately, the emergence of television. In conformity with the binary mode regulating the text, Richards foregrounds the advent of new technologies to express a moral vision that denies the perfectibility of humankind. As the decades pass, the rum-running and drunkards spawned by Prohibition give way to drug-dealing and addicts, and—the authorial voice suggests—a sapping of morality in both the youth and those in a position to provide them with leadership. The young spend their time “failing one university course after another and taking part in radical campus protests over library books and distribution of free hash,” while the business community invests in prophylactics, and a “new breed of priest,” young and pointedly gay, “play[s] guitar at mass, invokes the names of psychologists and popular singers” and condemns traditional patriarchal practices with a glib ferocity that raises indignation in the authorial mouthpiece.

At the heart of Richards' attempt at tragedy and epic (accounting for the grandiloquence and the profusion of heavy-handed allusions to diverse Shakespeare tragedies) is an age-old Manicheanism, a combat of good and evil. Evil is essentially embodied by villains that readers love to hate: Joey Elias, as fiendish as Iago, and Rebecca Druken, predictably accompanied by snake imagery, combining the viciousness of a

Goneril and a Regan, and the monstrousness of Cathy Ames in Steinbeck's *East of Eden*. Yet, while Steinbeck subtly reconfigures the biblical master narrative of Cain and Abel, Richards adheres to a simple binary opposition by pitting two sisters against each other as angel and devil: "this nun and I have divided the world between us," declares Rebecca.

Literary stereotypes such as the snake metaphor are accompanied by social and cultural stereotypes. Characterization is impeded by an uneven ear for dialogue and a reliance on stock characters. From the narrator Wendell's great-grandfather down to Wendell himself, the males of the Irish community are drunks. A strong-willed woman saps the virility of the men in her family. Feminism ("the agitation on behalf of women") is a ploy. Similarly, the language, at times laborious, often resorts to clichés ("This made his blood boil"; "He was by now too sick at heart"). When not relying on readymade locutions, the writing can be syntactically muddled to the point of impeding readerly comprehension. The author states the obvious, or needlessly reiterates. Even the structuring leitmotifs such as Elias and his brother's boots, metonymy of betrayal, are contrived and heavyhanded, as is the rather pat ending that resorts to the double wedding closure of Renaissance dramatic convention.

Happily, Richards produces good repartee, successfully generates pathos with outcasts such as a crippled hunchback (a recipe certain romantics before him have put to good use), and wields paradox skillfully. The reader encounters some felicitous phrases ("Why did he wear such large shoes, when he had nowhere to go?"). When the writing is not forced, it can be fine: the scene infused with biblical resonances in which Putsy takes it upon herself to forgive Elias on his brother's behalf contains a line lovely in its simplicity, which readers can think back on: "I loved you as

your brother did, and you abandoned me too, and that is all that is required."

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## Roots and Gatenby

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**Betty I. Roots, Donald A. Chant and Conrad E. Heidenreich, eds.**

*Special Places: The Changing Ecosystems of the Toronto Region.* U of British Columbia P \$29.95

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**Greg Gatenby**

*Toronto: A Literary Guide.* McArthur & Co. \$19.95

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Reviewed by Lothar Honnighausen

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One may ask how a cultural and literary historian dare review a book written by scientists dealing very professionally with geology, climate, watersheds, spatial growth, flora, and fauna. But ours is a boundary-challenging age, fascinated by multi-disciplinary projects, exploring liminality and overlaps between scientific and cultural studies. Obviously, our contemporary view of culture is no longer limited to fine arts and popular culture, but has become more comprehensive, including, beside the history of the sciences, the study of scientific attitudes and approaches. *Vice versa*, many of us, studying space, place, and the interactions of regional with global tendencies, use methods from science as well as from cultural studies. Therefore, *Special Places* deserves not only the attention of scientists but also that of Canadianists. Further, because the book deals in an exemplary fashion with an important region, it is also of interest to the international community of scholars studying *bioregionalism*.

In this regard, the difference in title and approach between the present book *Special Places. The Changing Ecosystems of the Toronto Region* and its 1913 precursor, *The Natural History of the Toronto Region*, is revealing. While the descriptive and taxonomic studies of *The Natural History* still breathe the spirit of nineteenth century

positivism, addressing the like-minded specialist, the appeal of the ecologically oriented new volume *Special Places*, celebrating the 150th anniversary of the Royal Canadian Institute (RCI), is more profound and far-reaching. The authors of the individual chapters, whether they write about “Mosses, Liverworts, Hornworts, and Lichens” or “Fish,” use their common approach, “ecosystem thinking,” throughout, particularly foregrounding “the *changing* ecosystems” to address general as well as scientific readers and to appeal to their ecological responsibility.

That the book takes its title from the heading of Part 4, “The Special Places” (Waterfront Ecosystems, The Port Lands, Scarborough Bluffs, The Savannahs of High Park, Oak Ridges Moraine, Credit River, Humber Valley, Don Valley, Duffins Creek, Rouge Valley), makes sense because these “special places,” particular landscapes interpreted as changing ecosystems, is what the systematic studies of Part 1 (The Broad Physical Basis: The Physical Setting, Climate, Watersheds), Part 2 (From Wilderness to City: Native Settlement to 1847, Spatial Growth), and Part 3 (The Past and Present Natural Environment: Vascular Plants, Mosses, Liverworts, Hornworts, and Lichens, Fungi, Invertebrates, Insect, Fish, Amphibians and Reptiles, Mammals, Birds) prepare for.

In contrast to the descriptive and taxonomic articles in the precursor volume, those in the present book have, despite all disciplinary and individual differences, a common unifying “*oiko*-logical” philosophy, and it is a pleasure to witness how well editor-in-chief Betty I. Roots and the editors Donald A. Chant and Conrad E. Heidenreich have succeeded in bringing together not only a team of highly qualified specialists, but one that shares essential scientific and moral convictions. This manifests itself in all of the 18 individual chapters. Moreover, the book provides the

necessary theoretical underpinnings for its new vision, strategically presented in the Introduction, in the important chapter 6, “Ecology, Ecosystems, and the Greater Toronto,” and in chapter 16, “From Acquisition to Restoration: A History of Protecting Toronto’s Natural Places.”

As should be obvious by now, I very much enjoyed reading and learning from this fine book. It has a reader-friendly layout and is clearly written. It provides us with lucid definitions not only of what vascular plants are, but also how ecosystems work. Above all, it presents animals and plants in the Toronto region as functioning within the wider context of changing ecological systems. I rather like the way in which additional biographies of leading scientists or ecological “champions” are inserted in blue boxes in the running text, and I do not mind the highlighted key sentences drawing our attention to major scientific facts and ecological threats. As one would expect of a volume commemorating such a venerable scientific institution as the Royal Canadian Institute—a brief history by Conrad E. Heidenreich appears at the end of the book—this is a thoroughly professional and beautiful publication. That it contains a wealth of maps, charts, photos, and helpful drawings is not surprising, but that texts and images are united and enhanced by a very attractive book design deserves special mention. Obviously the editorial team and the contributors had the full commitment and professional support of the UBC Press.

One might have expected more information on the environmental impact of gardening, on the role of natural science museums and universities and, last but not least, on the decision-making political bodies and on the socio-economic processes affecting the change of ecological systems. But given the richness of the book, there is no reason to complain. In contrast to the apocalyptic tone of so many environmental



studies, *Special Places* endears itself further to the reader by ending not only with a sober assessment of the precariousness of the “Evolving Urban Ecology,” but also with some cautiously optimistic conclusions if we continue to care about our “Special Places.”

The term *Literary Guide* in Greg Gatenby’s book is to be taken literally. The book is not a guide to the literary history of Toronto, but a cicerone to places of literary and cultural interest in the city. Therefore, it is arranged as a series of neighborhood walks, and the little maps, introducing each of these walks, are as indispensable as the anecdotal text on the houses, hotels, public buildings, and bookstores which have played a role in the life of Toronto writers.

The author has seen to it that the maps are designed in such a way that they are both detailed enough to help us find the locations and simplified enough to do so without any difficulty. Whether it will be fun to tote the bulky book all about Toronto is another matter. Instead, I suggest doing the reading at home and taking only a copy of the particular little map with a check list of its main places along on the tour.

The book is a mine of interesting information, lucidly presented, often in the form of well-told anecdotes. If one gets a bit tired from the rather small print and the crammed pages, a wealth of pictures of places and authors make one relax again. The Index seems to be reliable, but it would have been even more helpful if due graphic distinctions between important and minor references had been made. Among the many positive features, the attractive and clever cover design, by Scott Richardson, of the keys of an old type-writer, deserves mention.

Gatenby has a clear sense of *who is who* and how relevant the several places are. In most cases of authors unknown to me, I have enjoyed being introduced to them.

Following Mr. Gatenby on the High Park East tour to 174 Wright Avenue, I became acquainted with Emily Murphy (1868–1902), “the first woman appointed police magistrate,” “who instigated the lengthy struggle to have Canadian women declared ‘persons,’ the author of the first comprehensive book on drug addiction in North America,” and of the travel sketches, *Impressions of Janey Canuck Abroad* (1901) (286). At 62 Glengowan Road, Lawrence Park, I observed with pleasure—thanks to a lovely old photo in Gatenby’s *Literary Guide*—how Marshall Saunders (1861–1947), author of the bestselling (seven million copies) dog story *Beautiful Joe* (1893), spoon-fed a little lost baby robin in the presence of her Boston terrier, Fiji. The many rare and illuminating photos, for instance, the moving one of imagist poet W.W.E. Ross and Mary Lowry Ross or the charming one of Myrna Kostash at a Toronto “Love-in” (1967), enhance the attractiveness of the book. Further, Gatenby has organized his tours very sensibly and in such a way, that they include some highlights as well as some lesser lights mentioned in passing.

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## Foreign Lands

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### **Mireille Rosello**

*Postcolonial Hospitality: The Immigrant as Guest.* Stanford UP \$37.43

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### **Rukmini Bhaya Nair**

*Lying on the Postcolonial Couch: The Idea of Indifference.* U of Minnesota P \$84.31

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### **Ralph J. Crane and Radhika Mohanram, eds.**

*Shifting Continents/Colliding Cultures: Diaspora Writing of the Indian Subcontinent.* Cross/Cultures 42. Rodopi \$98.00

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Reviewed by Mark Williams

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Refugees tend to suffer discrimination because they are seen as gatecrashers, not “guests.” Yet guesthood itself is a condition

which imposes difficult obligations, as Mireille Rosello demonstrates in her fine study of the definitions and representations of hospitality in France and its African colonies. The metaphor of guest and host applied to migrants, invited and uninvited, is informed by concepts of ownership and nationalism. These concepts suit those who define the terms rather than those whose status is defined. In anatomizing the practice, literature, and rhetoric of hospitality, Rosello poses fundamental questions about how dominant groups within nations welcome and refuse others and forget the dubiousness of their presumption of generosity. These questions apply not just in the former centres of empire but also in settler colonies where, as she puts it, “the powerful and secure host [extending hospitality to more recent settlers] tends to forget that what he gives was taken from someone else.”

Rosello seeks to explain “the ways in which the state legitimizes some forms of hospitality while declaring others irresponsible, unrealistic, dangerous, or even illegal.” This is a linguistic as well as a historical problem. Rosello asks how the guest/host metaphor would change its meanings if the model of a hotel were substituted for that of a family house, observing that the hospitality of nations “may more closely resemble commercial hospitality.” Hospitality is in crisis because the word refers to drastically different conceptions and Rosello shows how the contested meaning of the term has driven debate in France about restrictions on migrants. Guests of the host country, in a famous case, were denied the right to extend hospitality to other migrants.

Rosello also examines the fear of the migrant. Citing Derrida’s observation that “[w]hen I open my door, I must be ready to take the greatest of risks,” Rosello acknowledges that the guest “does contain incalculable and unknown futures.” Nor does the

preference for educated over unskilled migrants ensure safety for the host. As Rosello points out, intellectuals such as Fanon have posed a real risk to the assumptions of the state. Intellectuals are more welcome than workers because they are deemed more civilized, but they may effectively challenge the concepts of civilization itself. In the climate of fear generated by 9/11 the element of risk has come to dominate Western consciousness. Yet rich nations still seek desirable immigrants and persist in seeing themselves as generous hosts for allowing the clever and the promising to enter their “homes.”

Rosello observes that immigrants’ point of contact with the “host” state is bureaucratic, and that it is hard to feel grateful to the impersonal and alienating functionaries who administer the codes and procedures that govern their new lives. Rukmini Bhaya Nair’s *Lying on the Postcolonial Couch* is also concerned with bureaucrats, but with their treatment of national citizens rather than immigrants or refugees. Nair argues that the indifference displayed in modern Indian life is a continuation of habits taught by empire and she advocates freedom from the “tragicomic inheritance of postcoloniality.” She proceeds by way of inventive readings of, *inter alia*, the execrable poetry of colonial administrators, postcolonial disaster narratives, the Rushdie fatwa, Kipling’s *Kim*, Tagore’s *Gora* and Allan Sealy’s *Trotter-nama*.

Nair’s critical practice involves vertiginous leaps, unexpected connections, and critical insights generated from often unlikely material. *Lying on the Postcolonial Couch* is an exhilarating but at times unnerving read. One feels captivated by so mobile an intelligence but bombarded by the sheer amount of evidence collected and examples offered. Yet, although Nair loads every rift with exemplary detail, her writing is never dry. Self-conscious, with an eye for parallelism and coincidence, Nair at times

becomes the novelist she describes: “[m]y essay has developed cracks, grown misshapen, has become overly long, quote-studded, a Frankenstein’s monster, under the strain of answering this question.” Scholarly in the most adventurous sense, she also notices the human pain not registered by officials, a quality she herself finds in Sealy’s brilliant *Trotter-nama*. And Nair’s thought is wittily turned, as when she advances the Oscar Wilde-like notion that idleness is an educational virtue which the forcing houses of Indian elite colleges destroys.

What holds the book together is the preoccupation with postcoloniality as a form of borrowed consciousness. For Nair, modern India is “a region of shadows, indicative of a mentality, an inherited condition of the psyche.” The colonizers have vanished into myth leaving behind the “recipient mentality” in which bureaucratic indifference thrives. In tracing the fine links between the Raj and contemporary India, Nair demonstrates the persistence of colonialism’s bad habits, the ways writing both embeds and resists those habits, and the possibility of compassion as well as blindness in human culture.

Satendra Nandan’s essay in *Shifting Continents/Colliding Cultures* also deals with a national trauma, not that which British colonization induced in India but rather that suffered by Fiji—especially Fiji Indians—as a result of both colonization and the recent indigenous coups. More than 60,000 Indians were taken to Fiji as *girmityas* from the late 1870s under a colonial system of legalized slavery. Since the 1987 coup more than 75,000 have left, mainly for Australia, New Zealand, the USA, and Canada. Among the ironies engendered by this national political trauma are the absent Indian faces in the ads for “cheap holidays in paradise,” the appearance of apartheid in a country which was at last developing postcolonial narra-

tives of its own, and the assumption of the role of brutal oppressors by the political leaders of the once colonized.

The essays in Crane and Mohanram’s collection, by concentrating on the effects of diaspora on contemporary Indian literary consciousness, further destabilize the notion of the postcolonial. Nilufer E. Bharucha points out that the Parsi diaspora “predates European colonization” of India. The meaning of diaspora itself is both slippery and contentious, and the editors allow that there was considerable debate about the terms diaspora and exile in the ACLALS conference that gave rise to the book. Some essayists, like Debjani Ganguly, who compares the religious transgressions of Rushdie and Pakistani writer Taslima Nasreen, challenge Rushdie’s celebration of displacement and exilic consciousness.

The danger in pursuing the complexities, diversities, and nuances of experience in terms like diaspora is that one ends by frittering away precise meaning altogether so that they might as easily refer to the modern as to the postcolonial. Ralph J. Crane, noting the variety of cultural and personal experience locked within homogenizing political labels like “black,” observes that diasporic identity recognizes the self as “multiple, fluid and dynamic.” This phrase closely recalls descriptions of Katherine Mansfield’s fiction, suggesting the range of conditions—feminist consciousness, modernist displacement, colonial self-exile—that might be said to produce what is attributed to the diasporic.

When Zohreh T. Sullivan retrieves a quotation from a 12th-century monk, Hugo of St Victor, who observed that “he is perfect to whom the entire world is a foreign land,” one feels that the claim of the dispersed to a state of homelessness has been dissipated utterly. Yet like Rosello’s and Nair’s books, *Shifting Continents* is stimulating precisely because rather than simply intoning the

litany of postcolonial terms—mimicry, identity, displacement, exile—the essays continually apply sceptical pressure to the shifting concepts they embody.

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## In Praise of the Left Hand

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**Jean Royer**

*Le Visage des mots*. Écrits des Forges \$10.00

*Nos Corps habitables*. Noroît \$17.97

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**Louise Cotnoir**

*Nous sommes en alarme*. Noroît \$15.95

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Reviewed by Cedric May

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I was in Toronto in 1985 for a conference. We celebrated the tenth anniversary of the death of Alain Grandbois in the fittingly grand setting of the University's baronial halls and the faded thirties' elegance of University House. I had enjoyed applying Victor Hugo's great line: "Les formes de la nuit vont et viennent dans l'ombre" (the shapes of night come and go in the darkness) to Grandbois's restless, far from shapeless nightscape, particularly in *Les Îles de la nuit*. Later, a neat, quiet man introduced himself. It was Jean Royer. We spoke about poetry, obvious perhaps. I asked his opinion of Eudore Évanturel, a poet being spoken about at the time in the quest for hidden riches in Quebec's first literary century. The next day, Royer brought and gave me the collected verse of Évanturel in the Réédition Québec series. This impresario of letters had had a hand in its publication. Everything in this encounter was redolent of the man, his quiet affability, his dedication to poetry and his desire to encourage, his tireless generosity in the service of literature.

Royer savours the intimacy of the world of letters. "Words have faces" and they are the faces of his friends, those with whom he has shared many poetry roadshows, whom he has interviewed and reviewed. "Le poème fut ton chemin et ta maison au bord du silence. Tu as grandi dans le ventre des

mots." (The poem was your path and your home on the edge of silence. You grew in the womb of words.) This camaraderie through poetry is a refuge against silence and solitude. Paul Chanel Malenfant gives just this emphasis in his beautiful introductory essay for *Nos Corps habitables*, selected poems 1984-2000. The central poem is the uncharacteristically prolix "Le lien de la terre," in which Royer names 49 poets, their titles, the collections they created, their affinities, quoting them even. I saluted this gift for empathy in an enthusiastic review of Royer's *Introduction à la poésie québécoise* (1989), noting then his preferences, his spiritual family, and his love of the "authentic, bravely original, gritty voice of Québec poetry." Poetry is this link with the soil, rarely patriotic, organic rather, visceral, rooted in a living, human medium. Malenfant unites this theme with that of the mother, as does Royer in the dozen words reproduced in his handwriting (visibly left-handed?) which open *Nos Corps habitables*: "Qu'est-ce que la poésie sinon la terre dans la bouche des mères," seeing poetry as the song of the earth on the lips of mothers. "The face of words" is the face of his mother particularly: the one who gave Royer his body, made it habitable, gave him his words, showed him that the creation of the poem is a maternal affair. Four poems open *Le Visage des mots*, glowing tributes to the woman with whom he has the closest blood ties.

"Une femme m'a pris par la main." (A woman took me by the hand). Hands, caresses, gestures handed down, these are just so many links with the mother whose life and death fill *Le Visage des mots*. Paul Chanel Malenfant does not take up this hand theme in his introductory essay, whether out of discretion or a desire for coherence, giving preference to the maternal theme and the tributes to fellow poets, including a moving "Tombeau de Miron."

The hand motif is relegated to a lengthy footnote on page 15.

“Éloge de la main gauche” and “Main d’ombre” which translate as “In praise of the left hand” and “phantom hand,” are the last of the four sections of *Le Visage des mots*. “Main d’avant moi / et moi sans elle,” Royer salutes the hand he never had, linking this with other creative artists, the Catalan sculptor Jordi Bonet, evoked in the act of creating a famous Montreal mural, and the left-handed Gauguin. The tree comforts the child, troubled by the absence of his right hand, by telling him that his branches too are of unequal lengths. Does left-handedness favour creative art, we are left asking. This playful, inventive treatment of a sad theme justifies the epigraph from Francis Ponge, the equally puckish poet of the doggedness of things. These brave lines belong in any Royer collection. He deserves the elegant homage the Éditions du Noroît pay him here.

From the same editor comes the 14th title from, Louise Cotnoir, *Nous sommes en alarme*. Her work goes back to the 1980s when Cotnoir took part in collective women’s theatre. The *Oxford Companion to Canadian Literature* reminds us that collective creation has been one of the main currents in Quebec theatre since 1965. Though still teaching there, Louise Cotnoir has come a long way from the Thetford Mines of those heady days, a location synonymous with labour disputes brutally repressed, with some of Quebec’s blackest and bleakest industrial landscapes. Most will have seen those movie clips in black and white of the sombre protests in 1950 during the Asbestos Strike, with the young Pierre Elliott Trudeau in short pants walking alongside the striking miners. The “nous” of the title echoes throughout these poems, the collective voice that comes naturally to Cotnoir and her “itinéraire féministe”—the title of one of the series she has contributed to—is reflected in the tiny

photograph she provides for the front cover of a standing statue of a muscular virago in stark contrast to the standard feminine image. This is big city poetry in two voices, one writing prose which speaks the collective sense of alarm, the other more laconic, more factual, in short, pared down poems, expressing physical, despiritualized reflections on the city scene. The writer is marooned in a lonely bar in that vast “trailer-park” which is North America, in the acute irony of the “happy hour.” The décor is reminiscent of that in Michel Tremblay’s *Duchesse de Langeais* where the “duchess” is similarly stranded on a plastic beach under the full glare of vacation sunshine.

This collection is marked by a critical distance which is evident in the language. Louise Cotnoir writes in elegant, rhetorical French, at ease with the regular anglicisms, present more to reflect contemporary concerns—she shares the bar with a young black man—than out of necessity. She is comfortable with the voice she has made her own, forged no doubt in the classrooms of the college where she teaches as much as in her writing or on the barricades, and which suits the note of shared alarm she feels compelled to sound. Enforced leisure hangs heavy on the arms of the ideologically committed. Degrading, dehumanizing, driving us back into a very physical self, it is increasingly the challenge of our times.

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## CanLit History Today

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**Denis Saint-Jacques, ed.**

*Tendances actuelles en histoire littéraire canadienne*. Nota Bene \$21.95

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Reviewed by Marie Vautier

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This collection of literary history, analyses, and theory is based on a workshop organized by Denis Saint-Jacques and E. D. Blodgett for the Association of Canadian

and Québécois Literatures in Quebec City in 2001.<sup>1</sup> Denis Saint-Jacques' introduction notes the complexity of the rapport between literary history and the concept of the "nation." E. D. Blodgett offers a comprehensive overview of how various literary histories in French and English have framed the ever-changing relationship of literary history to national identity formation. Winfried Siemerling's contribution compares the work of the Americanist Sacvan Bercovitch to that of Blodgett. Against a backdrop of alterity and the "New World," Siemerling develops a theory of "non-transcendence" regarding questions of cultural plurality. To my mind, and despite the admirably well-documented presentation of the theoretical arguments, it is unfortunate that most of this chapter *détonne* in its focus on *American* literary history.

Lucie Robert's analysis of novels by Robertson Davies and Françoise Loranger in her work on "le théâtre vu par les auteurs dramatiques," is typical of the book's comparative Canada-Québécois focus. Robert, however, situates the analysis within the larger context of her research on the "statut institutionnel de la dramaturgie," and on novels written by playwrights/dramatists which fictionalize the social realities of the theatre world. A second article on the theatre, Louise Ladouceur's detailed discussion of the *franco-québécoise* adaptations of plays from English-speaking Canada for presentation on the contemporary stage in Quebec, offers a spectacular survey of the profound social and identity challenges to the Canadian *imaginaire* occasioned by the liberties taken in the translations/adaptations of plays from three periods after 1969.

Ladouceur's article finds an echo in Beaudoin and Lamontagne's study of the reception of Québécois francophone literature in English-speaking Canada between 1939–1989. Complete with graphs, tables

and statistics, this article notes the overwhelmingly positive reception of Roch Carrier, the under-representation of Réjean Ducharme and Pierre Vadeboncoeur, and the ambivalent reception accorded the work of Jacques Poulin. As with Ladouceur's work, this article, part of a larger research project, proposes various sociological observations to account for these cross-cultural receptions.

Practices of translation are at the centre of Annette Hayward's contribution, which arises out of the same major research project. She examines the reception of pre-1940s literary and historical works in French which were translated into English, arguing that in both cultures, the production of literature was motivated by similar aesthetic/moral value judgments, aiming for a "réalisme idéaliste," and that theories such as "un marché des biens symboliques autonome à la [Euro-French Pierre] Bourdieu" are inapplicable here.

Translation is also at the heart of Kathy Mezei's excellent overview of French-English/English-French literary translation in Canada; she situates the act within "the realities of Canadian cultural politics" (Sherry Simon), while incorporating references to many theoretical and practical approaches to translation. Along with Beaudoin and Lamontagne, Mezei notes the importance of feminists' collaborative work in this field.

The title of the book insists on the *contemporary* tendencies of literary histor(ies), but one of its most rewarding aspects is its discussion of the past. Mary Lu MacDonald argues the need for "context": "Times change, words take on new meanings, political and social conditions mutate." MacDonald considers the literary works of the pre-1860 period as "products of particular individuals" and details "the complex context in which [they were] written." Although occasional markers of orality do not affect the clarity of MacDonald's argu-

ments, another contribution is greatly flawed by the author's disinclination to make it into a scholarly text. Despite his disclaimer, Peter Dickinson's study of Patrick Anderson, André Béland, and Derek McCormack in "Canada's Queer Literatures" would have greatly benefited from more editorial rigour.

Chantal Savoie argues for the inclusion of journalists' work at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in literary history: newspaper by-lines, such as those collected in the volumes of *Lettres de Fedette* (first published in *Le Devoir*, 1914–1922) were a woman-centred form of literary creativity. Clément Moisan proposes a different kind of inclusion: he presents the "grandes lignes" of a text he co-authored with Renate Hildebrande on the "*histoire de l'écriture migrante au Québec*." The volume concludes with a brief article on literature in cyberspace; René Audet argues that hyperfictions, contrary to expectations, have not mutated into different genres.

This book offers solid academic overviews of the many fields of our literatures; it is highly recommended reading for graduate students and researchers.

#### NOTE

- 1 I was then on the executive of ALCQ/ACQL, and made a presentation on postcolonialism which I did not submit for publication.

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## Western Ways

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**Fred Stenson**

*Lightning*. Douglas & McIntyre \$32.95

Reviewed by Katherine Durnin

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There's a trick Fred Stenson has been learning to do with a Western: he lovingly bur-nishes the familiar pieces of an established genre, but assembles them in surprising ways and reworks them with finely crafted detail.

In *The Trade* (nominated for the Giller Prize in 2000), Stenson chronicled the

consolidation and subsequent waning of the Western Canadian fur trade in the nineteenth century. As something of a sequel, *Lightning* is set in the second half of the century, when ranching and farming were becoming the emergent economy in the region. Though this novel is not as self-conscious a work of historical fiction as the earlier one, Stenson treads a fine line between producing a recognizable Western and practising some historical revisionism by updating traditional views of the Old West. His hero, Doc Windham, is a wise and world-weary Texas cowboy hired to drive a herd of cattle from Montana to the new Cochrane Ranch in what is now southern Alberta. As the drive takes shape in 1881 and the men and animals move across Montana, Doc recalls his arrival in the territory 15 years earlier, his escapades in wild and woolly mining towns, and his love affair with Pearly, a billiards shark and independent spirit. This double-barrelled narrative allows the novelist to inject historical nuance into a rambling adventure tale, and the young Doc's passage along a steep learning curve for survival provides a plausible explanation for the older Doc's wisdom and world-weariness.

The New West in this Western is mainly apparent in the female leads: the American Pearly—brash, scrappy, free-wheeling—and the British Canadian Esther Prieston—reserved, intelligent, commanding. One might suppose that they represent the contrasting national characters on the two sides of the border, except that Esther's British husband and his friends engage in a decadent orgy that makes an American lynching party seem downright wholesome by comparison.

The cattle drive appears as a central set piece in the novel, but much of the action takes place according to the rhythms of life in towns and on homesteads—human rhythms of hard work over long stretches broken by drunken binges or visits to

whorehouses, violence unleashed and violence contained. But these are strangely tentative rhythms, subject always to the shock of accident. The brutality of this picture is tempered by the wry, laconic dialogue, and by striking landscapes. Stenson is especially good at creating a panoramic effect in descriptions of prairies and foothills: “The country was a thirsty tan with nothing above it on most days but a pale blue through which fine, white fish-skeletons swam.”

Stenson’s knowledge of life in young towns and on new ranches comes from his upbringing in southern Alberta and from the thorough research that lies solidly behind everything he writes. In *Lightning* we learn, for example, that saloons specialized in such activities as billiards or, of all things, bowling; how Freemasonry operated in frontier towns; that bars in a supposedly dry Fort Macleod sold “medicinal” liquor to surprising numbers of ailing locals; and how, exactly, one goes about castrating a bull calf. Still, didacticism is no longer a quality that readers value in novels, though we may appreciate teaching that happens inconspicuously. The strong didactic streak in this novel is aimed at supplementing or even refuting what readers already “know” about the Old West.

Doc Windham, an inquiring man and an avid reader, is the main vehicle for the lessons, but the omniscient narrator does his fair share of teaching too. As he enters the Macleod Hotel, for example, Doc notices “There was a little sign wagging under its cave that showed a pistol pointed at a skull and the words *No jawbone*, meaning no credit.” Clearly, Doc does not need to add the explanatory tag to his own observations: the message passes straight from author-narrator to reader. Readers might delight in the offbeat detail, the chance to feel that they are being initiated into the arcane knowledge that makes up the stuff of the past, but they might also

balk at feeling that they are being fed tidbits of local colour in order to bedazzle them from noticing a vaguely inconsequential plot. Over the span of the novel, the sheer density of Western lore on offer is impressive and inspiring. That the lore cannot quite make up for the sparseness of an essentially picaresque plot says more about the Western as a genre than about Stenson as a craftsman.

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## Response and Responsibility

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**Drew Hayden Taylor**

*Furious Observations of a Blue-Eyed Ojibway.*  
Theytus \$16.96

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**Lee Maracle**

*Will’s Garden.* Theytus \$16.95

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Reviewed by John Moffatt

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Like the earlier two instalments in Drew Hayden Taylor’s *Funny, You Don’t Look Like One* series, *Furious Observations of a Blue-Eyed Ojibway* is composed of “opinions and observations” drawn here from the period 1999–2002. As in the earlier works, the themes of identity and expression, both personal and public, inform most of the essays in this book in one way or another, as Taylor contemplates Aboriginal humour, Canadian politics, 9/11, food, cheerleader calendars, travel across Canada and around the world, and the rising tide of enthusiasm for golf among First Nations people. Consistent elements are Taylor’s characteristic wry humour and impatience with stereotypes; he continually prompts readers to re-think their easy assumptions about the moral and logical geography of the issues. If he pokes fun at the Canadian Alliance or affirms the culpability of various religious denominations in the residential schools tragedy, the reader is never under the impression that Taylor is simply falling into line with a fashionable or politically correct viewpoint. In “Casting an



Indigenous Ballot” the discussion of Alliance policy occurs in the context of a wider discussion of the ethics of aboriginal participation in the Canadian political process, while in “The Walk Through the Valley of the Shadow of Litigation” the focus is ultimately on the responsibility of organizations for the behaviour of their members.

Taylor’s ability to consider his subject matter from opposing positions gives the collection some of its best moments: his discussion of Aboriginal Humour and the problems it seems to pose for the non-Aboriginal audience, particularly where the reception of his own work is concerned, is a highlight. In “Evidently I’ve been a Bad, Bad Boy” and “White Like Me” he explores a 2000 incident in Vancouver when an anonymous bomb threat was made in response to his play *AlterNatives*. Both of these pieces ask the age-old question of whether an author can expect the audience to distinguish his or her opinions from those of the fictional characters, and while Taylor finds humour in the situation (“and worst of all, my mother found out about the bomb threat and gave me a good scolding, telling me to ‘start writing good plays again!’”), he doesn’t hold out much hope in this instance.

*Will’s Garden*, Lee Maracle’s first novel for young adults, also addresses issues of cross-cultural misapprehension and stereotyping with compassion and humour, but the story is ultimately optimistic in its implications. Set in an unnamed Sto:lo community near Mount Cheam in the Upper Fraser Valley, the novel follows 15-year-old Will through the days leading up to and following his traditional coming-of-age ceremony. As in Maracle’s earlier work, most notably *Ravensong* (1993), the novel develops Will’s character partly in terms of his response to the complex ethical codes of Sto:lo society, and partly in terms of his confrontation of the larger world, particularly at school. Some readers will no doubt

find the high school’s pack of inarticulate racist “jocks” rather crudely drawn caricatures, but Maracle is interested in the roles that people are willing to play in society, and throughout the novel Will is looking for ways to see people in larger contexts that make their behaviour comprehensible, if not forgivable. A key theme in *Will’s Garden* is the challenge of finding a language in which to comprehend and embrace human difference; Maracle’s attention to the difficulty of reconciling different value systems saves the novel’s depiction of small moments of reconciliation from sounding simplistic. For example, when Will brings home his friend Wit, who is homosexual, his family’s troubled response, while low-key, nevertheless prompts Will to examine the kinds of freedom and choice that his society offers. The family ultimately tolerates Wit (who is part Aboriginal), but Will and the reader are cautioned to think carefully about how homophobia may be constructed differently from community to community.

Like Stacey, the protagonist in *Ravensong*, Will sometimes seems wise and self-possessed beyond his years. However, the novel also effectively captures Will’s teenage longings for love and impatience in a world that often still treats him as a child; the reader’s resistance to his insights draws attention to the obstacles that Will must still face in his effort to find the authority to speak in his own voice.

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## Tête ailleurs et désertion

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**Hélène Vachon**

*La tête ailleurs*. Québec Amérique \$22.95

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**Pierre Yergeau**

*La désertion*. L’instant même \$22.95

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Comptes rendus par Carlo Lavoie

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Dans son premier roman pour adulte, Hélène Vachon nous livre un récit dense et complexe ouvrant la voie à une réflexion

sur la création et sur le monde qui nous entoure. Publié en 2002, *La tête ailleurs* devient une affaire de regard qui nous oblige à remettre nos propres perceptions en jeu. L'auteure propose une remise en question de ce que les yeux ne voient qu'au premier abord par ce que les yeux du cœur n'osent que très rarement dévoiler.

Divisé en deux parties, ce roman nous fait entrer dans la vie de Alison Moser, dont le gagne-pain consiste à peindre les portraits de gens qui veulent laisser des souvenirs à ceux et celles qu'ils aiment. Ce métier est loin de la combler mais lui sert néanmoins à se nourrir, quoique très peu, et à boire du soir au matin, autant à la maison que dans son bistrot préféré. C'est en peignant les têtes de ses clients qu'elle se remet constamment en question, elle qui aimerait tellement être à la hauteur de ce qu'elle croit être une personne bien. Ainsi, les gens qui l'entourent contribuent à son questionnement. Parmi ces personnages qui meublent son univers, il y a sa tante Doria, qui habite le petit village de Penwick et qui l'aime de façon inconditionnelle. Il y a aussi son ex-conjoint Linder, qu'elle a toujours cru trop parfait pour elle, Léa et son ami Allan, dont le couple semble aller à la dérive, Hunter, un sans-abri, SDF, le chien qui habite avec elle et qui se contente de prendre le moins de place possible, et enfin Warren, le nouveau voisin de palier bruyant qui viendra bouleverser la solitude qu'elle aimait jusqu'alors. Très «tête ailleurs» dans son travail et ses soirées de «vin solitaire», elle sera forcée de porter une attention particulière au bruit de ceux qui l'entourent et surtout, à porter un regard différent sur elle-même.

Ce roman doit également beaucoup à la peinture. D'abord d'un réalisme saisissant, le récit nous permet de voir le monde sous différents regards. Ainsi, la narration en est une multiple et devient une sorte de concert kaléidoscopique. Les récits enchâssés dévoilent différentes facettes de la vie de

Alison. Les voix de ses amis se mêlent les unes aux autres pour apporter autant d'ombres et surtout de nuances au tableau morne qu'elle semblait vouloir peindre de sa propre vie. Les couleurs singulières de chaque voix narrative s'insèrent dans un univers empreint de détresse et d'un humour noir dans lequel Alison se cherche. Tous ces personnages feront en sorte qu'elle se sente ébranlée dans son petit monde et qu'elle se sente obligée d'en sortir pour trouver un sens à sa vie.

Ce questionnement sur le sens de la vie hante également le monde de *La désertion* de Pierre Yergeau. Paru en 2001, et finaliste au Prix du Gouverneur général du Canada en 2002, ce roman est le huitième titre publié par Yergeau. L'auteur abitibien y présente la suite de *L'écrivain public* paru en 1996 et qui marquait le début d'une fresque régimale qui devrait compter neuf titres. D'ailleurs le lecteur reconnaîtra Jérémie, écrivain public, le personnage principal du roman du même titre, qui cède ici le pas à l'histoire de Michelle-Anne Hans, ou encore Mie, que l'on suivra de l'enfance à la vieillesse. À l'aide de fragments rappelant les souvenirs d'une vie et d'un style riche, Yergeau nous fait revisiter l'enfance par le biais de deux thèmes principaux, la perte et l'abandon.

Divisé en trois parties, ce roman relate les faits et gestes importants qui ont meublé la vie de Mie, une enfant de gens de cirque élevée dans un camp de bûcherons de l'Abitibi par sa grand-mère Tony et le chef cuisinier du camp, monsieur Tchen. La première partie la présente d'ailleurs toute petite alors qu'elle évoluait entre les chaudrons de la cuisine et la salle à manger remplie de bûcherons. Très tôt, elle sera appelée à oublier qu'elle est une enfant afin de se rendre utile et d'abandonner les simples jeux qu'elle s'était créés pour s'imaginer une nouvelle existence, soit les ombres chinoises projetées sur les murs par le cuisinier d'origine chinoise et son jeu de

marionnettes rappelant le Grand Cirque d'Hiver dans lequel évoluaient ses parents. Femme ordinaire d'un mineur menteur, coureur de jupons, alcoolique et drogué, elle aurait voulu devenir une grande femme et quitter l'Abiti. Elle se verra vieillir, aimer, être déçue par l'amour, avoir des enfants, les regarder partir et enterrer son mari. À travers tous ses souvenirs, elle apprend que l'on se noie dans le passé, que l'on se perd dans le présent et que le futur, selon monsieur Tchen, n'existe pas. Pas étonnant ainsi que dans les souvenirs de Mie se mêlent des bribes de son présent alors qu'elle combat jusqu'à la vieillesse pour changer sa vie. La perte de l'enfance devient alors l'abandon de grands projets pour Mie. Les illusions sur l'âge adulte cèdent rapidement le pas devant ce vaste territoire où règnent le silence, la confusion et la répétition de la même épiphanie qui s'étend sur des kilomètres. Dans ce paysage, les souvenirs se dressent comment autant de fragments de vie, souvent incomplets, variés et en désordre.

Du côté formel, Pierre Yergeau marie admirablement bien une forte mélancolie et un côté humoristique très pointu. Des scènes à la fois empreintes de douceur et de violence nous livrent un monde de turbulences, un monde d'amertume et de blessures. Mie n'aura pas réussi à quitter la vallée de l'or, mais le lecteur saura apprécier un style d'écriture faisant découvrir le pays natal de l'auteur.

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## Redefining Alberta

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**Aritha van Herk**

*Mavericks: An Incurable History of Alberta.*  
Viking \$36.00

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Reviewed by Katherine Durnin

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For anyone wishing to understand the deep roots of Western alienation from central Canada, this is the book to read. For anyone seeking a delightful, rollicking history

of a cantankerous, contrarian region that keeps an eagle eye on its own interests within Confederation, this is also the book to read. The prose sparkles, the pacing is impeccable, and perhaps most significantly, Aritha van Herk conveys something of the mysterious bond between people and place that defines what it means to be an Albertan. The author relies on the work already done by many outstanding historians (listed in an excellent bibliography), but brings her talents as a novelist to the task of writing a lively, accessible and thorough account of Alberta's past.

Borrowing a page from the *Annales* historians, van Herk begins her history with "primordial time" to outline the prehistoric geological and climatic events that shaped the physical makeup of present-day Alberta. Once we learn that "trilobites were the first true Albertans," the stage is set for a radical redefinition of the term. Residence does not suffice: love of the land and its people is a prerequisite, and no one with an outsider's "carpetbagger" mentality qualifies.

There are chapters on the fur trade era, relations between whites and Natives, the mapping and surveying of the West with attendant battles over control of the land, the establishment of the NWMP, the beginnings of cattle ranching, settlement, the creation of the province, and its bizarre political life. Fur trade history is arguably the most colourful part of Alberta's past, with its hardships, its rivalries, and its larger-than-life characters, such as the Falstaffian HBC factor John Rowand, the detestable HBC governor George Simpson, and the superlative Métis guide and interpreter, Peter Erasmus.

In the chapter on politics, van Herk begins by rescuing Frederick Haultain, "the father of Alberta," from obscurity. She goes on to outline the development of Alberta politics from the United Farmers of Alberta, through the Social Credit era and Conservative landslide elections that have

consolidated Alberta's heritage of one-party rule. The provincial government's early involvement in railway development schemes seems to justify Ottawa's view that Alberta might be too inexperienced to handle political and economic autonomy. It seems unfair, therefore, that when these "pie-in-the-sky railways" go bankrupt, van Herk holds Eastern banks to blame. Her message is loud and clear throughout: we Albertans would rather shoot ourselves in the foot than have an outsider—and especially an Ontarian—come and do it for us. (This volume might well have come with a health warning for "Centrals" who are prone to apoplexy.)

Chapters on women, cities, and culture sketch more of the region's social history. The section on Edmonton and Calgary is admirably clear on how urban development proceeds from frontier outpost to settlement through boom-and-bust to shape a modern prairie metropolis. To her credit, van Herk does not shy away from delving into some of Alberta's more unsavoury aspects, including its stubborn racist streak and the disastrous experiment in social engineering that from 1928 to 1972 led to the sterilization of thousands of mentally ill and handicapped Albertans.

It is unfortunate that this stunning narrative should be marred by such flaws as misplaced illustrations (the photograph of John Rowand appears on the page about George Simpson, for example, and a map drawn by Peter Pond in the section on Anthony Henday) and a strangely sketchy map of the province. These are minor flaws, however, for a spectacular history written with more than a touch of grace and humour.




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## Children from the Wars Returning

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**John Wilson**

*And in the Morning*. Kids Can P \$7.95

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**Jean Little**

*Brothers Far from Home: The World War I Diary of Eliza Bates, Uxbridge, Ontario, 1916*. Scholastic Canada \$14.99

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Reviewed by Jonathan F. Vance

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The success of the Dear Canada series has brought the epistolary novel back into vogue, at least as far as children's books are concerned. And, since the American literary critic Paul Fussell famously referred to the First World War as "Oh, what a literary war," in that its participants were, more than in any other war, both infused with an appreciation for the written word and moved to write about their experiences, it seems only fitting that the epistolary format be used to bring the Great War to young readers.

John Wilson and Jean Little both cover roughly two years of the war: *And In The Morning* from the day of Britain's declaration of war, in August 1914, to the first days of the July 1916 Somme offensive that decimated Britain's New Army; and *Brothers Far from Home* from Christmas Day 1916 to the first peacetime Christmas two years later. Through it all, the two young writers, Jim Hay and Eliza Bates, undergo the kind of life-altering tragedies that struck millions of people around the world. Jim's father is killed in action in the first month of the war, and he becomes an orphan soon after when his mother dies of a broken heart. His own tragic fate is played out in the aftermath of the First Day of the Somme, the single bloodiest day in the history of the British Army. Eliza also watches as her comfortable existence in a manse in Uxbridge, Ontario, falls to pieces. One brother is killed at the front in bizarre circumstances, a shock that drives her father

to a nervous breakdown, and the other returns from Europe horribly maimed. The neighbouring family is scarcely more fortunate, for their soldier son comes back from the war ruined in mind rather than body.

The secret to a successful epistolary novel is to capture and retain the voice of the writer. In this, Little succeeds admirably, and one never doubts for an instant that the diary reveals the deepest thoughts and fears of a typical 12-year-old girl. Eliza Bates uses her journal as any child might, to blow off steam over her ill-treatment by a sibling, to celebrate when things go right and grieve when things go wrong, to confide in when no one else understands, and to explore her own emotions. Through it all, the diction is utterly authentic. When Eliza complains of her sister's airs or muses about babies ("I've seen some positively repulsive babies brought in to be baptized. They improve later, usually, but at first they slobber and look like little red monkeys. Bald and bawling."), one never imagines that the journal is anything but the work of a young girl.

Wilson is less convincing with the voice of his protagonist. At the opening, Jim Hay is a 15-year-old Glaswegian, but he often doesn't sound like one, even if we recognize his maturation through the fires of war. Wilson does a good job of having Hay parrot the conventional propaganda of 1914 (the insertion into the text of news articles acts as a nice foil in this regard), but Jim often sounds less like a teenager and more like an adult trying to sound like a teenager. Phrases like "The pungent odour of decay mixed with the ordinary smell of horses, such a common odour of home that its juxtaposition with death turned my stomach" just don't ring true coming from a working-class Glasgow teenager, even one with literary inclinations. While Little never loses sight of the fact that, for a 12-year-old girl, being brushed off by a big sister is more important than the fall of Liège,

Wilson tries too hard to make Jim's words trace the movement of British society from naive idealism to realist disillusion.

But this very fact also gives *And in the Morning* a strong grounding in the history, for Wilson drew heavily on archival records and the writings of soldiers from the Highland Light Infantry to construct Jim Hay's experiences. Little, too, gives her novel a solid historical basis, the inspiration for Eliza's doomed brother Hugo coming from Little's own uncle, who was killed in action in 1918. She also provides postwar biographical details on her characters to heighten the verisimilitude. Both authors play on the literary inclinations of their characters by giving each of them an encounter with a great writer: Jim Hay meets the British war poet Isaac Rosenberg at the front (it is Rosenberg who encourages him to read more poetry), while Eliza has a brush with L.M. Montgomery, whose husband served a parish north of Toronto during the war.

The publication of World War I letters and diaries, either in book form or on the internet (notable, for example, is the impressive collection assembled by the Canadian Letters and Images Project of Malaspina University College in Nanaimo, BC), has been something of a growth industry of late. Because many of them were written by young soldiers like Jim Hay, John Wilson faces (but doesn't quite meet) the daunting challenge of trying to bring something fresh to the subject. However, very few of those accounts reveal the perceptions of the children like Eliza Bates who had to make sense of the war from afar. And, as Little reveals so sensitively, they often interpreted the conflict in ways that might surprise us.



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## Feeling Numb

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**Terry Woo**

*Banana Boys*. Riverbank \$22.99

Reviewed by Jenny Pai

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Terry Woo's debut novel centres on a group of young friends who recount their drunken university camaraderie and subsequent angst-filled pursuit of "sexloverelationships," careers, and self-awareness, also allayed by alcohol and other sedating strategies. Luke, Dave, Shel, Mike, and Rick are "Banana Boys"—Chinese yellow on the outside, assimilated white on the inside—and much of the novel deals with Rick's decision to reject this label and instead embrace what he considers to be a more rewarding identity, that of a "FOB"—fresh-off-the-boat immigrant. Woo's use of stereotypes critiques the compartmentalization of race and racism; the novel rejects the notion of a singular Asian Canadian experience, instead asserting that the friends are "[o]rdinary and flawed" people who happen to avoid life through self-anesthetization. Woo is especially deft at creating parallels between money-driven Rick and aspiring-writer Mike, including the awakening "moment[s] of clarity" that propel them to transform their lives. "Sounds like *Generation X*," Luke intones about the seeds of Mike's novel; indeed, Woo's numerous Couplandesque references remind us that the friends live in a distinctly non-Asian popular culture, foregrounding their struggle with invisibility even as they find themselves glaringly visible.

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## Confusing Collusions

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**Lorraine York**

*Rethinking Women's Collaborative Writing*.

U of Toronto P \$50.00

Reviewed by Valerie Raoul

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As we are well aware, granting agencies are strongly urging researchers in the Humanities and Social Sciences to engage in "col-

laborative" and "interdisciplinary" research. Lorraine York's informative and thought-provoking study of published examples of collaborative academic and creative writing projects should be required reading for those willing to take up this challenge. While York aims to illustrate the joys and benefits of teamwork, as well as its risks and pitfalls, it is undoubtedly the latter that emerge most forcefully from her analyses.

The duets and choruses discussed are diverse of period and location, as well as in the number and gender of the participants. An initial overview ranges from nineteenth-century British pioneers (Wordsworth and Coleridge, as well as lesser known lesbian couples) to more recent feminist experiments in Europe (Cixous and Clément, the Milan Women's Bookstore), and contemporary co-authoring of academic work by women in North America (Gilbert and Gubar). Three chapters are devoted respectively to collaborations in prose, poetry, and theatre, drawing out the effects of generic contexts as well as the role of gender and race/ethnicity/sexual orientation in the relationship between collaborators. All three sections include in-depth analysis of Canadian examples.

The two texts selected for detailed examination of prose collaborations are a novel co-authored by Carol Shields and Blanche Howard in 1991 (*A Celibate Season*) and *Cancer in Two Voices* by Sandra Butler and Barbara Rosenblum, a journal published the same year in the US. The fact that both texts are in prose seems to be less important in comparing them than their status as fiction or autobiography, an aspect that could be given more attention.

Nevertheless, the juxtaposition brings out some of the central issues of power dynamics that York wishes to address. In the case of the novel, the better known writer (Shields) strives not to overshadow her partner, and the epistolary format allows each to be primarily responsible for one

part of the exchange. Shields chose, specifically, to take on a male voice, distancing herself from the femininity associated with her fiction. The two writers have a professional relationship, in spite of their friendship; they maintain a certain distance (both personal and geographical). Butler and Rosenblum, on the other hand, begin by introducing themselves as a Jewish lesbian couple living together, and their record of a shared (and ultimately unsharable) experience raises poignant questions of a different order about the limits of collaboration.

In her opening discussion York broaches the sensitive topic of the actual or potential eroticization of intellectual or creative collaboration between two people, of the same or opposite sex. Whether overt or covert, desire for identification/fusion is in a relationship of tension with a need for self-assertion and control. This tension emerges progressively more clearly in the following sections. Collaborative poetry in fact has a history of competition and emulation, going back to the troubadours. Lesbian couples such as Suniti Namjoshi and Gillian Hanscombe or Daphne Marlatt and Betsy Warland have provided fascinating examples of creative collaboration, with titles that encapsulate the tensions conveyed (*Flesh and Paper* and *Two Women in a Birth*, respectively). Both examples incorporate the delights of close collaboration, “when it works,” and the distress experienced when it is less successful. Another Canadian experiment, *Linked Alive*, illustrates the possibilities when a larger group of six poets, representing ethnic and gender diversity, combined their talents. They did so by imitating the Japanese renga, a traditional form of collective verse-making based on sequential contributions. Cooperation and competition co-exist, as the participants rub off on each other, creating a collective voice that is “subject to change” (the title of another work by Marlatt and Warland).

From the outset, York asserts that her inquiry is based on a premise of suspicion towards any feminist belief in “women” as more prone to collaboration or better able to succeed in it than men. The chapter on theatre documents various collectives, cooperative ventures, and anonymous team efforts that were undertaken in Canada and the UK under the combined influence of second-wave feminism and radical politics. The main focus, however, is on one of the most notorious and controversial cases of collaboration as the cause for discord and disappointment, the transformation of Maria Campbell’s memoir *Halfbreed* into the play *Jessica*, mediated by Linda Griffiths, and *The Book of Jessica* that details their disagreements. While theatre, like film, necessarily entails collaboration, it nevertheless provoked, in this case, a highly contentious debate over issues of ownership and appropriation when people work together.

Issues of trust and inherent power disparities emerge as central in York’s analysis, reflecting her (somewhat intermittent) adoption of a Foucauldian frame of reference. If women have opted for collaborative endeavours, it appears to be because of circumstances rather than an innate tendency to share. Collaboration is never an easy way out, or a crutch. The tendency to undervalue it in the academy, in spite of SSHRC’s expressed desire to encourage it, makes it a risky investment with no guarantee of success. The narrow path between collusion and collision is difficult to negotiate, and confusing in a world where the “single author” remains most easily recognized. Significantly, this book is written by York alone. Is collaboration worth the effort? My own experience would lead me to answer “yes,” in spite of the daunting prospects.



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## Of Note

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### Lois Simmie

*Trying to Say Goodbye.* Coteau Books \$19.95

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Kensington Manor, enclosed by Victoria's soft air and growing things, combines something of *The House of All Sorts* (although with more violence), and something of Firozsha Baag (although the portraits of the characters crowding Kensington lose their witty edge as Simmie moves toward the gloom of detective investigation completed). Matthew, the tortured central consciousness of the novel, is caretaker at the Kensington—plodding the halls in search of the tortuous and tormented, hoping for diversions that will keep him from lapsing into drink. Meanwhile a poltergeist roams, provincial politicians are scandalous, and the calm prairies beckon. Scrabble™ shapes the syntax. Matthew yearns for various reconciliations with daughter, grandson, and estranged wife. I enjoyed the sarcastic undertone in this portrait of a suffocating and vulnerable world—especially where it is leavened and extended by exuberant, surprising literary quotation. Virginia creeper against the apartment building wall taps out the message: Bare ruined choirs where no birds sing. And Victoria, we learn, is still a pretty how town. LR

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### Jane Barker Wright

*The Understanding.* The Porcupine's Quill \$19.95

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The hippie culture of free love and communal farm collides with the conventions of the parent-teacher conference. Solly and Isobel struggle to sustain a “not normal” marriage and family: the obligation to be “ordinary” is constant tyranny. Wright conveys nicely the ironies of niceness; her descriptions bristle with contempt for Fruit Roll-Ups, macramé, and “real, up-to-the-minute feminists.” The narrative tracks back in time, hinting here, noticing a ghost

there, as the reader gradually accumulates the stories and details that impede the most determined striving for banality: little things such as “bralessness” and *The Whole Earth Catalogue*; big stories such as Isobel's passionate, caring kidnapping of a baby girl orphaned by suiciding parents. *The Understanding*, given its dreamers and soft haunting, is not always easy to understand—in part because the haunting is often not too soft. But in steady skewering of smugness, the novel is never boring. LR

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### Sandra Sabatini

*Making Babies: Infants in Canadian Fiction.*

Wilfrid Laurier UP \$59.95

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Sabatini discusses a wide-range of twentieth century Canadian fiction in this study of the figure of the infant, some of it quite surprising. Surprising to remember babies in works you had always thought were about other characters and places. Sabatini's focus on the function of babies in maternal narratives brings with it an interesting refiguring of some aspects of the history of Canadian fiction—and culture. She writes perceptively, for example, on “semantic hazards,” or on French grammar in Audrey Thomas's *Mrs. Blood*. And as much as she has to summarize plot and character in order to situate the often unnamed, Sabatini often stops to attend to a very particular detail, such as the punctuation in Ross' *As For Me and My House*. I particularly enjoyed Sabatini's puzzled but bright comments on the “rule of estrogen” in Robert Kroetsch's *What the Crow Said*, and her situating that novel as drastically changing Canadian male writers' representing of infants. LR

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### Mary Burns

*Flashing Yellow.* Turnstone P \$18.95

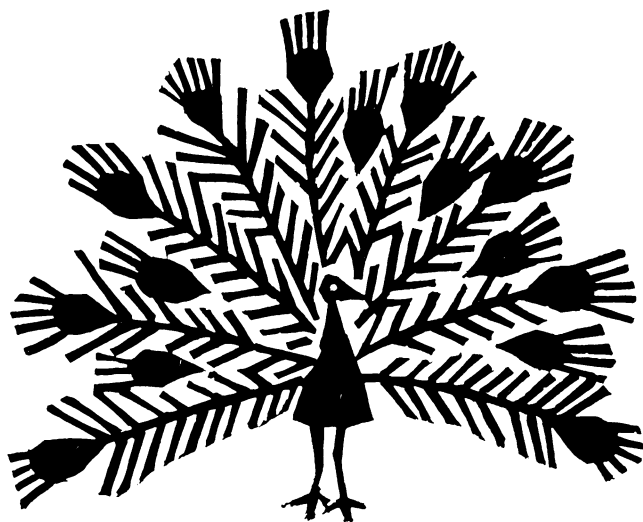
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Somewhere between the Italian violins that thrill her daughter and the growth-oriented refrains of the Vista Grande Growth Fund,



middle-aging Shinny worries the secrets of her growing loneliness. Burns tests an intriguing form, a near-epistolary novel in which the central female character seldom writes; she does not even write back to her several correspondents, although she does confront Carter Briggs, her mutual fund manager, on a busy street. Shinny's mind is filled with memory, and the smells and textures of (sometimes unwritten) Vancouver, but her actual writing is confined within the letter allowances prescribed for memorial plaques on park benches. These she reads attentively: she composes one for her own mother, and imagines the stories

packed in others. Texts on plaques represent the terse forms of remembering and communicating available to a character living where the traffic signals are continuously flashing yellow, a personality always cautious, always tentative. But other letters to Shinny from her grandson (in the form of an audacious family history) and from Glen, nurseryman proprietor of Riverbend Botanicals, erode her cautious self. Some abrupt plot-turns ironically hesitate near the end—as Shinny looks ready to cross against the flashing yellow, to speak with Glen the “thoughts and blushes” she has steadily concealed. LR



## La Proclamation royale sur la Déportation des Acadiens ou le protocole de la grande prudence

Bernard Haché

Il est à se demander à quelle lecture, voire à quelle réception il faut vouer la *Proclamation royale*<sup>1</sup> signée le 9 décembre 2003, qui reconnaît la déportation des Acadiens et, dans une certaine mesure, les affres subies par la population d'origine française de la Nouvelle-Écosse au milieu du 18<sup>e</sup> siècle. La déclaration officielle a reçu un accueil enthousiaste, mais les acclamations ont quelque chose de trompeur : un écart significatif subsiste entre les demandes initialement formulées à l'intention d'Elizabeth II—à l'origine, il était question d'excuses et de torts admis par la reine en personne—et la réponse que constitue la *Proclamation royale*, signée et délivrée par la Gouverneure-générale du Canada. Il faut de même recevoir avec réserve la conception que se fait la Couronne de la déportation, dont la sommaire description repose sur certains aspects, il est vrai, majeurs et dramatiques, mais qui ne suffiront pas à donner la pleine mesure des événements.

La *Proclamation royale* a-t-elle été conçue trop précipitamment? L'imminence de dates anniversaires significatives (le 400<sup>e</sup> de la fondation de l'Acadie, en 2004, et le 250<sup>e</sup> de la Déportation, en 2005), tout comme les pressions politiques accrues et insistantes

auront rendu gênant le maintien du silence monarchique à propos d'un événement plus que jamais d'actualité, surtout dans les provinces Maritimes et en Louisiane. La livraison de cet énoncé officiel, dans la turbulence d'un débat parfois acrimonieux et qu'il devait terminer, permettra de constater que la *Proclamation* elle-même ne fut pas sans histoire.

### 1. Les excuses royales : une histoire à finir

Il faut remonter au 4 janvier 1990 pour comprendre ce qui a amené la Couronne à rompre un silence vieux de deux siècles et demi sur l'Acadie de la déportation. Ce jour-là, un avocat de Lafayette, en Louisiane, et d'origine acadienne, Warren Perrin, procéda à une démarche fort originale lorsqu'il fit parvenir au gouvernement britannique ainsi qu'au palais de Buckingham une pétition invitant la reine Elizabeth II à reconnaître la déportation comme une « erreur ». Il invitait la reine, par la même occasion, à abroger l'ordre d'expulsion des Acadiens qu'aucune loi ou décret n'a jamais clos.<sup>2</sup> La requête du juriste louisianais était entièrement symbolique, ce qui n'empêcha pas Londres de soutenir que les événements de 1755 avaient désormais peu à voir avec la monarchie britannique depuis que les souverains de Grande-Bretagne avaient transféré à Ottawa la gouverne de l'État canadien, auquel ils ne restent plus désormais attachés que par tradition.<sup>3</sup> Infructueuse, la démarche de Perrin n'en fut pas moins remarquée aux États-Unis, et certaines législations

américaines (dont celles du Maine et de la Louisiane) décidèrent d'en débattre.<sup>4</sup> Plus récemment, le sénateur louisianais John Breaux informa le Congrès américain du principe de la reconnaissance royale de 1755, et son intervention fut rapportée dans les comptes rendus officiels du Congrès.<sup>5</sup>

En 1994, l'avocat de Lafayette profita du 1er Congrès mondial acadien (CMA), dans le sud-est du Nouveau-Brunswick, pour répandre dans l'Acadie ancestrale la démarche qui lui tient à cœur. L'idée des excuses royales intrigua pour le moins et fit, dès lors, périodiquement les manchettes dans les Maritimes, entre autres en 1996, lors d'une visite du prince Charles dans le nord-est du Nouveau-Brunswick,<sup>6</sup> et en octobre 2002, à l'occasion du passage de la reine, à Dieppe, dans le cadre des célébrations de son jubilé d'or.<sup>7</sup> Toutefois, le vrai débat public fut lancé suite à l'initiative de Stéphane Bergeron, député de la circonscription québécoise de Verchères-Les Patriotes, qui obligea la Chambre des communes à débattre, à son tour, d'une demande d'excuses officielles. Affilié au Bloc québécois, M. Bergeron s'intéresse à l'Acadie en raison de ses racines ancestrales et inspiré par le projet de Perrin, il déposa, de 1999 à 2003, quatre motions et un amendement liés à la reconnaissance de la déportation par la Couronne. Les propositions du député de Verchères-Les Patriotes moururent cependant les unes après les autres, au feuilleton ou au vote.

Les efforts de Bergeron ne restèrent pourtant pas sans effet. La première motion débattue en Chambre (M-241) réactiva définitivement le débat à l'échelle acadienne. D'abord dissoute par le déclenchement des élections de novembre 2000, la proposition est ramenée en Chambre en février 2001.<sup>8</sup> En juin, la Société nationale de l'Acadie décida d'appuyer la motion<sup>9</sup> et de former un comité d'abord chargé d'étudier la demande d'excuses officielles et qui finira par procéder à une consultation publique.<sup>10</sup>

L'intérêt croissant suscité par la motion de Bergeron n'empêcha pas les Communes de la rejeter,<sup>11</sup> non sans avoir, au préalable, défait dans un vote relativement serré un amendement qui aurait réduit la demande d'excuses à une simple reconnaissance des préjudices.<sup>12</sup> Parmi les opposants à la motion d'amendement on retrouvait les députés acadiens du Parti libéral, tandis que des députés anglophones, réputés de droite, tels Elsie Wayne (Saint John) et Preston Manning (Calgary Southwest), l'appuyèrent. Le 18 octobre 2002, Stéphane Bergeron répondit à l'échec par le dépôt d'une nouvelle motion qui ne réclamait plus d'excuses, mais bien la reconnaissance des préjudices occasionnés par la déportation.<sup>13</sup> La motion fut jugée irrecevable. En mars 2003, le député bloquiste déposa une quatrième motion qui ne connaîtra pas une fin plus heureuse.<sup>14</sup>

L'Histoire retiendra un fait inusité : le désaveu total de la députation acadienne du Parti libéral, qui refusa catégoriquement d'endosser les propositions de Bergeron. Par principe, le gouvernement Chrétien refusa de permettre à un député issu des rangs de l'opposition—et, de surcroît, affilié au mouvement séparatiste—de tirer le moindre crédit politique de la question acadienne.<sup>15</sup> Les députés acadiens du Parti libéral, coincés entre la « ligne » du parti et leur statut de porte-étendard de la collectivité acadienne, étaient cependant dans l'embarras. Leur opposition à la motion M-241 provoqua une vive indignation en Acadie, où elle fut vigoureusement dénoncée.<sup>16</sup> Un bel échappatoire vint les sauver : une lettre adressée en 2002 par la Société nationale de l'Acadie (SNA), au palais de Buckingham, qui demandait à la reine de reconnaître les torts causés par la Déportation.<sup>17</sup> Elizabeth II renvoyait la question à Ottawa,<sup>18</sup> qui s'en saisit pour finalement adopter un décret conséquent,<sup>19</sup> rédiger un document approprié, le faire signer par la Gouverneure-générale

Adrienne Clarkson et le livrer au public, le 10 décembre 2003, dans une cérémonie de circonstance.

Dirigeants et porte-parole d'organismes acadiens applaudirent aussitôt cette prise de position officielle. Au concert d'acclamation se joignirent, notamment, les députés acadiens libéraux, qui croyaient peut-être que la *Proclamation* allait éteindre la motion déposée par Bergeron en mars 2003, ce qui leur épargnerait de devoir la défaire, l'année même du quatrième centenaire de l'Acadie. Toutefois, la *Proclamation* n'ayant aucun lien procédural avec la motion de Bergeron, celle-ci fila son chemin. Elle fut défaire, sans bruit, le 10 mars 2004.<sup>20</sup>

## 2. L'art du propos mesuré

Le texte de la *Proclamation*, rédigé dans les deux langues officielles, compte dix considérants,<sup>21</sup> qui situent les Acadiens et la Couronne par rapport aux événements historiques, et forment prémisses à l'ultime énoncé : « Nous, par Notre présente Proclamation, laquelle prend effet le 5 septembre 2004, désignons le 28 juillet de chaque année, à compter de 2005, comme "Journée de commémoration du Grand Dérangement". »<sup>22</sup> Honneur, appréciation, reconnaissance caractérisent l'intention avouée du document qui n'offre, par contre, aucune excuse, n'exprime aucun regret, ne reconnaît aucun préjudice ou tort et ne prétend nullement clore l'ordre d'expulsion. La *Proclamation* n'en représente pas moins la prise de position officielle la plus significative de la Couronne à l'endroit des Acadiens depuis le 18<sup>e</sup> siècle. Ces derniers, nous annonce la monarchie, « par la vitalité de leur communauté, contribuent de façon remarquable à la société canadienne depuis près de quatre cents ans »\*.

La *Proclamation* établit également le statut de l'énonciateur en révélant que c'est la « Couronne du chef du Canada et des provinces »\* qui y tient propos, en fait, au nom de la « Couronne du chef du

Royaume-Uni »\* à qui elle a « succédé »\*, mais au nom de laquelle fut exécuté l'ordre d'expulsion des Acadiens. Dans le relais des couronnes, on comprendra que la première se prononce sur ce qui fut commis au nom de la seconde et affirme reconnaître la déportation à la lumière de certains faits, qu'elle définit essentiellement comme suit :

[L]a déportation du peuple acadien, communément appelée le Grand Dérangement, s'est poursuivie jusqu'en 1763 et a eu des conséquences tragiques, plusieurs milliers d'Acadiens ayant péri par suite de maladies, lors de naufrages, dans leurs lieux de refuge, dans les camps de prisonniers de la Nouvelle-Écosse et de l'Angleterre ainsi que dans les colonies britanniques en Amérique;\*

La Couronne reconnaît ces « faits historiques »\*, de même que « les épreuves et souffrances subies par les Acadiens lors du Grand Dérangement »\*, mais procède à une délimitation circonspecte de l'événement et de ses circonstances. Il faut savoir d'emblée que le terme « dérangement » tient de l'euphémisme, car dans les faits le peuple acadien, à compter de 1755, ne fut pas que « dérangé. »<sup>23</sup> En outre, la déportation, version *Proclamation*, s'en tient, dans l'essentiel, à une dimension : la fatalité. La souffrance généralisée et de nombreuses pertes de vie sont ce qu'on retiendra—ou qu'on doit retenir—de l'épisode, évitant ainsi toute élaboration sur ses aspects controversés : pourquoi y eut-il déportation? la mesure d'expulsion répondait-elle à l'illégalité du statut des Acadiens ou à une basse convoitise? la sanction appliquée fut-elle adéquate ou excessive? la déportation fut-elle légale dans le fond? La *Proclamation* évite ces questions, la Couronne ayant préféré adopter à l'égard des événements historiques une position qui soit, à tout point de vue, simple et accommodante. L'atténuation ressort, même quand il faut parler des milliers de morts, la Couronne se

gardant de ne jamais imputer aux maîtres d'œuvre de la déportation la fatalité résultant de leurs actions. L'absence même d'explications ou d'excuses incitera à attribuer machinalement la disparition de milliers d'Acadiens, hommes, femmes et enfants, à quelque circonstance fortuite, sinon à l'inexorable destinée.

En s'abstenant d'entrer dans les détails, la Couronne passe sous silence nombre de faits troublants : aucune mention des Acadiens et Acadiennes exécutés ou abattus de sang froid pour avoir résisté ou tenté de fuir l'expulsion; aucune allusion au démembrement des familles, aucune mention des propriétés, terres, récoltes, bétail et biens de toutes sortes confisqués ou détruits; aucune évocation non plus des conséquences à long terme de la déportation, qui condamna l'Acadie d'après 1763 à l'indigence et à l'instabilité. Les séquelles sociales, économiques, démographiques et politiques, qui découlèrent directement de la destruction entreprise dès 1755, se sont en effet répercutées à travers les générations. Un siècle après la déportation, le peuple acadien se butait toujours aux autorités coloniales, qui légiféraient de manière à entraver la reconstruction de leurs communautés, au nom de « Sa Majesté. »<sup>24</sup> C'est démontrer toute la complexité et l'étendue de l'épisode 1755–1763, dont la commémoration ne saurait se limiter à la mortalité dans l'exil. Même en ne s'en tenant qu'aux huit années de la déportation, l'événement devrait encore être pris pour ce qu'il fut : la société acadienne fut expulsée et ses villages rasés par les troupes britanniques. Dans les faits, la déportation fut l'anéantissement d'une contrée et le démantèlement de la société qui y prospérait. Considérer l'événement dans sa totalité, c'est irrémédiablement le faire basculer du tragique au sordide.

On s'étonnera, par contre, dans un texte contournant sciemment la controverse, de voir la Couronne confesser son rôle de premier responsable de la déportation : « le

28 juillet 1755, la Couronne, dans le cadre de l'administration des affaires de la colonie britannique de la Nouvelle-Écosse, a pris la décision de déporter les Acadiens. »\* La *Proclamation* reste toutefois muette quant aux motifs de la saignée de 1755. Aucune justification ou référence légale n'est produite pour valider l'ordonnance d'expulsion : qu'en diront tous ceux qui doutent de la légalité des actions commises contre la population acadienne? Les mots « cadre de l'administration des affaires »\* n'expliquent rien; ils ne légalisent guère mieux.

La *Proclamation* évite la controverse mais ne l'éteint pas parce qu'elle ne fournit aucune assise légale à la déportation. Une étude menée il y a quelques années par Michel Bastarache—aujourd'hui juge à la Cour suprême du Canada—considérerait la réception du droit britannique dans l'Acadie, après 1713, et mettait en doute la validité de l'ordonnance de déportation qui fut émise par le Conseil de Halifax, parce qu'elle ne reposait, apparemment, sur aucune loi.<sup>25</sup> Selon Bastarache, ni la commission à Cornwallis de 1749, ni le Conseil réuni par Lawrence ne pouvaient revendiquer le statut d'Assemblée législative, et par conséquent, la déportation ne pouvait donc être ni décrétée ni exécutée.<sup>26</sup> Plus récemment, le spécialiste en droit constitutionnel Christian Néron expliquait l'impasse dans laquelle s'étaient trouvés les Britanniques de la Nouvelle-Écosse à l'aube de la déportation. Néron rappelait que selon l'arrêt Calvin de 1608, tous les Acadiens né après la cession de l'Acadie à l'Angleterre étaient automatiquement sujets du roi « au même titre que les sujets qui habitaient l'Angleterre. »<sup>27</sup> La constitution d'une assemblée législative en Nouvelle-Écosse aurait permis à la population acadienne, alors majoritaire, d'élire ses représentants, ce qui leur aurait permis de contrôler le gouvernement local. Il appert que « si les Acadiens avait [*sic*] pris le pouvoir, ils ne se

seraient pas voté une loi pour se déporter eux-mêmes. »<sup>28</sup>

Warren Perrin, devant l'accumulation de circonstances et de faits troublants, ne trouve pas davantage les motifs légaux suffisants pour appuyer les mesures prises contre la population acadienne.<sup>29</sup> La question de la légalité de la déportation reste tout à fait irrésolue. C'est sans doute cette incertitude qui aura motivé l'insertion, dans la *Proclamation*, d'un énoncé pour le moins inattendu :

Notre présente Proclamation ne constitue d'aucune façon une reconnaissance de responsabilité juridique ou financière de la part de la Couronne du chef du Canada et des provinces et qu'elle ne constitue d'aucune façon une reconnaissance d'un quelconque droit ou d'une quelconque obligation d'une personne ou d'un groupe de personnes, ni n'a d'incidence sur un tel droit ou une telle obligation.<sup>30</sup>

Formulées en 2003, ces précisions se rapportent, faut-il le rappeler, à des actions qui remontent à deux siècles et demi passés. Bien drôle d'honneur que celui accordé par la Couronne à de « féaux sujets », auxquels elle cherche aussitôt à retirer un éventuel droit à la compensation, d'autant plus que celui-ci pourrait être accordé par ses propres tribunaux. Peut-être la Couronne s'est-elle souvenu que Perrin lui-même, en formulant sa requête d'excuses, ne souhaitait que s'en tenir au plan symbolique. Entre le symbolique et le pécuniaire il y a une marge, et la *Proclamation* a bien voulu l'établir clairement. La remémoration à son prix : une compensation des droits acadiens spoliés, aussi légitime soit-elle, reste, de toute évidence, d'un coût trop élevé.<sup>31</sup>

### **Tourner une lourde page sans faire de bruit**

Mélange de politique, de protocole et d'histoire, la *Proclamation royale* destinée à la communauté acadienne, c'est aussi la sérénité d'apparat qui file sa voie dans la

controverse issue du 18<sup>e</sup> siècle, tout en cherchant à éviter les écueils juridiques que sont les mots « torts », « excuses », « coupable ». La parole royale, dans la *Proclamation* se fait donc parfois, et délibérément, imprécise, sinon trop courte pour rendre les faits tels qu'ils auraient dû l'être. Que pouvait-on alors offrir à l'Acadie, à la veille du 400<sup>e</sup> anniversaire de sa fondation? La commémoration de la fin tragique de milliers d'Acadiens qui disparurent pendant leur déracinement constituait une issue honorable. Pour en arriver au ton approprié, la Couronne opta pour un choix d'images qui émeuvent et bouleversent. Elle a donc parlé d'un acte horrible, mais sans parler de l'horrible, elle a évoqué la souffrance, sans évoquer la brutalité; elle a voulu rappeler le deuil sans créer de bourreaux. Dans cette optique, il faut se souvenir, mais ne point s'indigner.

La *Proclamation* apparaîtra de bon goût parce qu'elle appelle à la réconciliation plutôt que de poser en antagonistes perpétuels l'Acadie et l'Angleterre. C'est donc au nom de ce bonententisme qu'on souhaitera éviter systématiquement tout ce qui peut révéler l'autre déportation, la déportation odieuse et sauvage, porteuse de controverse et de questions irrésolues; honteuse et condamnable parce qu'elle doit concevoir des Acadiens coupables et châtiés par l'exil, ou une administration britannique compromise dans le nettoyage d'un territoire parce qu'il y avait profit à tirer de la dépossession et de l'éviction d'un peuple.

Il existe une Acadie de l'erreur, qu'on a voulu taire, mais à quel prix? Celui de la quiétude ou celui de la justice? La *Proclamation* ne solutionne rien, ne définit rien, et laisse mille questions en suspens. Le vœu—combien naïf!—« que les Acadiens puissent tourner la page sur cette période sombre de leur histoire »\* ne peut aller qu'en passant par l'oubli de ce que fut véritablement la déportation.

La *Proclamation* se présentera donc, en vérité, comme un pari risqué : c'est d'oubli dont il s'agit ici, autant que de mémoire.

NOTES

\*Extraits tirés de la « Proclamation royale ».

- 1 « Proclamation », dans la *Gazette du Canada*, 31 décembre 2003, partie II (2), volume 137, numéro 27.
- 2 Perrin se fondait sur des précédents, où la Couronne s'était effectivement excusée pour des actions commises en son nom envers d'autres peuples, et souhaitait aussi que la Couronne érige un monument à la mémoire des Acadiens de la déportation. Quant à la pétition, elle fut expédiée à la fois à la première ministre de l'époque, Margaret Thatcher, ainsi qu'à la reine Élisabeth. Cf. Perrin, Warren S., « Une pétition à l'Angleterre » dans *Le Congrès mondial acadien. L'Acadie en 2004. Actes des conférences et des tables rondes*, Moncton, Éditions d'Acadie, p. 47–51.
- 3 Warren A. Perrin, « The Petition to Obtain an Apology for the Acadian Deportation: Warren A. Perrin, et al. Versus Great Britain, et al. », *Southern University Law Review*, vol. 27, no. 1, Fall, 1999, p. 37.
- 4 Une résolution de la Louisiane, adoptée le 10 juin 1993, demandait au gouvernement britannique et à la reine d'Angleterre de normaliser la situation des Acadiens, notamment en mettant fin à l'exil : « THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Legislature of Louisiana hereby urges and requests the government of Great Britain to restore the status of « French neutrals » to the Acadian people and make a formal declaration of the end of the Acadian exile. » Dans : « Resolution of the Louisiana Legislature », Regular Session, 1993. (Senate Concurrent Resolution, no. 159). L'année suivante, l'État du Maine faisait de même en adoptant une résolution à la Chambre des Représentants et au Sénat, qui demandait à la Grande-Bretagne de rétablir le statut de « French neutrals » des Acadiens, de proclamer la fin de la déportation, de constituer une commission d'enquête chargée d'étudier les circonstances dans lesquelles a été menée la déportation et d'ériger un monument pour commémorer la fin de la proscription acadienne. (State of Maine, *Joint Resolution urging the Government of Great Britain to end the exile of the Acadian People*, House of Representatives, Senate Chamber, April 13, 1994, H.P. 1492.).
- 5 « Expulsion of the Acadians », *Congressional Record*, Senate, September 12, 2002, p. S8560–S8561.
- 6 Nelson Landry, « La SNA et la SAANB n'attendent pas d'excuses du Prince Charles », *L'Acadie Nouvelle*, mercredi, 10 avril 1996, vol. 12, no. 215, p. 3.
- 7 Steve Hachey, « La reine s'excusera-t-elle de la Déportation lors de son passage à Dieppe? La Société nationale de l'Acadie ne se fait pas d'illusions », *L'Acadie Nouvelle*, vendredi, 30 août 2002, édition 4607, p. 5. Rino Morin Rossignol, « Un symbole jubilant », chronique « De tout et de rien », *L'Acadie Nouvelle*, mercredi, 9 octobre 2002, édition 4635, p. 13. Steve Hachey et Philippe Ricard, « Le couple royal n'a pas fait déplacer les foules à Dieppe », *L'Acadie Nouvelle*, lundi, 14 octobre 2002, édition 4638, p. 3. Steve Hachey et Philippe Ricard, « La reine Elizabeth ignore l'Acadie et la Déportation », *L'Acadie Nouvelle*, lundi, 14 octobre 2002, édition 4638, p. 5.
- 8 Motion M-241, déposée à la Chambre des Communes le 7 février 2001 : « Qu'une humble adresse soit présentée à son Excellence la priant d'intervenir auprès de sa Majesté afin que la Couronne britannique présente des excuses officielles pour les préjudices causés en son nom au peuple acadien, de 1755 à 1763. », dans *Feuilleton et feuilleton des avis*, jeudi, 8 février 2001, p. IV.
- 9 Philippe Ricard, « Demande d'excuses à la Couronne britannique pour la Déportation : La SNA se rallie à la cause du député Bergeron », *L'Acadie Nouvelle*, lundi le 4 juin 2001, édition 4287, p. 5.
- 10 Steve Hachey, « Un comité consultatif sur les excuses officielles », *L'Acadie Nouvelle*, jeudi le 16 août 2001, édition 4340, p. 5; Philippe Ricard, « Excuses de Londres, la SNA veut élargir le débat à la population », *L'Acadie Nouvelle*, vendredi, 17 août 2001, édition 4341, p. 8.
- 11 Vote sur la motion principale : 59 pour, 182 contre, 12 pairés. (*Débat de la Chambre des communes*, volume 137, numéro 119, 1<sup>er</sup> session, 37<sup>e</sup> législature, *Compte rendu officiel* (Hansard), mardi, 27 novembre 2001, page 7570, vote no 178).
- 12 L'amendement proposé se lisait comme suit : « Que le texte de la motion M-241 soit modifié en retranchant les mots "présente des excuses officielles pour les préjudices" et en les remplaçant par "reconnaisse officiellement les préjudices". », dans *Débats de la Chambre des communes*, vol. 137, no. 119, 1<sup>ère</sup> session, 37<sup>e</sup> législature. L'amendement fut défait par un vote de 103 pour, 136 contre, 12 pairés. (*Débat de la*

- Chambre des communes*, volume 137, numéro 119, 1er session, 37e législature, *Compte rendu officiel* (Hansard), mardi, 27 novembre 2001, page 7569, vote no 177).
- 13 Motion M-238 : « Que cette Chambre reconnaisse officiellement les préjudices dont a souffert le peuple acadien, de 1755 à 1763 », déposée le 18 octobre 2002, et inscrite aux journaux le lendemain.
- 14 Motion M-382, déposée le 20 mars 2003 : « Qu'une humble adresse soit présentée à Son Excellence, dans la foulée des démarches entreprises par la Société Nationale de l'Acadie, la priant d'intervenir auprès de Sa Majesté afin que la Couronne britannique reconnaisse officiellement les préjudices causés en son nom au peuple acadien, de 1755 à 1763. » L'insertion de la motion dans les *Journaux de la Chambre des communes* a été oubliée. Le premier enregistrement officiel sur papier se trouverait donc dans le compte rendu de la première heure de débat, dans *Débats de la Chambre des communes*, vol. 138, no. 123, 2e session, 37e législature, *Compte rendu officiel* (Hansard), vendredi, 19 septembre 2003, p. 7589-7596.
- 15 Cf. Philippe Ricard, « Les libéraux devront proposer une solution de rechange, soutient la SNA », *L'Acadie Nouvelle*, mardi le 10 juillet 2001, édition 4313, p.4. Voir également : Joseph Yvon Thériault, « La proclamation royale et le Grand Dérangement—Quelle mémoire commémoreront-on? », *Le Devoir*, vol. XCIV, no. 5, le 15 janvier 2004, p. A7. Voir aussi : Michel Doucet, éditorialiste, « Malgré les autres », *L'Acadie Nouvelle*, mercredi le 14 août 2002, édition 4595, p. 12.
- 16 Michel Doucet, éditorialiste, « Gênant », *L'Acadie Nouvelle*, mercredi le 28 novembre 2001, édition 4413, p. 12. Steve Hachey, « M-241 fait plus de bruit morte que vivante », *L'Acadie Nouvelle*, mardi le 4 décembre 2001, édition 4417, p. 6. Michel Doucet, éditorialiste, « Bouchés! », *L'Acadie Nouvelle*, lundi le 10 février 2003, édition 4720, p. 8. Hector J. Cormier, « Du courage, peut-être? », *L'Acadie Nouvelle*, mercredi le 12 février 2003, édition 4722, p. 12.
- 17 Steve Hachey, « La SNA demande à la reine de reconnaître les torts causés par la Déportation. Chère Elizabeth II. . . », *L'Acadie Nouvelle*, jeudi le 13 juin 2002, édition 4551, p. 2. [s.a.] « La deuxième motion sur les Acadiens battue elle aussi », *L'Acadie Nouvelle*, lundi le 10 février 2003, édition 4720, p.8.
- 18 Philippe Ricard, « La reine relègue à Ottawa le dossier des torts causés par la Déportation », *L'Acadie Nouvelle*, jeudi le 25 septembre 2003, édition 4889, p. 3.
- 19 La *Proclamation* a été autorisée par décret (C.P. 2003-1967) le 6 décembre 2003.
- 20 La quatrième motion (M-382) fut déposée le 20 mars 2003. Elle fut défaite le 10 mars 2004, par un vote de 63 pour, 116 contre. (*Débat de la Chambre des communes*, volume 139, numéro 123, 3e session, 37e législature, *Compte rendu officiel* (Hansard), mercredi, 10 mars 2004, vote no 22).
- 21 Dans un document officiel, le considérant est cet énoncé qui commence par « Attendu que. . . ».
- 22 Extrait de la *Proclamation royale*. Les prochains extraits tirés de la *Proclamation* seront, dans le reste de notre texte, identifiés par un (\*).
- 23 Les auteurs du *Manifeste de Beaubassin*, qui refusent la vision traditionnelle et folklorique de la déportation, rejettent l'emploi du terme « dérangement », qu'ils jugent incorrect. Le terme « déportation » ne leur convient guère davantage, le jugeant trop « banal » pour désigner ce qu'ils voient plutôt comme un « génocide », avec lequel ils ouvrent leur texte, de façon spectaculaire : « Nous, Acadiens et Acadiennes, sommes les survivants d'un génocide. », dans Marie-Claire Dugas, Charles Emmrys, Isabelle Dugas, Donatien Gaudet et Mario Toussaint, *Manifeste de Beaubassin*, dans *L'Acadie Nouvelle*, vendredi le 25 octobre 2002, édition 4647, p. 80.
- 24 La religion catholique, à laquelle appartenaient les Acadiens, servait de prétexte pour entraver le développement de leurs écoles, les priver du droit à la possession de terres et d'être justement représentés en assemblée. Jacques-Wilfrid Pineau remarque que : « [I]'intolérance religieuse manifestée par les autorités britanniques à l'endroit des Acadiens, de souche catholique, constituait pour ceux-ci une entrave supplémentaire à leur rétablissement. Londres, qui cherchait à restreindre l'autorité de Rome et à favoriser le protestantisme, communiquait en 1763 et 1775 au gouverneur du Canada des instructions assez claires à ce sujet ». Jacques-Wilfrid Pineau, *Le Clergé français dans l'Île-du-Prince-Édouard 1721-1821*, [Québec, Les éditions Ferland, 1967], p. 37. Raoul Dionne, constate également que « les politiques de la Nouvelle-Écosse les gardaient [les Acadiens] dans un état qui empêchait toute réorganisation normale ». Raoul Dionne, *La Colonisation acadienne au Nouveau-Brunswick 1760-1860*, Moncton, Chaire d'études acadiennes, 1989, p. 19.
- 25 Michel Bastarache, « Droits linguistiques et



culturels des Acadiens de 1713 à nos jours », dans Jean Daigle (dir.), *Les Acadiens des Maritimes : études thématiques*, Moncton, Centre d'études acadiennes, 1980, p. 371–417.

- 26 « L'ordonnance de déportation du 28 juillet 1755 était donc elle-même irrégulière. Ceci semble être confirmé par le fait que les avocats britanniques avaient à l'époque mis en doute la validité de toute législation faite par Cornwallis sans assemblée. » Bastarache, « Droits linguistiques. . . », p. 378.
- 27 Philippe Ricard, « Torts causés aux Acadiens lors de la Déportation de 1755 : Un dédommagement de 50 à 100 milliards \$? », *L'Acadie Nouvelle*, vendredi le 15 février 2002, édition 4467, p. 6.
- 28 *Ibid.*
- 29 Warren A. Perrin, « The Petition to Obtain an Apology for the Acadian Deportation: Warren A. Perrin, et al. Versus Great Britain, et al. », *Southern University Law Review*, volume 27, no. 1, Fall, 1999, p. 1–44.
- 30 Fait à remarquer, ce considérant est le plus important de la *Proclamation* royale, si l'on s'en tient au nombre de mots.

- 31 Le risque de poursuite aura visiblement été une préoccupation de tous les instants pendant la rédaction du document royal. De fait, l'enjeu est de taille. Une éventuelle poursuite pour les dommages et les conséquences à court et à long terme de la déportation reste toujours possible. Les Acadiens sont passés du rang d'un des peuples les plus prospères d'Amérique, à l'un des plus miséreux et des plus déseuivrés pendant des générations. Aujourd'hui encore, la déportation reste en cause dans le retard institutionnel, politique, économique, social et démographique du peuple acadien, en dépit d'avancées récentes et remarquables, mais qui restent fragiles. La déportation, assurément, a hypothéqué l'essor de la collectivité acadienne et a ses répercussions jusque dans la société d'aujourd'hui. La valeur d'une possible réclamation en cour reste ouverte à toutes les spéculations. En 2002, un spécialiste en droit constitutionnel a évoqué le chiffre de \$ 100 milliards. Cf. Philippe Ricard, « Torts causés aux Acadiens. . . » p.6.



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## Called by the Wild

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Laurie Ricou

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To judge by the books sent to our review desk, the call of the wild continues loud and seductive in the ears of Canadian publishers. We might understand this “call” as gentle beckoning, or as the lure of, and excuse for, some illusory freedom of wanton destruction. In the case of *Called by the Wild: The Autobiography of a Conservationist* (U of California P \$37.25), the inference is that some transcendent power commands author Raymond Dasmann to dedicate his life to biology and conservation. So, the calling is more important than the one called: the autobiography is thin, often banal, and waiting, irresolutely, for detail. Of more interest is Dasmann’s account of his work with UNESCO (1966–1971) to help articulate its Man in the Biosphere Program: he laments America’s ignorance of the UN, and its promptness to criticize the body; he admits that his own contribution had little effect; he muses intriguingly about the problems of translating terms such as “biosphere” and “conservation” into multiple languages. Canada has no presence in this book; the definition of biotic provinces might be more crucial to a conservationist. But Canadian literature contributes: Ernest Thompson Seton, along with Jack London, plays a crucial role in first voicing the “call” to Dasmann.

Often the wild calls to publishers in pictures rather than in words. But faced with photo albums to review, I’m usually dazzled

and baffled. Dazzled at images of stunning sweeps of uniform pattern, and equally dazzled by images of the mellifluously irregular. Dazzled by the palette. But baffled because I don’t have the technical understanding of photography to see *inside*. In this state, I often end up reviewing the text rather than the photographs. The captions in J.A. Kraulis’ *The Canadian Landscape/Le Paysage Canadien* (Firefly \$37.95) are often predictable, redundant, although they almost invariably include some map coordinates: “west of Antigonish,” “près de Petite-Vallée, en Gaspésie.” The Shield is old and “quintessential”—no human beings or animals are to be seen—but surprisingly, only very few photos are winter scenes (although glaciers and icebergs get good play). In Kraulis’ most intriguing line — “To photograph the landscape is to read it for its exclamation marks”—the metaphor is appropriately startling, but the problem remains that to a text-reader the exclamation point often identifies the least interesting reading, and the fewer the better.

Courtenay Milne is at least as spectacular and baffling as Kraulis, although his work shows considerably more interest in evidence/signs of presence than Kraulis. To those of us who would rather read between the exclamation marks, Milne is worth attention for recent collaborations with Canadian literary figures. We reviewed his *W.O. Mitchell Country* (1999) in issue # 170/171. Now we have Butala country and Carr country. *Old Man on His Back: Portrait of a Prairie Landscape* (Harper Collins/Nature Conservancy

of Canada \$39.95) celebrates (or argues for) the preservation of 200,000 acres of semi-arid mixed-grass Canadian prairie centred on a block of native prairie donated by the Butalas to the Nature Conservancy. Courtney Milne's photographs enhance Sharon Butala's essay asserting the conservationist ethic in ranching. And here I realize that the close-up rather than the vista is the best aspect of Milne's work: broomweed in soft focus: singular wispy stalks of grass sticking through the snow and, moved by the wind, writing on it. I join, less than objectively, in admiring Butala's story, having written my first letter to government about preserving our grassland 35 years ago at a time when I thought man was vertical and challenging rather than relaxing on his back, at a time when I didn't appreciate that grass could write.

Of the Milne literary collaborations, the Carr book is the moodiest: the camera is often in motion, or out of focus, or in extreme close-up. *Emily Carr Country* (McClelland and Stewart \$60.00) is also the Milne book most interesting to a student of literature. In explaining his method—"Carr has been having her way with me,"—Milne writes of carrying his favourite Carr *writing* on index cards. So, he is shuffling his passages of Carr's prose and using them to imagine his art. And, in teaching classes, he and his students would find in Carr instructions on camera technique and on "visual design". This "practical" potential in Carr's language makes the book a special literary/visual pleasure, as the reader keeps noticing how the Carr quotations may be reread by the context established in the photograph. Or, we re-read the titles of well-known Carr paintings and images against a perception offered through Milne's lens. In a passage from *Klee Wyck* I've taught many times ("growing things jumbled themselves together"), we have a tight close-up of a dozen kinds of moss on a nurse log—reminder of Carr's attention to the individual "seed" and the growing capacity of the "weaking." "Colours you

had not noticed come out," Milne's index card records, and at each turn of the page I felt this rediscovery: black bluff shows in Milne to be blue and green and soft yellow and silver. All in all, the best of the Milne/artist collaborations.

Sometimes the photos in the Butala/Milne book are maddeningly unexplained (*what flower?*), the coordinates uncertain, but in an Old Man Story, the silence may be appropriate. I learn from reading *Ancient Land/Ancient Sky: Following Canada's Native Canoe Routes* (Knopf \$33.95) that the English translation for the Ojibwa creator, Kitchi-Manitou is "the Great Mystery." I think Butala writes to respect the Great Mystery. And Peter McFarlane and Wayne Haimila's book is in the same spirit. *Ancient Land/Ancient Sky* is in the venerable sea-to-sea, east-to-west travel narrative tradition. But with intriguing differences. The "canoe" is a single-engine Cessna 172; the native routes are a memory and a guide, not just through landforms but across the ancient nations and their twenty-first century descendants across Canada. McFarlane is a writer specializing in native affairs and Haimila is of "Cree, Tsimshian and Métis ancestry" (dust jacket): so, they stop to notice the billboard that proclaims "Wikwemikong: Unceded Indian Land," and to listen to the ancient languages "Kuei Kuei" (hello in Innu). But the book is no nostalgic lament. Its straightforward style and its attention to a machine-borne technology mean that the memory of buffalo flesh and anger at a suicide epidemic in Minaki mingle with Filipino tourists and government planners' ideas of airport architecture. *Ancient Sky* takes a flight over twenty-first century communities, living with Visual Flight Rules and CBC satellite trucks as well as ancient rules and means of communication.

I admire Anne Wertheim Rosenfeld's *The Intertidal Wilderness: A Photographic Journey through Pacific Coast Tidepools* (U of California P \$24.95) not only because the text, by Robert T. Paine, is detailed, but because it is always attentive to the web of

ecological inter-connections that might make “wild” “natural.” Only a few of the photos were actually taken in Canada. Nonetheless, the book could be a superb companion for the ecologically attuned reader of Audrey Thomas’s *Intertidal Life*.

Other more circumscribed water places may be found in Victor Carl Friesen’s *Where the River Runs: Stories of the Saskatchewan and the People Drawn to its Shores* (Fifth House \$21.95), Hilary Place’s *Dog Creek: A Place in the Cariboo* (Heritage House \$18.95), and Dick Hammond’s *Haunted Waters: Tales of the Old Coast* (Harbour \$40.30). In Friesen’s “personal and popular, yet scholarly history,” the narrative runs somewhat sluggishly and more linearly than the river itself—yet the idea of writing a history that moves by canoe and steamboat and on the lookout for ferry crossings is a welcome testing of how topography shapes community. There’s not much “creek” in Dog Creek, a personal and anecdotal history of the Place family in this hamlet (barn, store, hotel, corral, and chicken house) that began as a stop on the supply line to Barkerville. Place relates a set of anecdotes with the charming objective of answering his granddaughter’s question, “What did you watch on TV when you were young?” Sheila (Doherty) Watson’s picture is reproduced: the “teacher at Dog Creek school . . . introduced me to Keats, Browning, and Shelley.” Place notes the titles of Watson’s novels, but has no more to say about their compelling evocation of the area. Nonetheless, readers of *The Double Hook* might find valuable context here, and more than a hint of the struggles coyote had (and has) being heard in this place. From river to creek to Pacific coastal waters, Dick Hammond has produced two books in which he re-tells stories told to him by his father Hal. The genre is muted tall tale, where the temptation to top-that-one is constantly tempered by the hope to believe every word of it. The *waters* in question are the indistinct, misted, walled-in rivers and inlets of the inland sea—places dark and

swirled where men hesitate to go. The stories have all the guess work of “I think” and “smelling like,” but with the oral energy of fish stories, acrobatic log rolling, legendary curmudgeons, and the matter-of-fact brutal accidents of working in the woods.

Jack London has an entry in Jill B. Gidmark’s *Encyclopedia of American Literature of the Sea and Great Lakes*, (Greenwood \$160.00) which notes *Call of the Wild* (1903) but concentrates on London’s “seafaring” adventures. Sea and Great Lakes seemed to me an odd organizational/selection principle for an encyclopedia. “Canadian Literature of the Sea” gets a three-page entry, about the same length as the entry on James Fenimore Cooper. It is easy to carp about what’s in and what’s left out of a book that evidently cannot be exhaustive. At the same time, my list may give some idea of the scope and merits of the book. There is an entry for “Antarctica,” but no mention of *A Strange Manuscript Found in a Copper Cylinder*. Gordon Lightfoot is in the entry for the *Edmund Fitzgerald*, while Joy Kogawa, as so often, is the sole Canadian in the entry on Asian American Literature. Sightings of the sea serpent Kingstie, near Kingston, are mentioned in “Great Lakes Myths and Legends,” but the Pacific monsters off Dungeness Spit and Victoria continue in hiding. Antonine Maillet does not appear in “Ghost Ship Legends,” but Farley Mowat gets his own entry, as does Jane Urquhart. “Northwest Passage” gets an entry but no “Strait of Anian.” Lorene Niedecker’s Great Lakes elude. James Swan, indefatigable chronicler of the Northwest is in, but not Ivan Doig, who reinvents him; Theodore Roethke’s Northwest is in but not Richard Hugo’s. I enjoyed the stimulus to think about odd categories Lighthouse Lit, Lifesaving Lit, or Mermaid Lit, and to muse about what Canadian titles might be added to these entries.

Just west of the Great Lakes is the very watery world of the Quetico-Superior, the trans-border bioregion extending from the

Nelson River, south below Lake of the Woods. Jim dale Huot-Vickery reads its signs (travels/trails/footprints, its symbols, directions, and so forth) in *Winter Sign* (U of Minnesota P \$19.50). In Huot-Vickery's world, winter is *essence* and the Pre-Cambrian shield is foundation and presiding character. Called by such "stark granitic" wild, Huot-Vickery tracks his own "settling in" through a series of compacted or truncated paragraphs, often only one sentence long, following both the sensations of subjective observation and reading the signs left for him by the formative nature writers Thoreau, John Muir, Aldo Leopold, Annie Dillard, and Barry Lopez, those who had "stitched together an appreciation of places wild, free, wind-whipped and lonely, where wolves run free as snowflakes fall."

There's not a whole lot of literature in Mark S. Blumberg's *Body Heat: Temperature and Life on Earth* (Harvard UP \$36.25), but Blumberg does have quite a bit to say about language and thermal metaphors, as well as about the vocalization of pelican embryos. Blumberg is not quite as stylish or literary as Michael Pollan or David Quammen, but like these writers he can convey the wilds of capital S science accessibly and without talking down. In a very comfortable, and even elegant octavo format, *Body Heat* is a handbook to warm to. It's full of "gee that's neat" responses, or "I don't remember that from Grade 10 Science." For me, such surprises included explanation of the panting response in dogs, and the (grade-school) reminder that "goose bumps" signal our bodies' vestigial memory that when the temperature falls, the fur erects to trap air and keep the chilled wild animal warm.

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## Earth and High Heaven

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Eva-Marie Kröller

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Halfway through Gwethalyn Graham's *Earth and High Heaven*, Marc Reiser and Erica Drake meet at Charcot's Restaurant.

He reads the menu to her ("ris de veau à la bonne femme, . . . poulet, filet mignon, escaloppe de veau, filet de sole à la something and something grenouilles"), they order manhattans and martinis, they quiz each other on books and films—"Cultured, aren't we?"—and as a lawyer and journalist respectively, they know the daily news inside out. The book is set in Montreal in the middle of World War II, but although the Anglo-French conflict is one of its subjects, the *milieu of Earth and High Heaven* (first published in 1944, and now available in a handsome new edition by Cormorant Press, with an Introduction by Norm Ravvin) is miles away from that of Gabrielle Roy's *Bonheur d'occasion*, published two years earlier to equally extravagant acclaim. Florentine's lunch counter serves fast food, and Rose-Anna's shock at the full meal her daughter sets before her signals only too clearly the deprivation suffered by the Lacasse family, as does her children's painful thinness. Florentine is not an urban sophisticate, and she embarrasses Jean Lévesque with her gauche and childish ways when he takes her to a restaurant. She asks him to her parents' house on the rare occasion when her large family is away, while Marc—although not welcome in the Drakes' Westmount home—can invite Erica to spend weekends with him in chic Laurentian resorts. Trapped by her poverty and Catholicism, Florentine cannot abort Jean's child but must entice Emmanuel into marriage. Erica, by contrast, draws on her connections at work ("people who work on newspapers know practically everything") and on her own considerable funds to arrange an abortion for her sister Miriam. Different as they are, however, both books belie the notion that Canadian writing lacks a tradition of urban writing or, for that matter, a tradition of social *engagement*.

I first came across Gwethalyn Graham in the dialogue she conducted with Quebec journalist Solange Chaput-Rolland in *Chers ennemis/Dear enemies* (1963), an epistolary

exchange between two formidably intelligent women. At the time, I was intrigued by the contrast between the coiffed and laquered look of the two women in their photographs, and the impassioned urgency with which they addressed the tensions smoldering between anglophone and francophone Canadians at the beginning of the 1960s. *Earth and High Heaven* holds similar contradictions for the contemporary reader, but it is instructive for one's historical understanding of literary genre that the same difficulty does not appear to have existed for the Canadian and American readers who bought the novel in sufficient numbers to oblige Graham to pay \$65,000 in taxes for 1944: 350,000 copies were eventually sold, including a special edition for the US Armed Forces. Other marketing details are documented in Elspeth Cameron's biographical essay on Graham in *Great Dames* (co-edited with Janice Dickinson for University of Toronto Press), including the high-level but ultimately failed plans to turn the book into a Hollywood movie.

Norm Ravvin's excellent introduction evaluates the book's contribution to the debate over anti-Semitism in Canada, and at one significant level, *Earth and High Heaven* is a *roman à thèse*, with long sections given over to well-informed, articulate and frequently heated discussion about the status of Canadian Jews in the face of European fascism. The romance between Erica and Marc is fitted around these conversations, and it sometimes seems as if love-making were got over hastily so that they may return as fast as possible to their real preoccupation, talking. Dialogue and narrative are sparse and ironic in the reportage manner of Fitzgerald, Callaghan or Hemingway, and it is no accident that much of Graham's novel takes place in a newsroom. Although there is much joshing about the triviality of society weddings and banquets, however, Erica looks after the women's page, not the news department, and at a level developed as elaborately as the *roman à thèse*, *Earth and*

*High Heaven* is a true contemporary of women's movies like the Warner Brothers' *Now Voyager*. Released in 1942 when "suffering in mink went over very big" (as *Halliwel's Film Guide* cattily puts it), *Now Voyager* developed a visual vocabulary of sexual restraint that only enhanced the extravagant sentiment between its characters, including the infamous scene in which Paul Henreid lights two cigarettes, one for himself, the other for Bette Davis, thus luring a whole generation of men into singeing their eyebrows in the pursuit of similar effect. Graham's book adapts the formula so well as to read at times like a parody: "Marc lit two cigarettes one after the other, handed her the second, and went on." Cigarettes must also be got out of the way and "[thrown] out on the road" when "[h]e kissed her throat and then her mouth and she had no will at all until at last memory came back." Erica and her colleagues may be entertained by the dressmaker's details in the society page, but her sister gets off the train "wearing a black suit with a foam of white at her throat, carrying her hat in her hand," setting the tone for numerous allusions to appearance, all stylish, all enhanced by others' commentary.

The combination of *roman à thèse* and fashion statement is intolerably jarring to the contemporary reader, but the problem is not so easily brushed aside as a phenomenon of the period: as several researchers have pointed out, the lush metaphorical language of recent novels such as *Fugitive Pieces* or *The English Patient* also keeps uneasy company with the seriousness of their subject matter. Like these books, *Earth and High Heaven* raises complex questions of genre and literary ethics, particularly *au courant* now that there is an almost obsessively renewed interest in Canada's involvement in the two world wars. Graham's novel deserves another critical look.



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**Articles, Opinions and Notes, Last Pages**

Rob **Appleford** obtained his Ph.D. from the University of Toronto, and has taught in both English and Drama departments at the University of Guelph and Lakehead University. He is currently an Assistant Professor in the English Department at the University of Alberta. He has published articles on the work of Delaware writer Daniel David Moses (2002, 1993), Cree playwright Floyd Favel Starr (2002), and Aboriginal theatre (2001). Currently, he is at work on a monograph study entitled *Caliban's Children: The Politics of Desire in North American Aboriginal Literature*.

Carrie **Dawson** teaches at Dalhousie University, and her current research is on literary “imposture” and ethnic misrepresentation in Canada, multiculturalism and the reception of “ethnic minority” literatures, and postcolonial theory.

Nathalie **Dolbec** enseigne la littérature et la culture francophone du Canada ainsi que la théorie littéraire contemporaine à l'Université de Windsor. Spécialiste de Gabrielle Roy et de la théorie de la description, elle a publié plusieurs articles sur le descriptif chez les écrivains du Canada francophone et de France des XIX<sup>ième</sup> et XX<sup>ième</sup> siècles.

Sherrill **Grace** is Professor of English at the University of British Columbia where she holds the Brenda and David McLean Chair in Canadian Studies and is a Distinguished University Scholar. She is currently writing a biography of Sharon Pollock.

Bernard **Haché** a obtenu la Maîtrise de lettres modernes de l'Université Stendhal (Grenoble). Il rédige actuellement une thèse de doctorat portant sur le feuilleton littéraire dans la presse acadienne du XIX<sup>ième</sup> siècle. Il a été chargé d'enseignement à l'Université de Moncton (UMCS). En 2003-2004, il a signé plus de 70 éditoriaux pour le quotidien provincial *L'Acadie Nouvelle*.

Heather **Kirk** is a freelance writer and part-time college instructor. She has published several novels for young adults and a number of articles about Canadian literature. She is a member of the Writers' Union of Canada and CANSCAIP.

Eva-Marie **Kröller** has most recently published the *Cambridge Companion to Canadian Literature* (2003).



## Poems

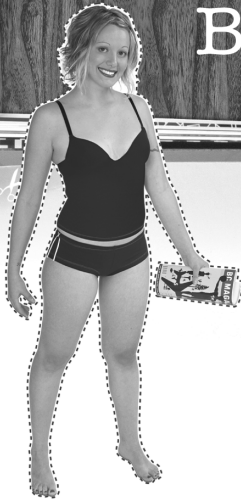
Bill **Howell** lives in Toronto; Susan **McCaslin** in Port Moody; Eric **Miller** in Victoria; Sheila **Peters** in Smithers; Peter **Trower** in Gibsons.

## Reviews

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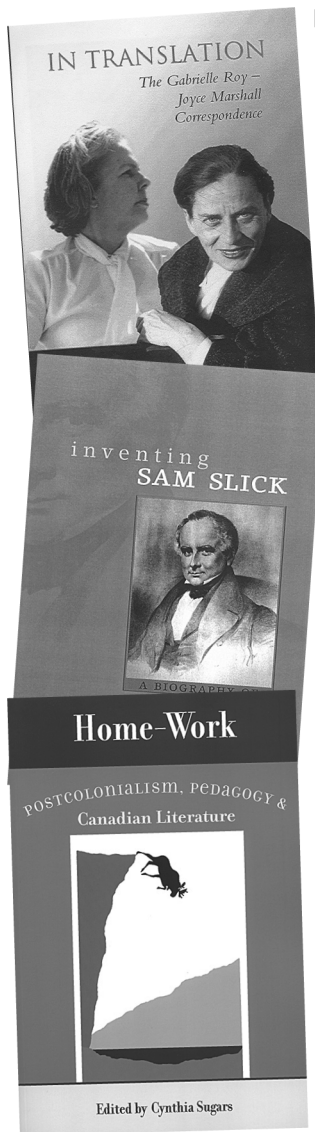


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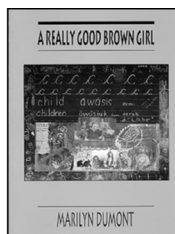
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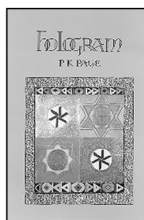
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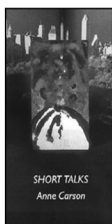
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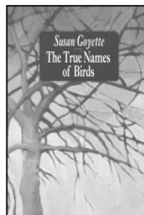
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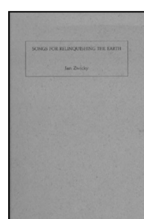
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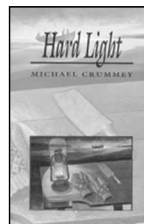
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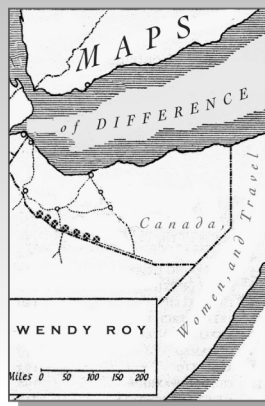
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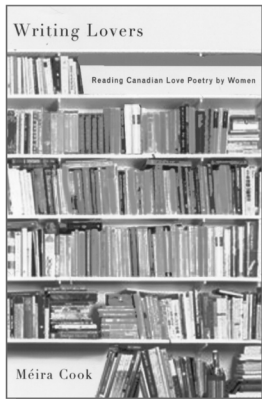


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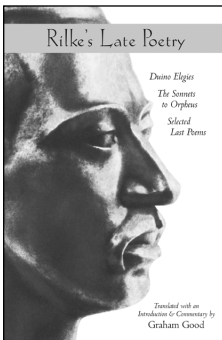
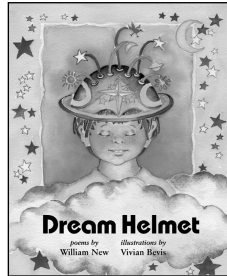
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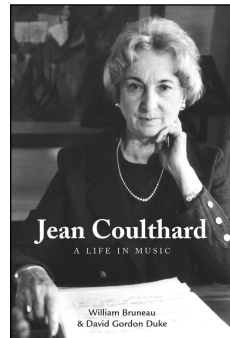
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