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Editorial

Beyond the Belly

Laura Moss

As I write this I am seven months pregnant. I just spent the weekend at a Canadian literature conference being the "pregnant one." Group conversations I was part of repeatedly went like this: "How's your research Joe Blow? How's your work Jane Doe? How many months pregnant are you Laura Moss? Really, wow. I don't know how you do it. That's amazing. OK. Good luck. So, what did you think of that paper Rohinton McKinton?" I felt like stapling my own paper abstract to the lower half of my shirt, since that was where people were looking anyway.

With my answer to the how-far-along question, many turned on their heels and walked away satisfied, leaving me slightly embarrassed and certainly less than satisfied. The question is not offensive in and of itself, but after over a hundred times in four days imminent childbirth seems to be what defines you. I would not have minded the repetition of the question as much if it had been accompanied by conversations about literature and the conference themes as well as about motherhood.

During my frequent trips to the washroom, I got questions about the gory details of my pregnancy. Apparently that space provides a safe house for queries that are otherwise off-limits for colleagues. Like most pregnant women, I am only too happy to talk about bodily functions with my friends, especially the recently pregnant—but with strangers? I know that the questions come from compassionate and caring people, but the cumulative effect is to make them feel invasive as well.

Asked "How are you doing?" I answered like everyone else: "Fine." But people pushed on: "No, how are you *really* doing?" I was diplomatic enough

to choke back the truth: "Well, actually, Person-I-Have-Just-Met, my legs are sore; I'm having Braxton-Hicks contractions, trouble breathing, and my head aches. I feel like I have a watermelon strapped to my waist, a bowling ball between my legs, a foot sticking through my ribs, and never-ending pressure on my bladder." As a polite Canadian and as someone trying to keep up my professional decorum, I just kept saying, "Oh, yeah, I'm pretty tired, too." I was actually just tired of my pregnant body being the public space of conversation.

In the 1970s, a similarly-qualified colleague at a professional conference asked my mother who was looking after her children. He supplied the answer: "God?" We have moved on: this weekend only one or two people asked if my husband was with (not "looking after") our two kids. But I did feel as if I was being asked who was looking after my research.

With this pregnancy I have received my share of the inappropriate comments that my sister chalks up to the "socially unthinking." When I was five and a half months pregnant I gave a plenary address at a conference in Germany. The conference organizer told me that he had been "warned" that I was pregnant and several different people commented to me that "real" academics don't have children in Germany. In one senior class at UBC, my students were visibly relieved when I told them that I was pregnant because "we were worried that you were just getting fat." At graduation, a student whom I had taught in two upper-level university classes moved my academic gown aside to rest his hand on my belly while introducing me to his parents and grandmother. One man I work with has said, twice, that I am so big that it is no longer funny. The irony, I realize, is that I would be equally peeved if everyone ignored my pregnancy, and I would rail against the expectations of completely disembodied intellect.

I know that increased maternity leaves, the introduction of paid parental leaves, and family-flexible teaching schedules are all recent institutional supports for having children; they have made it more manageable to balance a family and an academic position than it was even a decade ago. I know that women in generations before mine often had to choose between the two. If they chose both, I know that they faced far greater institutional and social barriers than I ever will. And yet, there still seems to be an inverse correlation between the size of one's pregnant belly and the credibility the pregnant woman carries in the workplace.

I am not a "hero," "brave," "amazing," or "crazy" (words people used to describe me at the conference). I am just balancing life and a job: like all

faculty. My balance happens to include a partner and children. I am not claiming that the balance is easy, that I am not exhausted a good deal of the time, that I don't panic about how well I am parenting and/or researching, or that I don't think that Ativan is a great medical invention, but I am saying that I am not exceptional. In the past two years, seven babies have been born to faculty members in the Department of English at UBC. Twenty of the 30 Assistant and Associate Professors in my department have children under 18 (11 women, nine men), indeed 12 have children under age seven. In my generation of postcolonialists and Canadianists from Dalhousie to McGill, from McMaster to Simon Fraser, many academics I know balance families and very productive research and teaching profiles.

The reality of today is that even at the conference I attended, many academics were also parents. When parents are in public without their children they are simply academics. The pregnant academic woman troubles the mind-body split expected of the intellectual because she is visibly straddling both. She projects the balance that many people are carrying and she embodies the gender gap already in academia. The questions about the belly are an extension of the "You're not a *real* professor, are you?" or "Is this really *your* office?" or "can you actually sign this, you don't look like a *regular* professor"—questions that young, particularly female, faculty get all the time anyway. Pregnancy exacerbates what one friend of mine calls the "feminine mismatch with my office and my profession." My friend also points out that some of the same students who ask such questions at the beginning of term come back later to seek advice on their lives and futures as professional women. She shifts from being an anomaly to being a role model in their eyes.

I wonder why, in spite of ample evidence to the contrary, it is still seen as exceptional to be pregnant and professional. The answer is that there is a "normal" academic body—and it's not one with a growing belly, spit-up stains on the shoulder, or even a Father's Day construction paper tie around the neck. It is a small, gray-haired man with leather patches on his elbows and crumbs in his unkempt beard (picture Yaweh in *Not Wanted on the Voyage*). The idea of the normal academic body needs to catch up to the progressive critical theories that we teach at university, and indeed to the reality that most of us live.

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D.S. Martin

Hints of the Hidden

Warm sun reinforces our denial
Summer's faded
like the slip of the birches' vivid green
along the colour wheel to an immaculate yellow
Such seems incompatible
with decline & fall

We slip on gloves to cycle the valley
the rise & descent of small hills
shifting gears of delight
The hillside is alive with death
coagulating on the branch tips of maple
& sumac pooling on the ground

Every familiar guise of our world reflected
in the smooth creek face hints
despite utility's slippery deception
of the hidden
in the way beauty tumbles into beauty
the way meaning detains our attention

David Williams

Making Stories, Making Selves

"Alternate Versions" in *The Stone Diaries*

In one form or another, the spectre of multiplicity still haunts criticism of *The Stone Diaries* a decade after its publication. This debate about multiplicity turns on several axes: is there one, or are there many, narrators of the life of Daisy Goodwill Flett? Is the "self" of this novel singular or plural? That is to say, is the represented subject "split by language" (Williams 131), so calling into question "the notion of a unified subject" (Briganti 183)? Or is Daisy the agent of her own destiny, taking action "*within* the narrative to reconcile what she knows with what she needs or desires" (Osland 97)? Conversely, is she a victim of social forces (Mellor 103), "erased from the record of her own existence" (*Diaries* 76), or does "the novel's focus on Daisy's 'empty centre'" make her story of itself "redemptive" (Roy 124)? Is Daisy's "life" a "tragedy" (Thomas, "writing" 79) or a "romance," the record of a constrained and powerless identity, or of a powerful selfhood able "to use the potentially terrifying concept of many realities and many selves in a positive project of reconceptualization" (Johnson 222)?

Ultimately, every question hearkens back to the primary question about the narrative act. Is Daisy the subject of her own story? Or is she the object of someone else's story? Is her life told by many narrators, as Winifred Mellor (98) and Gordon Slethaug (63) seem to think, or is her telling subject to the judgement of an omniscient narrator, as Simone Vauthier (184) and Wendy Roy (119) suggest in differing ways? Is Daisy's "life" a biography, or autobiography, or even "Auto/Biography" (Briganti 175); and would her "self" then be a hybrid form as well? If Daisy has as little power to act as

Thomas and Mellor claim, her life truly represents the tragic constraints on women's lives. To Oslund and Johnson, however, Daisy's telling is far more evocative of the "romance" of transforming possibilities.

In what follows, I will extend Lisa Johnson's premise that Daisy's "compensatory gift, the startling ability to draft alternate versions. . . . has been given short shrift in Shields criticism, and I hope to rectify this imbalance by emphasizing it here" (Johnson 190, 213). In place of Johnson's version of reception theory, however, I focus on recent work in identity theory to show how *The Stone Diaries* offers a wider prospect of identity formation than is permitted by current theories of cultural constructivism. For, by happenstance, if not by premonition, Shields' novel enacts a drama of identity formation that anticipates and reinforces the findings of Paul John Eakin in *How Our Lives Become Stories: Making Selves* (1999). The work of the novelist thus serves as an "alternate version" to the work of the theorist, both of which present overlapping models of an ever-widening, increasingly important, epistemology of pluralism in postmodern culture.

Making Selves

Recent findings in neural biology suggest that perception is inherently plural, since the brain is a network of neural networks, having multiple centres and billions of possible neural connections. Thus, "the brain's neural organization is constantly modified—both phylogenetically and ontogenetically—to adapt to the ever-changing demands of experience" (Eakin 13). The brain necessarily constructs perceptions of an environment to which the organism adapts; Gerald Edelman affirms that"[e]very perception is an act of creation" (cited in Eakin 16). Memories are also creations, since they are not stored on some biological hard drive (Eakin 106), but are themselves fresh "perceptions newly occurring in the present . . . As perceptions, memories share the constructed nature of all brain events"(18–19). And yet, if "[r]ecollection is a kind of perception," then *"every context will alter the nature of what is recalled"* argues Israel Rosenfield (cited in Eakin 19).

The illusion of a single, unified self is also unsettled by recent findings in cognitive psychology. Ulric Neisser (1988) identifies "multiple registers of self-experience" that point to at least five distinct selves: including the *ecological self*: "the self as perceived with respect to the physical environment"; and the *interpersonal self*: "the self as engaged in immediate unreflective social interaction with another person" (Eakin 22). Both selves emerge within two months of birth, while other, more complex selves develop from the third to

fifth years of human life: "[t]he *extended self:* the self of memory and anticipation, the self existing outside the present moment"; "[t]he *private self:* the self of 'conscious experiences that are not available to anyone else'"; and "[t]he *conceptual self:* the extremely diverse forms of self-information—social roles, personal traits, theories of body and mind, of subject and person—that posit the self as a category, either explicitly or implicitly" (22–3). So how are these several selves, in ceaseless acts of perceptual creation and re-created memories, ever bound together in the illusion of a single, unified identity?

"Responding to the flux of self-experience," Eakin observes, "we instinctively gravitate to identity-supporting structures: the notion of identity as continuous over time, and the use of autobiographical discourse to record its history" (20). Our sense of continuous identity is thus dependent on narrative forms whose ultimate referent is *time.* So narrative becomes the primary medium of an "extended self" whose work it is to reconcile past and present images of self with anticipated images of the self in future. For good reason, philosopher Anthony Paul Kerby joins "narrative psychologists" like Jerome Bruner "in his belief that self-narration is the defining act of the human subject, an act which is not only 'descriptive of the self' but *'fundamental to the emergence and reality of that subject'*" (Eakin 21).

From the vantage point of cognitive psychology, it is hardly surprising that it has "occurred" to Daisy Goodwill at the age of 72 "that there are millions, billions, of other men and women in the world who wake up early in their separate beds, greedy for the substance of their own lives, but obliged every day to reinvent themselves" (Shields 283). Nor is it surprising that this fictional character, facing the end of nine decades of life, should come to the conclusion that "[a]ll she's trying to do is keep things straight in her head. To keep the weight of her memories evenly distributed. To hold the chapters of her life in order" (Shields 340). For, amidst the ceaseless flux of existence, human beings seek continuity in the midst of change: "[W]hen we look at life history from the perspective of neural Darwinism, it is fair to say that we are all becoming different persons all the time, we are not what we were; self and memory are emergent, in process, constantly evolving" (Eakin 20). Even if the ontological question of identity could be settled, there would remain the epistemological question of how self-narration operates as an identity-supporting structure to sustain the illusion of continuous selfhood. Where does such a faculty come from, how and when is it acquired, how might it be influenced by culture, and how can it preserve what is fundamentally a new creation each and every day?

On the face of it, memory is the key factor in making an "extended self." Olover Sacks' Alzheimer's patient, for example, "who remembered nothing for more than a few seconds, was obliged to *'literally make himself (and his world) up every moment'*" (Eakin 100). Continuous identity is evidently a product of continuing story, where "Narrative and identity are performed simultaneously. . . . What is arresting about this radical equation between narrative and identity is the notion that narrative here is not merely *about* the self but rather in some profound way a constituent part *of* self" (Eakin 101). And yet, without memory, where is the self of self-narration, or where is the extension of the self in time? As Eakin puts it,

> [S]tudents of memory today hold that past experience is necessarily—both psychologically and neurologically—constructed anew in each memory event or act of recall. Memories, then, are *constructed*, and memory itself, moreover, is plural. Despite the traditional notion of memory as a single mental faculty varying only in strength and accessibility, memory is not, Larry R. Squire reminds us, "a single faculty but consists of different systems that depend on different brain structures and connections." (107)

Among several major memory systems—*semantic memory* of concepts and facts; *procedural memory* of acquired skills and habits; and *episodic memory* of personal incidents and events (Eakin 107–8)—episodic memory alone fosters the emergence of an extended self in time.

Episodic memory, however, turns out to be more than a matter of personal impressions or idiosyncratic choices; it is also a product of social conditioning. As Kenneth J. Gergen asserts "[t]o report on one's memories is not so much a matter of consulting mental images as it is engaging in a sanctioned form of telling" (Eakin 110). Typically, the forms that memories take are already sanctioned in early childhood by "memory-talk" with parents and other caregivers. But the underlying purpose of such talk, according to psychologist John Shotter, is "social accountability," the idea "that 'one *ontologically* learns how *to be* this or that kind of person' in conversation with others" (cited in Eakin 63). In other words, "what we talk of *as* our experience of our reality is constituted for us very largely by the *already established* ways in which we *must* talk in our attempts to *account* for ourselves—and for it—to the others around us . . . And only certain ways of talking are deemed legitimate'" (cited in Eakin 62).

If "our subjectivity is itself structured as a conversation," or, more precisely, if "the self is a dialogue which reflects and refracts concrete social interactions in which it plays a part" (Eakin 64, 65), then self-narration is

the best means of making ourselves accountable to others in socially acceptable ways, in forms intelligible to common experience. Indeed, such experience of memory-talk, both early and late, "conditions us to believe that our recognition as 'persons' is to be transacted through the exchange of identity narratives—no narrative, no self" (Eakin 126). What lurks in this dialogical imperative, however, is the pressing need of the child to acquire "narrative competence" (Eakin 106), in order to find social acceptance. One painful consequence of autism, for example, is the inability to express an intelligible form of selfhood, to share an experience of identity that reinforces a common sense of subjectivity. The majority of children do acquire this narrative competence in familiar settings of home and church and school. Foremost among educative influences is the family, which serves "as the 'vicar of culture,' indoctrinating the child in the received 'genres of life-accounting.' From this perspective we can think of the child's sense of self as emerging within a crucible of family stories and cultural scripts" (Eakin 117).

On the other hand, culture's coercive power to establish terms of reference, to determine what is and what is not legitimate experience, can set its deep impress in the soft wax of selfhood. In Western culture, we like to talk, John Shotter claims, "as if we all existed from birth as separate, isolated individuals *already* containing 'minds' or 'mentalities' wholly within ourselves, set over against a material world itself devoid of any mental processes'" (cited in Eakin 62). Missing in this version of an extended self, however, is "the presence of the relational [self] in autobiography. . . . Shirley Neuman has studied one of its surprising and revealing absences, the suppression of the maternal body. The mother may well be the primary source of relational identity, she argues, but her invisibility in stories of 'self-individuation' has contributed to our difficulty in recognizing identity precisely as *relational*" (Eakin 56–7).

For feminist readers such as Chiara Briganti, addressing this absence is the supreme achievement of *The Stone Diaries*—"the reclaiming of the maternal body and the elaboration of its relation to language in a genre that has traditionally banished the body from representation" (185). While Briganti reclaims a necessary space for the "relational self" grounded in the mother-child relationship, the absence of this maternal body, of early "memory-talk" (with either parent), and of an acceptable family "script," makes Daisy a narrative "orphan" in every sense of that phrase. For where could her memories come from, and how would she gain a sense of "dialogical identity"? How has she in fact acquired her stunning narrative competence? Or how does she revise the family script to suit the dictates of culture?

While one assumes that young Daisy has engaged in speculative forms of "memory-talk" with Clarentine Flett, her adoptive mother, about her mother's death and her father's desertion, one takes at face value Daisy's confession of unreliability in "inventing letters or conversations of impossible gentility, or casting conjecture in a pretty light" (77), precisely because memory is already an act of creation. What her confession cannot explain, however, is what she means by a "primary act of imagination" that allows her "to hold on to her life" by "supplementing, modifying, summoning up the necessary connections" (76). Her search for origins in a ground that yields few clues, and in a time that allows for little "dialogical identity," gradually reveals what is "primary" about this "act of imagination." Belatedly, her father has tried, on the long train-trip from Manitoba to Indiana, to reclaim his 11-year-old daughter, "never breaking for a moment his flow of words. He was talking now about his dead wife, the child's mother. . . . Some of this the young Daisy took in and some she didn't" (89). In the end, "She drifted in and out of sleep, but even awake her mind kept coasting back to the surfaces of the Simcoe Street house in Winnipeg where she had lived most of her life. . . . The face of Aunt Clarentine floated by, smiling." Her father's monologue evidently comes too late and is too one-sided to make him the "primary" agent of the child's "dialogical identity."

The adult Daisy has nonetheless been able to gather enough scraps of family history that, in keeping with the dominant scripts of culture, allow her to invent corroborating witnesses for her story, setting these "witnesses" in a form of dialogical counterpoint that belatedly does the work of "memory-talk." Thus she insists, early on, that: "[l]ife is an endless recruiting of witnesses. It seems we need to be observed in our postures of extravagance or shame, we need attention paid to us" (36–7). What witnesses are selected, however, or what "accounts" are chosen by Daisy to represent the story of her origins are not just "secured by whomever and whatever is available. What chance, what caprice!" (37). Rather, each of her narrative choices illuminates what it means to be a series of multiple selves that has come in the postmodern era to supplant a Cartesian model of unified, autonomous identity.

Making Stories

That Daisy is the narrator of her own story is signalled from its opening sentence: "My mother's name was Mercy Stone Goodwill" (1). That she is truly a woman of good will is evident in her portrait of her parents' married life. While Mercy calls her husband a "pick-and-nibble fellow," Daisy admits

that, "[e]ating was as close to heaven as my mother ever came. (In our day we have a name for a passion as disordered as hers)" (1–2). That Daisy, a citizen of "our day," declines to side with contemporary judgements is evident from the way she projects herself into the past, before reverting to the present tense: "And almost as heavenly as eating was the making—how she gloried in it! . . . It's something to see, the way she concentrates, her hot, busy face, the way she thrills to see the dish take form" (2). That she is inventing this scene becomes evident in her subsequent retreat to the past tense: "Some sharp thought, the worry over how to keep the pudding cool, or perhaps envy for the Fletts' new ice chest, brings on my mother's first spasm of pain. . . . A witness, had there been a witness present in the little back kitchen, might have feared a fainting spell coming on, even though my mother is not much given to faintness" (4). Clearly, there is no witness for Daisy's account. And yet she plays fair with us, announcing from the outset her ubiquity in time and space, attributes that link her to an old-fashioned omniscient narrator.

This "witness" who has to be imagined puts the daughter reflexively in the grammatical position of the mother who "imagines the soft dough entering the bin of her stomach" (6), uniting them syntactically as subjects of the sentence. At the same time, Daisy finds herself in a similar psychological position to her mother, her knowledge every bit as limited as that of the woman who "never knows when she blows out the lamp what to expect or what to make of her husband's cries. . . . Niagara in all its force is what she's reminded of as he climbs on top of her each evening, a thundering let loose against the folded interior walls of her body" (7). As far as we know, this inmate of "the Stonewall Orphans Home" (29) has never been farther from Stonewall than Garson, Manitoba, where her husband Cuyler Goodwill works in the marble quarries, and so is likely to have no conception in 1905—an age before movies or television—of Niagara's true thunder. The fact that Daisy imagines this scene, that she has projected a moment of sexual confusion and longing onto her mother, will only emerge in a scene some 125 pages later when, on a visit to Niagara Falls, she recounts how "[s]he resisted an impulse to lean into the man's chest, to shelter there, crying out her joy at having found this unexpected intimacy" (133–34).

That Daisy needs to invent witnesses to corroborate her story, or that she should turn, after the death of her mother, to "Clarentine Flett, a woman half-crazed by menopause and loneliness, and in mourning for her unlived life" (37), accords with her need for "social accountability" (Eakin 63). Not

surprisingly, her stepmother Clarentine shares this sense of missing witnesses: "The men, her husband and sons, leave for the quarry at seven o'clock sharp and return at five. What do they imagine she does all day?" (11). The only "pair of eyes" that "can see through the roof and walls of her house and regard her as she moves through her dreamlike days" (11) must belong to the adult Daisy, who can have no inkling of what Clarentine thought before taking on responsibility for a motherless child.

Again, in the second chapter, we are taught how to read this narrative ventriloquist:

> "She didn't tell me," [a bereaved husband] roars to the vacant sky, "she never told me."
>
> This is what he is unable to comprehend: why his Mercy had seen fit to guard her momentous secret.
>
> He supposes he must look upon her silence as a kind of betrayal. . . .
>
> Yes, it must be confessed—years later this is clear to me—that my father's love for my mother had been damaged, and sometimes, especially when waking from one of his vivid dreams, he wonders if he is capable of loving the child. (60-1)

Daisy's "confession"—her abrupt intrusion into the thoughts of the bereaved young husband—suggests her compulsion to imagine his loss, since she herself is implicated in it, having "caused" her mother's death. But she suffers as well from her father's abandonment of her at birth, from an underlying sense of betrayal that she projects onto him. The ultimate mark of Daisy's "good will" is her willingness to give him the benefit of the doubt, to imagine her father suffering the same pain that has always shadowed her life. And so she sets about, through "a primary act of imagination," to motivate his desertion of her in terms of a more acceptable cultural script. Cuyler has felt a prior duty, perhaps, or else he has followed a higher calling to perpetuate the memory of his dead wife.

If Daisy is "guilty" of "dreaming a limestone tower into existence" (76), it is only because this "monument to lost love" proves her father's nobility, aligning him with the story of the Shah Jahan who, alienating his son and successor, would bring about his own downfall by building the costly "Taj Mahal" (71) as a memorial to his beloved Mumtaz. At the same time, Daisy manages to create a meaningful relationship with her absent father by joining him in an imaginative re-creation of the lost mother. This sort of autobiographical project, as Eakin reminds us, is "one of the most striking varieties of the relational life," since it "concerns the parent who is—literally or figuratively—absent" (87–8). What Daisy does, in chapters on "Birth" and "Childhood," is then less concerned with "Daisy's displacement from

the centre of her story . . . each time Daisy is constructed—or constructs herself—as an other" (Roy 122), than it is with recovering the building blocks of an unfinished "relational self."

The narrator of "Birth," who, in her peroration to the story of her mother's death, admits that, "It's this wing-beat of breath I reach out for" (40), is still yearning a lifetime later to establish some relational identity with her mother. With extraordinary generosity, she offers an "alternate version" of her mother's "betrayal" of her father—well before he comes, in the order of her narrative, to his own grief-stricken conclusion about his wife's "betrayal"—as simple ignorance of matters sexual: what Victorian orphan would understand "the way of a man with a maid"? Simple corpulence—she is "an extraordinarily obese woman" with "jellylike features" (17), who rarely had her menstrual period—would also make it difficult to read the signs of her pregnancy. Long before (and well after) the fact, the child can forgive both her parents for being victims of a plausible misunderstanding.

That corpulence is a rationalization emerges from Daisy's account of the parents' "wedding portrait" (17) in which the woman, dressed not as a bride and looking unlikely to marry a youngster who looks more like her son (172a), blatantly contradicts this verbal portrait of a woman too fat to know she is with child. Nor is the boy who stands beside the woman in the photograph "an inch or two shorter than she" (33) in an otherwise pedestrian image titled "Cuyler and Mercy, 1902." A final inconsistency—the postulated "wedding portrait" was taken a year before their announced "wedding date, June 15, 1903" (182)—is more than a sign of postmodern "playfulness," a joke played on the faithful in the sanctuary of mimesis. Such a glaring contradiction looks more like motivated "play," forcing the reader to re-read the narrative to date in order to realize the larger signs of Daisy's "good will."

While "it is true," as Dianne Osland writes, "that a dawning recognition of the inconsistencies and impossibilities of Daisy's narrative can slowly undermine confidence in the narrative verities that sustain the formative accretions of the coherent self" (96), it is equally true that a more generous interpretation bolsters confidence in the power of narrative to create coherence where it was lacking before, to transform a story of death and desertion into a culturally sanctioned script of good intentions thwarted only by circumstance. For both parents now appear, much as Daisy herself, under the aegis of "social accountability," schooled in their daughter's narrative *"to be* this or that kind of person," in order to conform to "the dominant social 'text' to which we are held 'accountable'" (Eakin 63). With this assurance,

the aging narrator affirms her continuity with the lost parent, feeling "herself merge with, and become, finally, the still body of her dead mother" (359). Indeed, Mercy's unwitting pregnancy may be a trope for the whole of Daisy's autobiographical act, since the "self" of the teller comes to contain this unexpected other to which it gives birth. In giving narrative "birth" to her mother, Daisy also gives birth to herself—to an extended self more in keeping with the cultural script of loving parents who have wanted children.

One must not forget, all the same, the wise reminder of Dianne Osland that "it is surprising, and perhaps worrying, how many discontinuities we are prepared to overlook" in the novel, "how many simply do not register, how willingly we re-establish the terms of the contract between an external verifiable reality and life reconstituted in, or as, language" (96–7). While Osland seeks to remove such inconsistencies in Daisy's plot from the poststructuralist field of "mere" play and to resituate them within the economy of coherent self-invention, she succumbs herself to the trace of reference in the very moment of advising scepticism: "But [Clarentine's] reading of romantic novels, her unsettling discovery of the 'secret hoard of tenderness' (18) in the house next door, and 'her lost hours, her vivid dreams and shreds of language' (12) seem to have little more to substantiate them than an unusually fervent and possibly derivative phrase from next door in a letter to Cuyler in which she declares, 'I loved your dear wife Mercy with all my heart' (50)" (Osland 96). The probability that no such documents exist is signalled both by a lack of dates for the letters in this sequence—in stark contrast to the sequence of letters making up another chapter entitled "Work, 1955–1964"—and by her acknowledgment, at chapter's end, that Daisy is quite capable "of exaggerating or lying outright, inventing letters or conversations of impossible gentility" (77). The invented "fact" of the letter is only meant, however, to justify Clarentine's desertion of her husband inasmuch as she has heard Daisy's father's (invented) profession of a love stronger than death: "'I love you,' she heard young Cuyler Goodwill say to his immense, bloated wife, Mercy. 'Oh, how I love you and with all my heart'" (16). Clarentine, like Cuyler, like Mercy herself, is thus given an alibi for betraying her husband in order to make a new life for herself and the orphaned infant in the bustling city of Winnipeg. The story of Daisy's birth then becomes the story of a whole string of deceits lovingly transformed in the telling into a string of pearls.

"As makers themselves," Eakin writes, "autobiographers are primed to recognize the constructed nature of the past, yet they need at the same time to believe that in writing about the past they are performing an act of

recovery; narrative teleology models the trajectory of continuous identity, reporting the supreme fiction of memory as fact" (98). One of the beauties of Daisy's act of recovery is the way her whole narrative seeks to redeem her past and the people in it, to affirm, with Nietzsche's Zarathustra, "Thus I willed it." Haunted by the story of this husband whom Clarentine deserted to care for her infant self, Daisy is left to imagine "Magnus Flett, whom she has never met but who stands in her mind as a tragic figure, abandoned by his wife, dismissed by his three sons, despised, attached to nothing. In a way she loves him more tenderly than she loves her husband, Barker. What exactly had Magnus Flett done to deserve such punishment?" (187). There is no answer, except to say that he serves as a metonym for her own sense of desertion.

Nor is there evidence to support Barker's claim in an (invented) letter to Clarentine that "Our Father, as you know, remained hardened in his heart to the end, and it is for him we must now direct our prayers" (55). Flying in the face of her future husband's claim, Daisy tells the story from Magnus' point of view, crediting him with such an intense longing for his lost wife that he memorizes one of her books, *Jane Eyre,* "so that if by chance his wife should decide to come home and take up her place once more, he would be ready. If this talky foolishness was her greatest need, he would be prepared to meet her, a pump primed with words full of softness and acknowledgment" (100–1). Magnus would be so prepared, that is, were he the same man as the 115-year-old Magnus Flett whom Daisy later finds in the Orkneys, but for whom there is no shred of evidence to cast him in the leading role of deserted husband, faithful unto death to the memory of a faithless wife (Williams 137). Indeed, the whole story confirms her claim that "she is cursed with the lonely woman's romantic imagination and thus can support only happy endings" (149). But the point is not that Daisy is a romantic escapist in flight from reality. To the contrary, this maker of stories, who would redeem her personal past, together with key figures in it, is a highly self-conscious, self-critical narrator of a story she admits is "written on air, written with imagination's invisible ink" (149). The larger question must be what purpose is served by imagination in "life writing" which does not even pretend to be "writing"?

Telling Privacies

For Eakin, writing is a late, though not a necessary, stage in the construction of life stories, since "we are always writing our lives in the act of living them, that we perform this life writing in narrative terms" (123). Indeed,

there would be no sense of "self," or any form of identity, were it not for tellings in which we all share, assimilating the scripts of family and culture in "memory talk." Daisy is not unique, then, in recounting, if "not writing," her life story. As Shields once remarked to Joan Thomas, "[s]he's thinking it, in exactly the same way that we all think our own life. We carry around this construct that is our own life. But no, she doesn't actually put pen to paper or anything like that. She's building it, and she's building it out of the scraps of what she knows and what she imagines" ("Golden" 58).

This self who constructs a narrative order for herself does not need an audience to confirm her sense of internal consistency; the coherence of her identity is purely a private matter: "All she's trying to do is to keep things straight in her head. To keep the weight of her memories evenly distributed. To hold the chapters of her life in order" (340). Evidently, this fourth among multiple selves is "the *private self:* the self of 'conscious experiences that are not available to anyone else'" (Eakin 23). This private self is often present "before the age of 5" (23), as appears in Daisy's account of her daughter Joan, and her burgeoning sense of secrecy. "Already, at the age of five, Joan understands that she is destined to live two lives, one existence that is visible to those around her and another that blooms secretly inside her head" (*Stone* 172). The child's secret life is nonetheless narratively contained in Daisy's private story of "Motherhood, 1947," where it stands as a metonym for Daisy's own secret thoughts, if not as a trope for her "telling privacy."

At the heart of her very public role as a mother is Daisy's intensely private sense that, "She may be crowded out of her own life—she knows this for a fact and has always known it—but she possesses, as a compensatory gift, the startling ability to draft alternate versions. She feels, for instance, the force of her children's unruly secrecies, of her father's clumsy bargains with the world around him, of the mingled contempt and envy of Fraidy Hoyt (who has not yet written so much as a simple bread-and-butter note following her summer visit)" (190). Revealing herself as the "alternate" source of these "public" accounts of her maternal identity, she recovers a measure of privacy in imagining the private thoughts of others, thereby revealing something of the mechanism of her own identity formation. So, for example, she offers two contradictory versions of her friend Fraidy Hoyt's brief entrance into this child-centred life from which Daisy feels "crowded out":

> While she was there she thought: here is Daisy Goodwill with a distinguished husband and a large well-managed house and three beautiful children. Daisy's got all that any of us ever wanted. . . .

> Or else Fraidy Hoyt thought: oh, poor Daisy. My God, she's gone fat . . .
> And, Jesus, just look at this guest room. Hideous pink scallops everywhere. I'm suffocating. Four more days. (183-4)

The uncertainty about what her school friend really thinks is one more sign of Daisy's authorship of explanations dictated by "good manners," a reminder that an inaccessible dimension of the subjectivity of others can only be reached through imagination. But these "alternate versions" of Fraidy Hoyt also remind us of alternate versions of Daisy herself, one consumed by public demands, the other restored by means of telling privacies.

Once before, Daisy sensed how her private identity had been consumed by a public story of her "tragic" widowhood— "she who's still living in the hurt of her first story, a mother dead of childbirth, and then a ghastly second chapter, a husband killed on his honeymoon. Their honeymoon, I suppose I should say" (122). The truth is that there was never any honeymoon; the alcoholic bridegroom showed no interest in consummating the marriage. And so, "[y]ou might like to believe that Daisy has no gaiety left in her, but this is not true, since she lives outside her story as well as inside" (123). The ability to see herself as a free agent, outside, as well as inside, the constraints of public opinion, gives an emphatic denial to the claims of social constructivists who see only constraining webs of power.

A final dimension of this private self appears, in the very moment of its withdrawal, in a "private" prelude to a "public" discussion of Daisy's depression in "Sorrow, 1965":

> She remembers her dear sweet Barker fondly, of course she does, she honors his memory, whatever that means; and she thinks of him, smilingly, every single time she rubs a dab of Jergens Lotion into the palms of her hands, floating herself back to the moment—a very private moment, she will not discuss it with anyone, though she records it here—in which he had extolled her smooth-jointed fingers, comparing them to wonderful flexible silken fish. (230)

The privacy of this thought, like the privacy of the act itself, floats upon a current of intimacy, the true dynamic of which is an extension of the private self, a real enlargement of its possibilities through sexual relation to another private self. And so "she will not discuss it with anyone, though she records it here." Yet where is "here"? Both in the theatre of her private imagination, it would seem, *and* in the intimacy of relation with her imagined auditor. It is as if her dead husband were somehow succeeded by the secret reader; this act of "telling privacies" finally reconfirms our own identity as private selves.

Registers of Self

That the whole account in chapter seven of Daisy's "Sorrow" belongs to Daisy herself is suggested by two things. The increasing distance from Daisy of the supposed "narrators"—from her children and close friends to Cora-Mae Milltown, a former nanny, to Skoot Skutari, the grandson of a Jewish peddler who supposedly "witnessed" Daisy's birth—makes it improbable that Cora-Mae, who has not been heard from before, would appear to tell us about Daisy's depression, or that Skoot Skutari, who likewise lives half a continent away, would have the slightest reason to know about her present circumstances. The same thing can be said about Alice's narrative of her mother: either the diaries she admits to having burned "in the fireplace and also the letters I had written home during my year away at college, letters full of gush and artifice" (234) have appeared out of thin air in the previous chapter (cf. 209–10, 212, 215–6), or else this later account is the imagined one, or—more likely still—both are invented since Daisy fails to catch the inconsistency. (By contrast, Alice has no reason to reconstruct the letters presented in "Work" that she now admits to having destroyed in "Sorrow," while Daisy has every reason to do so.)

What these plural fictional accounts of Daisy's sorrow have to show, however, is something else about expanded registers of self-experience. For, in one sense, what Daisy does in imagining others inferring causes for her depression is to mitigate the isolation of her private self—if not to undo the deprivations wrought by privacy itself—by reviewing and reconfiguring her interpersonal self in relation to each of these others. In every "narrator," Daisy finds a facet of character that reflects her back to herself, that establishes a thread of affiliation binding her to each in turn. What we get in each case is an awareness of the other as a private person, with judgements peculiar to that individual; likewise, in "theory" after "theory," we recognize the autobiographer's full assumption of her "conceptual self"—what Eakin terms "the extremely diverse forms of self-information—social roles, personal traits, theories of body and mind, of subject and person—that posit the self as a category, either explicitly or implicitly" (23).

From the outset of "Sorrow," Daisy herself reminds us that it is her "mysterious suffering core which those around her can only register and weigh and speculate about" (230). Given this reluctance of the private self to reveal itself, we, too, are dropped as confidants, are left behind to speculate on the source of her unhappiness with other "witnesses." Even so, "Alice's Theory" anticipates a larger theory of selfhood emerging in Daisy's own story, since

Alice insists that "The self is not a thing carved on entablature" (231). Since "[i]n one day I had altered my life: my life, therefore, was alterable" (233), then, by corollary, her mother's sad state must be alterable, too, just as it was after her husband's death: "But then, presto, she became Mrs. Green Thumb. Her old self slipped off her like an oversized jacket" (239). Another "alternate version," presented in "Fraidy Hoyt's Theory," leans on Freud's theory of repression to suggest that Daisy has merely denied herself "the sharpness of early excitations," to wit the "sexual spasm," by means of which we are able to "enter the realm of the ecstatic" (247). While Fraidy's opening bluster sounds true to her character—"You don't expect Alice Flett Downing to believe in her mother's real existence, do you?" (240)—her appeal to the reader to arbitrate among such privately-held theories warns us not to believe in the "real existence" of her own theory. Fraidy is clearly a mouthpiece for the ventriloquist who pieces together a theory about her "conceptual self" by tracing out its variegated roles and traits and attributes.

"Cousin Beverly's Theory" is still appropriate to a single mother raising a child out of wedlock. "I think it's the kids who've got her down. Being a widow she feels extra responsible, I can understand that" (250), Daisy's niece says, although she also sounds like a projection of Daisy's own voice speaking for Mercy, Cuyler, and Clarentine in the opening chapters. Moreover, Beverly's conclusion begins to sound like Daisy's judgement at the end of the chapter: "A person can make herself sick," Beverly says, "and that same person has to will herself to get well again, that's my personal theory" (250). "She'd like to clean her body out with a hoot of laughter and give way to the pull of gravity," the narrator sums up her period of depression: "It's going to happen. All this suffering will be washed away. Any day now" (263).

The claim of the title to be "Mrs. Flett's Theory" is not weakened by a counter-claim in its opening sentence that "[s]urely no one would expect Mrs. Flett to come up with a theory about her own suffering—the poor thing's so emptied out and lost in her mind she can't summon sufficient energy to brush her hair, let alone organize a theory" (261). For she manages to constellate her "conceptual self" in terms of a whole series of "theories" that could not be organized by anyone but herself. Her refusal, at the outset of the chapter, to "discuss it with anyone" (230) is clearly belied at chapter's end by the resumption of the first-person narrative which carries with it the double-voicing of an outside perspective: "In a sense I see her as one of life's fortunates, a woman born with a voice that lacks a tragic register. Someone who's learned to dig a hole in her own life story" (263). That

the one who says "I" cannot be "a narrator who knows more than Daisy knows or invents" (Vauthier 184) is evident from the present-tense narration of the ensuing paragraph: "Already, right this minute, I feel a part of her wanting to go back to the things she used to like, the feel of a new toothbrush against her gums, for instance" (263). The intimate nature of this physical revelation, together with its simultaneous merging of inner and outer perspectives, finally puts paid to the account of a conceptual self that, encompassing various registers of experience—bodily, relational, extended, and private selves—is mediated by a multitude of voices even as it renounces the "tragic" implications of social constructivism.

The Binding Problem

One crucial question remains to be answered: how does this multiplicity of selves gain the character of a unified identity? "Cuyler Goodwill, to supply an example, traveled in his long life from one incarnation to the next. In his twenties he was a captive of Eros, in his thirties he belonged to God, and, still later, to Art. Now, in his fifties, he champions Commerce" (91–2). Cuyler himself is never concerned to unify his serial identities, and yet his account of them hints at two linking mechanisms by which these plural identities are finally bound together: "And he is oddly unapologetic about his several metamorphoses, rarely looking back, and never for a minute giving in to the waste and foolishness of nostalgia. 'People change,' he's been heard to say, or 'Such-and-such was only a chapter in my life'" (92). The instrumentality of language may not suffice for "neurobiological accounts of subjectivity" that pose what John Searle calls "the question of how different stimulus inputs to different parts of the brain are bound together so as to produce a single unified experience" (cited in Eakin 15). But the constancy of first-person pronouns in autobiographical accounts (Cuyler's reference to "my life") help to create a sense of ontological, as well as linguistic, continuity in the "grammar" of existence.

Daisy's use of pronouns thus does two things simultaneously: it uncovers multiple subject (and object) positions of the self in the "natural" syntax of experience; and it creates a necessary agreement of subject and object, of private and public identities, of past and present selves, in the formation of her life "sentences." So the older narrator tells how the eleven-year-old girl

> could only stare at this absence inside herself for a few minutes at a time. It was like looking at the sun.
>
> Well, you might say, it was doubtless the fever that disoriented me, and it is

> true that I suffered strange delusions in that dark place, and that my swollen eyes in the twilight room invited frightening visions.
>
> The long days of isolation, of silence, the torment of boredom—all these pressed down on me, on young Daisy Goodwill and emptied her out. Her autobiography, if such a thing were imaginable, would be, if such a thing were ever to be written, an assemblage of dark voids and unbridgable gaps. (75-6)

Such "voids" and "gaps" are bridged in this passage by a "grammar" that allows the user to shift roles, to play a dynamic variety of parts in the ongoing drama of identity. "In [Emile] Benveniste's memorable phrase, 'ego' is he who *says* 'ego'" (Eakin 21). Even as Daisy stares down the tunnel of memory at this childhood self called "she," she looks outward simultaneously at the immediate world as "you," thus crossing the gap between subject positions in the space of an apposite phrase ("on me, on young Daisy"), so creating as well a further identity of teller, told, and hearer. For each of these positions, while invariable in its syntax, is capable of being filled by the identity of another—whichever "you" hears whatever "I" might say about whichever "her." Because of these multiple linguistic roles, it does appear likely that as Ian Burkitt puts it, "[t]he self is a dialogue which reflects and refracts concrete social interactions in which it plays a part" (cited in Eakin 65).

The self can even carry on this dialogue posthumously, as appears in the last chapter "Death" where Daisy drafts "alternate versions" of her obituary, one of which announces, "Flowers gratefully declined," the other of which begins, "*Flowers gratefully accepted*" (343). Moreover, there are alternate versions of her epitaph, one conforming to public decorum—"*In Loving Memory of/ Daisy Goodwill Flett/ 1905-199-*"—the other moving toward private meditation—"*In Loving Memory of/ Daisy Goodwill/ Who . . . Made the Decision/ After Prolonged Reflection/ After Torment/ With Misgivings With Difficulty With Apologies With/ Determination/ To Lie Alone in Death*" (347). This latter demonstration of subjectivity in all its multiplicity is latterly directed outward, however, not inward, to the old problem of "binding." For Daisy, who senses her life scattering into a series of lists and catalogues, of menus and recipes, also imagines her children sorting through her personal effects and finding another woman than the one they thought they knew: "This beautiful man fell out of a window. Her lover. Her brand new husband. Think if that happened to you. Would you want to talk about it?" (351). Daisy sees her children coming to accept her private identity against which they had so long conspired by thoughtlessly "crowd[ing] her out of her own life" (192). Yet she imagines them imagining alternate lives for her:

"Do you think her life would have been different if she'd been a man?" (353). In the end, they could still fail to grasp the truth of her private self:

> "I am not at peace."
> Daisy Goodwill's final (unspoken) words.
>
> "Daisy Goodwill Flett, wife, mother, citizen of our century: May she rest in peace."
> Closing benediction, read
> by Warren M. Flett,
> Memorial Service, Canary Palms.
> (361)

And yet the legacy Daisy bequeaths to her children is not so different from the scraps and fragments of knowledge left to her by her own dead mother: another scattering of evidence with which to begin the process of imagining a life they can no longer take for granted, nor may even hope to possess in its totality.

The story Daisy constructs up to her last moments—"DAISY (GOODWILL) FLETT Peacefully, on ___, in the month of ___ in the year 199_" (343), the incompletion of the dates as telling as her later confession that "I'm still here" (352)—turns out to be her ultimate story of a self that she imagines extending beyond death, her "life" turned into a site where others are now left to gather her remains. Even so, her continuing goodwill offers her successors a model by which to redeem the past, much as she has done for others before her. Autobiography thus gives way to the possibility of another kind of afterlife in the "social accountability" of biography. Only now, the reach of her "extended self" extends through the generations to bind all who interpret her story together across time. So the work of making selves becomes at last the work of making communities. In more than one sense, the self turns into a richly rewarding dialogue.

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Vincent Charles Lambert

Fable

Pour Jacques Brault

On dit aussi qu'en ces bois
Comme en chacun, le sentier
Va serpentant
Qui devient plaine.

Et qu'une vieille absence
Adossée dans l'hiver
Dort ensevelie, arbre
Parmi les arbres

Pareil est ce vent, qui remontant la nuit
Trouva mon visage.

Laura Robinson

Remodeling *An Old-Fashioned Girl*

Troubling Girlhood in Ann-Marie MacDonald's *Fall on Your Knees*

In L.M. Montgomery's *Anne of Green Gables* (1908), Marilla asks the orphan Anne to tell her story, wanting to know, specifically, if the women who had foster-mothered Anne had been good to her. Anne replies: "Oh, they *meant* to be—I know they meant to be just as good and kind as possible" (41, original italics). Marilla thinks about Anne's responses: "What a starved, unloved life she had had—a life of drudgery and poverty and neglect; for Marilla was shrewd enough to read between the lines of Anne's history and divine the truth" (41). Anne's traumatic history and her refusal to speak it dramatically reveal what is often repressed in traditional literary constructions of girlhood. Abuse or neglect or trauma is frequently the backdrop for many girl heroines in English girls' fiction from the mid-nineteenth century to the early twentieth century in America, Britain, and Canada. Charlotte Yonge's *The Daisy Chain* (1856) depicts the May family in the aftermath of their mother's tragic and untimely death. Louisa May Alcott's March sisters deal with economic hardship and their father's absence because of the civil war in *Little Women* (1868–69). In Frank Baum's *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* (1900), Dorothy is an orphan raised by her humourless aunt and uncle in a barren landscape. Frances Hodgson Burnett's Mary from *The Secret Garden* (1911) is first neglected then orphaned and unwanted. While the circumstance of the stories is one of unhappiness, this emotion is, for the most part, actively suppressed in girls' stories. Instead, like Pollyanna playing the Glad Game, the girls learn to emphasize optimism and happiness.

While the novel has been largely dismissed by literary critics, Eleanor H. Porter's *Pollyanna* (1912) clearly and simplistically articulates the central message to girls in many girls' stories, variously expressed as "grin and bear it," "rest content with your lot," "count your blessings." (See Cadogan and Craig, Foster and Simon, and O'Keefe for more in-depth discussions.) Poor and orphaned like many of her literary forebears, Pollyanna plays the "Glad Game," working to find reason to be glad in the most trying of circumstances. By labouring so hard to be glad, Pollyanna reveals that gladness is not a given. It is work, and it is necessary for survival. Like Pollyanna, then, the traditional heroine of a girls' story must learn to be happy and upbeat, despite her material conditions. These stories then present models of feminine behaviour to their young female readers, in effect potentially teaching readers that good girls are optimistic and cheerful.[1]

Ann-Marie MacDonald's novel *Fall on Your Knees* pays homage to the tradition of girls' stories that teaches young females how to accommodate happily to the world around them.[2] MacDonald is no stranger to revising literary traditions. In her award-winning play, *Good Night Desdemona, (Good Morning Juliet)*, MacDonald rewrites two of Shakespeare's most famous heroines, allowing them greater power and substance. Similarly, in the process of creating the four Piper girls who read and imitate girls' stories, MacDonald's novel shows how the girls inevitably revise the cultural scripts which they inherit. The Piper girls necessarily comprehend and articulate their own circumstances through the models of girlhood available to them, particularly Louisa May Alcott's *An Old-Fashioned Girl* (1870) and *Little Women*, and L.M. Montgomery's *Anne of Green Gables*. Inevitably, as the girls attempt to emulate the model, they remodel it. MacDonald's narrator highlights how the retelling of the story necessarily alters it by pointing out that "Every time Frances tells the true story, the story gets a little truer" (249). As critics such as Jennifer Andrews and Hilary Buri have noted, *Fall On Your Knees* opens up a world of abuse, oppression, and despair. In doing so, it locates new scripts for articulating that which has been typically elided in girls' stories: abuse, incest, and racism. MacDonald's latest novel, *The Way the Crow Flies* (2003), also revisits and revises an ideology of traditional girlhood by depicting young girls as abusers and murderers. Unlike the cruel and almost hopeless world of *The Way the Crow Flies*, *Fall on Your Knees* may present a bleak world of intolerance as Sheldon Currie suggests (111), but, in diverging from the girls' story traditions that it acknowledges as sources, it also suggests a successful method for change—continually

remodeling inherited traditions. Unlike the overt message of its predecessors, *Fall On Your Knees* does not encourage or allow the heroines to rest content with their lot; they must actively seek to change it.

Cultural Inheritances

Girls' stories influence MacDonald's heroines. As Susan Hekman points out in a discussion of the subject's agency, the cultural scripts we inherit are the tools by which we define and understand ourselves. Arguing that the subject can only express itself through discursive formations already available, Hekman explains that

> subjects piece together distinctive combinations, that is, individual subjectivities, from the discursive mix available to them. This does not mean that each subject chooses the elements of that discursive mix that match his/her pre-given subjectivity. Rather, it entails that subjectivities are products of the discourses present to subjects, not removed from or preceding them. (203)

Thus, girl heroines that a girl encounters in her reading might shape her understanding of herself, as one discursive identity available to her. While this view of the subject might suggest that the subject is an unwitting victim of the discourses at play on him or her, agency is arguably inevitable. Each subject is a product of multiple discourses, rather than a mere reflection of just one. An individual girl is not duped into aping one particular image of girlhood; indeed, as much as she might want to or try, she can never replicate unaltered a specific reproduction of girlhood that is, itself, a reproduction of girlhood, and on *ad infinitum.* I will discuss this in more detail momentarily.

The sheer number of books mentioned in *Fall on Your Knees* is testament to the importance of inherited cultural scripts: Hansel and Gretel, Aesop's Fables, *Water Babies*, "every girls' book you could ever think of from *Little Women* to *Anne of Green Gables* . . ." (100), fairy tales, *The Bobbsey Twins*, *Great Expectations*, *What Katy Did*, *Pollyanna*, *Arabian Nights*, and *Jane Eyre*, and this list is but a sampling of the children's literature. As Hekman would suggest, the Piper girls make sense of their life, in part, through what they have read. Materia kills herself in the oven, so that she is half in "like the witch in Hansel and Gretel" (2), says the narrator. When Frances drags Lily off to the abandoned mine, she explains that dead men are in it, "and diamonds." Lily responds by making a connection to literature: "Like in Aladdin" (266). Kathleen describes Rose's unlikely pink ruffled dress as a "Pollyanna" dress, a hilarious reference as Rose, no happy Pollyanna figure,

becomes the cynical transgendered blues singer, Doc Rose, demonstrating both the pressure to conform and just how far what is accepted as "real life" diverges from fiction. The fiction within MacDonald's fiction reveals that individuals can only understand and express themselves in terms of available discourses.

Rose's unlikely pink outfit demonstrates how MacDonald's novel both employs and deviates from the children's tales it invokes. As Judith Butler argues in *Bodies That Matter*, our identities are continually reproduced or performed in order for a sense of identity to be established. However, identity cannot be reproduced unchanged; not only can we never reproduce a discursive subjectivity exactly, we are never self-identical. That failure to reproduce ourselves exactly demonstrates the inevitability of change and is therefore the site of agency. By both attempting to emulate and thus necessarily revising *An Old-Fashioned Girl*, *Little Women*, and *Anne of Green Gables*, the girls in MacDonald's novel show the continual need to repeat one's identity, such as "girl," and the inevitable failure of the repetition. In doing so, this novel troubles the construction of girlhood as an identity and an ideology. As Katarzyna Rukszte argues, MacDonald's novel "queers" identity in that it "challenges the stability of normative categories" (19). While Rukszte focuses primarily on multi-cultural identities in her article, her argument can easily be extended to familial identity. *Fall On Your Knees* uncovers the abuses, pain, and secrets, and the host of emotional responses to them, that traditional constructions of girlhood have not only tended to cloak but also narrowed to a required cheerfulness. Frances, the sister who most embodies a revised girlhood script, literally rewrites the ending of *Jane Eyre* by adding "an epilogue, wherein Mr. Rochester's hand, severed and lost in the fire, comes back to life and strangles their infant child" (224). While funny, this ending reflects not only the abusive patriarchal power in the Piper girls' lives, but the need to revise the traditional happy ending to account for lived experience.

The Traditions of Girlhood and Familism

One of the dominant impulses of traditional girls' stories is the heroine's attempt to locate some type of family support, in such orphan tales as *Anne of Green Gables*, *Jane Eyre*, and *Pollyanna*, and/or achieve familial approbation, in such domestic novels as *The Daisy Chain* and *Little Women*. Family support and love is the solution to the heroine's problems, even when the family is also the source of the heroine's problems.[3] Familism as an ideology

is rarely questioned in the tradition of girls' stories, either within the works or by critics, because these books, variously called "family chronicles" or "domestic novels," are clearly vehicles for naturalizing familial ideology. In *The Anti-Social Family*, Michèle Barrett and Mary McIntosh argue that the family is not just a social institution but also an ideology in Western society. As an ideology, familism is anti-social, Barrett and McIntosh claim, because it privileges the family unit over the community at large. They point out that the family demarks and enforces gender and class inequality. Furthermore, the family unit can easily be the site of abuse that becomes difficult to escape:

> The exclusion of outsiders and turning in to the little family group may seem attractive when it works well and when the family does satisfy its members' needs. But the little enclosed group can also be a trap, a prison whose walls and bars are constructed of the ideas of domestic privacy and autonomy. (Barrett and McIntosh 56)

Girls' stories tend to uphold and transmit the ideology of family, at least overtly. Representations of girlhood traditionally require conformity to a domestic role and to patriarchal rule. Discussing novels of female adolescence, Annis Pratt agrees:

> The many eighteenth- and nineteenth-century novels that dealt with feminine conduct became a highly popular way of inculcating the norms of womanhood into young readers, mixing fiction and prescription in a manner that fascinated them while pleasing their parents. These novels prescribed submission to suffering and sadism as an appropriate way to prepare a young girl for life. (13)

In his discussion of Alcott's depiction of family in *Little Women*, Humphrey Carpenter suggests that the tales are often more complicated than Pratt would allow: *Little Women* "castigates family life for imposing suffering, and yet asserts that only in the family can sanity be found" (93). Other critics, such as Shirley Foster and Judy Simons, do not question the familism that underwrites these domestic novels.[4]

In stories as different as *What Katy Did*, *Pollyanna*, *Anne of Green Gables*, and *Jane Eyre*, all mentioned in *Fall On Your Knees*, the girls ultimately locate their identity solidly within the bosom of family. In *What Katy Did*, rebellious Katy falls from a swing and becomes an invalid; in this position, she comes to understand herself as the enviable centre of family life and the helpmate of her father. In *Pollyanna*, the heroine's accident helps to bring together her rigid aunt and the doctor, ending the novel with a marriage and the promise of the nuclear family. In *Jane Eyre*, Jane providentially

finds her cousins and inheritance, all through family connections she did not realize she had. This new family leads to her independence and ultimate fulfillment. In *Anne of Green Gables*, the heroine never locates her place in an actual, biological family, but sacrifices her schooling to maintain her adoptive mother in a move that signifies the establishment of familial relations once and for all. This sacrifice likens her to Katy and Pollyanna, in that a restriction (an immobilizing accident or sacrificing a scholarship) leads to a strong familial pay off. Although abusive, or absent, or unfulfilling to each heroine initially, family is ultimately constructed as the reward.

In its revision of girls' stories, *Fall On Your Knees* exposes the familism in the tradition by detailing how it operates to keep the Piper girls in thrall to the abusive patriarch. In so doing, McDonald's novel reveals the abuses that familial ideology works to keep secret, and thus rewrites the girls' story to suggest that, rather than the solution, family as ideology might be the problem.

An Old-Fashioned Girl: Cheerful Hard Work

The ironic references to the book *An Old-Fashioned Girl* indicate how MacDonald's girls' story revises the girls' story tradition. For being such a good girl, Mercedes receives from her father a porcelain figurine, named *An Old-Fashioned Girl* presumably after Alcott's didactic novel. Alcott's Polly, the old-fashioned girl of the title, is ostensibly "not intended as a perfect model"; yet, in the preface to the book, Alcott evinces the hope that Polly will be an improvement on contemporary girlhood (v–vi). The poor country cousin of the Shaw family, Polly is set up as a foil to the two wealthy and terribly spoiled contemporary girls, Fanny and Maud, and their mischievous brother, Tom. While Fanny has fine clothing and grown-up flirtations, Polly dresses simply, primarily because she does not have the means for fancy dress. Through embracing "the sunny side of poverty and work" (265), she establishes a business teaching youngsters piano, and sets up housekeeping on her own. She is plain, hardworking, charitable, diligently cheerful, and rather boring, especially when compared to the scandalously flirtatious Fanny and the gambling, dapper Tom. When the patriarch of the Shaw family goes bankrupt, Polly guides the whole family to a simple, yet more admirable and charitable, lifestyle. Alcott's message is clear: money and freedom spoil children, causing them to disdain family and disrespect the patriarch. On the other hand, strife rallies the family together. Moreover, the patriarch should always be valorized, even, or especially, in the moment when the family's precarious dependency on him is revealed in bankruptcy.

Picking up on Alcott's messages about girlhood and the family, in MacDonald's novel, James presents Mercedes, the hardworking Polly-style sister, with the "Old-Fashioned Girl" figurine after the death of both her sister, Kathleen, and her mother, Materia. This gift shows that he has retracted his earlier convictions that his daughter Kathleen would be "a modern girl": "James had read about the 'New Woman.' That's what my daughter's going to be" (60). Kathleen's demise encourages James to return to An Old-Fashioned Girl as a literal model for his other daughter, Mercedes. Kathleen, the "New Woman," did not adhere to the tenets of familism or proper girlhood. No domestic role model, she leaves home in pursuit of her own career, and she initiates a lesbian romance with a woman of colour.[5] Not surprisingly, the "New Woman" must be punished: in *Fall on Your Knees*, by rape and death. The "Old-Fashioned Girl," Mercedes, is ostensibly rewarded, even though the reader sees that Mercedes' commitment to family is misguided and her rewards meagre.

The repeated image of the figurine shows the extent to which the novel revises the traditions of girlhood it represents. After James presents the model to Mercedes, she proudly displays the statuette on her dresser where it reminds her "how nice her daddy is" (232), an ironic comment as James is the paragon of the abusive patriarch, having raped Kathleen and Frances, for example. To be worthy of the title An Old-Fashioned Girl, one must glorify the patriarchal power without question, just as Polly encourages the Shaw family to do after the patriarch's bankruptcy, "learning from misfortune how much they loved one another" (302).

The figurine next appears when saintly Lily, angry at Frances, smashes it on the floor, breaking it. That she destroys the Old-Fashioned Girl in her rage is appropriate as this expressed rage is not typical of old-fashioned girls' stories, where girls learn instead to repress their anger, as Jo must in *Little Women*. The saintly mother Marmee in *Little Women* explains to Jo her own need to repress anger: "I am angry nearly every day of my life, Jo, but I have learned not to show it" (Alcott, *Little Women* 75). Similarly, even when Polly might justifiably feel anger because the Shaw children are rummaging through her possessions and laughing at them, she merely tells them she will not forgive them, "then as if afraid of saying too much, ran out of the room" (Alcott, *Old-Fashioned* 83). Of course she forgives them, but anger must be repressed, justifiable or not. Significantly, in *Fall on Your Knees*, Frances literally remodels the model when she "fixes" it: "The Old-Fashioned Girl has a parasol for a head and a head for a parasol. She is

daintily holding up her own head of ringlets to the sun while the insensate yellow parasol is implanted in the empty neck like a flag" (257). Not only does she literally remodel it, but Frances is also the metaphorically remodeled Old-Fashioned Girl. At the speakeasy, she performs vaudeville acts and prostitutes herself, "a pint-size whore with a parasol" (304), recalling the figurine, and she boasts, "I've got what ain't in books" (288), as if to emphasize her difference from characters like Alcott's Polly.

The refashioned figurine next returns when James reaches into the hope chest, where the disfigured figurine is stored. He wants to retrieve his bayonet in order to kill the man he suspects of interfering with Frances, but he pulls out the figurine instead. Appropriately, since Frances has become a prostitute, James asks: "What happened to The Old-Fashioned Girl?" (369). Overturning her role as the patient do-gooder Polly, Mercedes responds to her drunken father's appearance with a gun by pushing him down the stairs, because she is afraid he intends to harm Frances. No good-natured old-fashioned girls can exist in the world MacDonald creates. As Rukszto argues, this moment is a turning point, one where the father is finally defeated by "his daughters' agency" (29), decidedly not a feature of the traditional girls' story.

The statuette's next appearance directly establishes a connection with Frances. When Frances insists that Lily must leave the Piper house for New York, Lily is outraged. This moment is ironic, as Lily responds, "This isn't a story, Frances" (450). The reader knows that, of course, it is a story, but one that differs radically from the traditional ones about girls. Furthermore, Lily pummels Frances, forgetting that "Frances is not a book, or a porcelain figurine" (450–51). Frances is not as breakable as the original statuette, yet she is a remodeled girl. Instead of labouring quietly for little pay, doing charitable work, and having reverence for patriarchs, Frances performs loudly, prostitutes herself, and demonstrates no respect for her father. She does so for self-sacrificial reasons that are quite different than those which emerge in the tradition of girls' stories: rather than working to "render home what it should be" as Alcott claims the Old-Fashioned Girl should (vi), Frances works to provide the funds for Lily's escape from home and the dangers of the family.

Little Women: Saintly Self-Sacrifice

While *An Old-Fashioned Girl* forms a leitmotif throughout the novel, the comparisons to girls' books such as *Little Women* and *Anne of Green Gables* also trouble the traditions of girlhood. *Fall On Your Knees* rewrites Louisa

May Alcott's *Little Women*. It is a family chronicle of four girls—Kathleen, Mercedes, Frances, and Lily—just as *Little Women* chronicled the lives of Meg, Jo, Beth, and Amy. The patriarch is away at war for a time in both. Both Kathleen and Jo pursue their ambitions in New York City: Kathleen as an opera singer, and Jo as a writer and governess. Both girls meet their romantic partners in New York: for Jo, a dusty professor; for Kathleen, a black pianist who also happens to be female. Kathleen, like Jo, is decidedly ungirlish: she shows "an alarming tendency to play with boys. . . . for ever banishing herself from the society of girls" (41). These similarities highlight how MacDonald's novel diverges from the traditions of little womanhood represented by Alcott. *Little Women* recounts the lives of the four sisters as they learn to rest content with the hardship of their relative poverty and as they grow into proper sacrificial womanhood. Upon the father's return from the war, he comments with approbation on Meg's rough hands, Jo's pale and worried face, Beth's slipping away, and Amy's sacrifice (208–09); obviously, hard work, suffering and self-deprivation are the hallmarks of little womanhood. One of the messages of *Little Women* is drawn from John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, a book that forms a leitmotif throughout *Little Women*: one can only achieve salvation through struggle and suffering.[6]

Tellingly, the Piper girls play "Little Women" in the chapter entitled "Little Women": "Mercedes would be motherly Meg, and Frances would be tomboy Jo who cuts off her hair but gets married in the end, and Lily would be delicate Beth who was so nice and then she died" (199). While the girls readily adopt roles from the fiction they have read, MacDonald's fiction fulfills none of these destinies. Mercedes becomes dry "leather lips," the brutal spinster schoolteacher with nary a maternal bone in her body. Frances does cut off all her hair (289), but not for any laudable purpose. Alcott's Jo snips her mane in order to raise funds for their ill father in the war, whereas Frances bobs her hair in part to be fashionable and to appeal to men sexually. Delicate and invalided Lily does not die like Beth; indeed, she proves the strongest as she walks from Cape Breton to New York City and is the only surviving sister at the end of the narrative. Moreover, the girls' game of "Little Women" transmogrifies into "Little Women Doing the Stations of the Cross." They revise the Protestant story with the addition of their Catholic experience. Finally, the Piper girls discard "Little Women" altogether and role-play female saints, exposing the connection between these two representations of model girlhood.

Little Women stays inaccessible to the girls, necessarily and thankfully.

That they cannot finally become the models they emulate allows them the agency to construct themselves differently. The limitations of the scripts they inherit is revealed by the pretend food that they feed each other in moments of bewildering pain. After James rapes Kathleen, she returns home, silent and pregnant, to be confined to the attic:

> Frances and Mercedes have been allowed in to read to her and to bring her trays of food. They have read *Black Beauty*, *Treasure Island*, *Bleak House*, *Jane Eyre*, *What Katy Did*, *Little Women*, and every story in *The Children's Treasury of Saints and Martyrs*. . . . They also get their mother to search out recipes for the invalid food found in *What Katy Did* and *Little Women*. "Blancmange" seems to be the favourite of languishing girls. They never do find out what it is. "White eat." What would that taste like? (146)

Similarly, after Kathleen's gory death and the fallout, Frances cannot get warm or eat. Mercedes turns to the scripts before her in order to cope: she "feeds [Frances] pretend blancmange. 'Pretend' because the dish is unavailable to them outside the realm of fiction" (150). Mercedes frantically attempts to emulate the model that she might have seen in *Little Women*: the eldest sister, Meg, sends blancmange to the ailing next-door neighbour boy, Laurie (Alcott, *Little Women* 46). After Frances is sexually abused by her father, she creates a white dough of flour and water and sucks on it: "White eat"? Frances has learned from fiction to eat blancmange when one is ailing, thus she indirectly reveals the hurt that is not directly addressed until much later in the novel, the hurt that she has no language for except "blancmange." Similarly, after Frances' baby has supposedly died, Mercedes brings her a tray of pretend food: "Frances looks at the tray while Mercedes identifies its contents, 'Blancmange, treacle, mead and mutton—'" (447). Frances points out that the tray is empty, and Mercedes bursts into tears. The childhood games that allowed them to know they were hurt yet still escape the pain into a fictional world is gone. They must locate direct expression. Even so, as Frances is dying, Mercedes brings her their dolls and tells the story of "two tiny girls with tartan housecoats and cinnamon toast." Moreover, the text reveals Mercedes' thoughts as she tries to comfort Frances: "A flagon of port or would you prefer blancmange?" (557). This pretend offering is unspoken now, but the reference to food that belongs only to the world of fiction for these characters at once reveals the necessary following of tradition and the ultimate impossibility of doing so. Mercedes continues to express her anguish through reference to blancmange, yet MacDonald's story revises the tradition by showing that parts of it, represented by

blancmange, are inaccessible. Moreover, MacDonald's focus on blancmange—a bland pudding of milk, sugar, and starch—highlights the content of traditional girls' stories: sweet, bland, white. As critics such as Melanie A. Stevenson have argued, MacDonald explores racialized identity in this novel, highlighting the abuses resulting from notions of "racial purity." The girls' story tradition that MacDonald's novel cites and draws upon is exclusively and significantly white. MacDonald refuses to allow her heroines to serve "white eat" for her readers.

Anne of Green Gables: No Place Like Home

Not only does MacDonald's novel embrace and rewrite *An Old-Fashioned Girl* and *Little Women*, but it also revisits Canadian girlhood by its references and similarities to Montgomery's *Anne of Green Gables*. Orphaned Anne arrives at Green Gables, the home of elderly siblings, Marilla and Matthew, only to discover that a mistake was made: they wanted to adopt a boy, not a girl. The novel recounts Anne's tribulations on her path to acceptance at Green Gables. The similarities between the two novels are numerous. Kathleen is a red-head like Anne. She is humiliated in front of her class, as Anne is and as Amy is in *Little Women*. Where Anne is punished for cracking a slate over Gilbert's head and Amy for possessing a contraband food, Kathleen is ostensibly punished for reading a book, once again demonstrating the threatening power of reading in MacDonald's novel. The narrator reveals that Kathleen is actually punished for her personality, her haughty difference from the other girls that the schoolteacher despises; Kathleen lacks the agency in her crime that Anne and Amy possess.

Fall on Your Knees and *Anne of Green Gables* also highlight the ability of representations of femininity to influence readers. Both Anne and Frances attempt to model themselves after their heroines by cutting their hair. Motivated by the desire to be like the raven-haired beauties about whom she reads, Anne attempts to dye her hair black; when it turns green instead, she is forced to cut it short. Expressing more agency in her haircutting, Frances wants to be like short-haired, feisty movie heroines. Red-haired Frances also echoes Anne, even phonetically, but especially in her outrageous exploits and scrapes and her inevitable loveableness. However, Frances is a major rewriting of Anne. Rather than an overly-earnest, well-intentioned orphan who inadvertently exposes others' hypocrisy, Frances is an ironic and unrepentant delinquent, hell-bent on exposing hypocrisy and injustice. Like Anne, Frances also receives acceptance, and receives it because of her

defiant refusal to be anything other than what she is. Montgomery's Anne pleads with Marilla: "I'll try to do and be anything you want me, if you'll only keep me" (47). Frances offers no such promises, and yet she mysteriously reaches acceptance in her community, and with the reader, even though she has transgressed major taboos: sexually assaulting a young man, becoming a prostitute, and being pregnant out of wedlock, for example. As the sister that has tried so hard to fulfill expectations, Mercedes feels betrayed by the community's response to Frances: "It is not fair that Frances should bask in Daddy's affection and the approval of sundry shopkeepers for something that ought to have her hiding her face in shame" (436). MacDonald clearly revises the ideology of girlhood with her portrayal of Frances.

Mercedes also bears similarities to Anne, with the telling difference of displaying a greater passivity than Anne. Because of alcohol, Mercedes is separated from her best friend, Helen, just as Anne was forced to part with Diana. Anne inadvertently got Diana drunk, which led to their separation. Mercedes' loss is more passive; she is not responsible. Helen's father simply does not want his daughter being friends with a bootlegger's daughter. Furthermore, Mercedes turns down a scholarship to Saint Francis Xavier University, just as Anne turns down a scholarship to Redmond College in Halifax. Both do so to devote themselves to their families. However, Anne's sacrifice is also a signifier of her final acceptance at Green Gables, arguably a sacrifice to celebrate as she finally and undeniably has a home. For Mercedes, the sacrifice is for her family, but she gains nothing from it. Mercedes' sacrifice shows a damaging effect of family ties; she is bound in an unfulfilling manner to her father and Frances and evinces a passive acceptance of her role. Of course, Mercedes adopts this behaviour precisely because she is actively modeling herself after girls' story heroines.

While Kathleen, Frances, and Mercedes share qualities with Anne, the Anne of *Fall on Your Knees* is Anthony, the orphan from Halifax, just as Anne was an orphan from Nova Scotia. Anthony reveals the extent to which *Fall on Your Knees* remodels traditional girlhood—while girls have been her central concern throughout, MacDonald ends her story with a male, a mixed-race man who sports in the first syllable of his name, the name of the most famous Canadian storygirl, but a male nonetheless. In moving from girls to a boy, and from white and black to a mixture of white, black, and "in-between Lebanese," MacDonald's novel challenges the familism that has been responsible not only for the racism, but also the sexual, emotional, and physical abuse in the Piper family. By the introduction of Anthony, this

novel evades the trap of biological essentialism by insisting that one does not have to be biologically female in order to be the hopeful protagonist of a girls' story.

Overcoming Familism

Frances' child, Anthony is the symbol of hope and affirmation. By his exile from the Piper family, Anthony manages to evade the abuse, incest, and racial oppressions that infect the Pipers. Anthony's success as a well-adjusted, open-minded young academic of ethnomusicology suggests that being estranged from family might be the solution to the cycle of abuse. Whereas the dominant theme in *Anne of Green Gables* is acceptance—Anne struggles to be accepted at Green Gables—in *Fall on Your Knees*, it is both acceptance and escape. Anthony gives us hope because he has been excluded from the abusive traditions and conventions which are now being revealed to him in the telling of the narrative. Yet, he also receives acceptance into the family by his inclusion in the family tree and in the tale we have just heard.

The last-second revelation that, at the beginning of the book, Lily is telling the story is the novel's liberatory moment, the escape from oppression, the final agency. The final words of the novel are Lily's: "sit down and have a cuppa tea till I tell you about your mother" (566). These words lead the reader back to page one: "They're all dead now." In those first few pages, a first-person voice is speaking to a "you," and apparently showing photographs, both real and memory snapshots. MacDonald is working from a tradition here as well. Margaret Laurence's female *Bildungsroman*, *The Diviners*, is structured in part by memory snapshots and is also a circular narrative; in the final words of the novel, Morag finishes writing the book we have just read. Similarly, in *Fall On Your Knees*, after reading to the ending, the reader can picture the novel's initial voice as Lily's telling the family history to Anthony, a history that began "[a] long time ago before you were born" (7). The reader is thus aligned with Anthony, the mixed-race man, bearing witness to the Piper family story.

Aware of the importance of reading and story-telling for interpreting oneself, this novel labours to teach its own readers, embodied in Anthony. Through Lily and then the omniscient narrator, this novel teaches Anthony and the reader a revised, more inclusive history, both Anthony's individual one and a collective Canadian one. The circularity of the narrative means that the story is always in the process of being told, and it highlights a sense

of orality because the story is always being spoken. The focus on an oral tradition, which MacDonald emphasizes with the "a long time ago" folk tale style, works to refuse fixing identity or capturing the story once and for all. *Fall On Your Knees* shows that we need traditions in order to express and understand ourselves, but it emphasizes that we need to keep those traditions, and our identities, open, in flux, in process, in order to intervene in the kind of abuses and oppressions and intolerances that permeate this novel. Moreover, by emphasizing the limitations of the traditions and establishing itself within these traditions, this novel acknowledges its own limitations and thus avoids establishing itself as the final unchanging fixed authority. Through this circular ending, MacDonald's novel effectively exposes the ideological workings of the girls' story tradition by revealing the clash between the Piper girls' reading and their lived experience. By revealing the pernicious effects of familism, *Fall On Your Knees* rewrites the girls' story tradition, educating a new generation of readers about the strength and survival of girls in the face of almost unspeakable, but finally spoken, abuse.

NOTES

1 I do not wish to simplify the complex messages of girls' stories and thus contribute to what Beverly Lyon Clarke regards as the dismissive attitude of academics towards children's literature (Clarke 2). I am here discussing the overt or dominant messages of the texts. Clearly, the novels are riven with other meanings that readers and critics have recognized. While some critics such as Deborah O'Keefe argue that the girls tend to move from feisty to docile over the course of classic girls' stories (see also Pratt and Segal), other critics, such as Shirley Foster and Judy Simons wrestle with the complexity of the books' messages, suggesting that the works both uphold and subvert dominant social beliefs, for example. Elizabeth Lennox Keyser sums up the dominant views in Alcott criticism by stating that "[m]ost scholars now perceive a radical, visionary, or at least revisionary impulse in her fiction" (xii). Similarly, Mary Rubio establishes a position that other Montgomery scholars echo: "Montgomery both works within the traditional literary genre of domestic romance and yet circumvents its restrictive conventions when she critiques her society" (Rubio 8). MacDonald's novel picks up on and rewrites its predecessors' ambivalence by clearly showing the damaging effects of girls' stories central messages: the focus on gladness and submission to the patriarch.

2 Of course, the girls' stories that MacDonald's novel treats also emerge from and revise a tradition that precedes them. Humphrey Carpenter points out that Charlotte Yonge's *The Daisy Chain* was a precursor to Alcott's *Little Women*, which then influenced the creation of other girls' books, such as *Anne of Green Gables* (Carpenter 93–94, 98 and note 77, 227). For further detail, see Karen Sands-O'Connor's discussion of the debts Alcott owes to Yonge, and Temma Berg's discussion of how Montgomery rewrites Alcott by altering sisterhood to friendship.

3 Again, while this may be the overt message, the girls' stories often gesture to other quiet messages. See Claudia Nelson's "Family Circle or Vicious Circle?" for an assessment of how Alcott subtly undercuts the patriarchal figure in her fiction. MacDonald's novel makes blatant these subtle messages.
4 Foster and Simons attempt to exalt American girls' fiction over English girls' fiction by claiming that in the American tradition, girls are not "bound by an overriding concept of domestic duty" (18), and that American girls are not "located within a familial context (18). They mistakenly cite Canadian *Anne of Green Gables* as an example of this American feature. Moreover, both *Anne* and *Little Women*, their two examples, are irrefutably domestic novels, even though they provide room for the heroine to blossom outside of traditional roles. Anne desires a home; Jo finds comfort in the bosom of her family.
5 Arguably, Rose is a transgendered man, and therefore Kathleen is actually in a heterosexual relationship, a reading that problematizes sexuality and biological essentialism even more than most critics have done. Regardless of the interpretation here, Kathleen is clearly straying from a traditional path in her romance.
6 Once again, I will state that this is not the only message that Alcott's ironic rewriting of Bunyan produces. See Karla Walters and Linda K. Kerber for two relevant detailed discussions.

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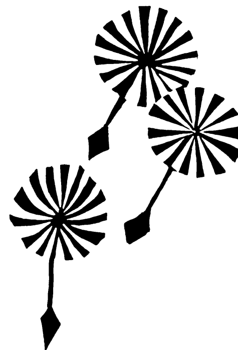

Neile Graham

Hunting the Lady Well

—near Rosemarkie, The Black Isle, Scotland—

The fence-caught goat rescued, we leave the field; the gate
shut carefully behind us, round the tricky-rocked point.
I choose the beach route, confident I can navigate the sea-
brown sand—but instantly flounder thigh-deep
in muck. Chastened, mud-limned, I clamber back
to my parents on solid ground, rejoin our search.

Mother takes the high, Dad the low, I the middle search
spanning the wooded hill like a comb, a sieve, a fence, a gate
wide open, between us everything escapes back
into the hidden world. We realize we've reached the next point,
too far, turn around to face the way we've come: somewhere deep
in the green-burdened puzzle of the woods above the sea

what we seek is guarded by undergrowth sifted dark as sea's
bottom. The forest-maze daunts us, but again we search.
Through whips of brush and branches, we're deep
in shade, each space between tree trunks a gate
into shadows—we stride through them, drifting points
of awareness in the murky air, as though wandering back

in time, in place, in memory. My parents now back
far behind me, I orient myself by the cough of the sea;
waves lurch on the muddy bay between rocky points
while above me the leaves' rattling flow masks my search.
I can't find the centre here, the other world, the gate
muffled in layers of forest so thick so deep

I can't help but taste a weed-chocked wilderness so deep.
Battened inside me it locks my throat. I know the well's here, back
in the ground I keep crossing, my mud-spattered gait
awkward, anxious, sad. Pause. Listen again. Listen: above the sea's
rush winds a watery sound not wind; I search
a sudden stillness. There. A bush tied with ragged ribbons points

to water, glass-clear. A waist-high stone the point
where water breaks from the hill into a pool of wonder, mystery deep
in filtered light, not a place for anxious search
but to listen still and find. It's real, not somewhere back
in time, story, museum walls. I splash my face, sluice the sea
mud from my legs; the water hazes, clears. I tie a rag: a gate

for me into this place's deep green liquid heart, a gate
to the point of any return. I call my parents up from the sea
to share that what I've found; I can't turn away, it calls me back.

Ellen Quigley

Picking the Deadlock of Legitimacy

Dionne Brand's "noise like the world cracking"

Theories of legitimacy restrict much analysis of Dionne Brand's writing. These arguments depend on a self-other split. An authoritative "Black and Female" self arises in the colonizer's language (Sarbadhikary 118), and a resisting subject emerges in the silences of sexist and racist narrative (Gingell 50). Both arguments rely on Western notions of a split self: essential being struggles against its objectification in language. The belief that language, a social construct, misrepresents pre-linguistic or pre-colonial origins makes the subject's struggle legitimate. In *No Language Is Neutral*, Brand begins to trouble originary displacement through painful belonging in "exile" (Zackodnik 194), although exile still suggests longing for origin. Such resistance to Western neo-colonialism remains bound to the self-other binary intrinsic to European modernism, so Brand jettisons both the self and the other in *In Another Place, Not Here*. Breaking the Western deadlock for resistance, the characters reject the legitimacy of origin, community, and self-identity: "And belonging? They were past it. It was not wide enough, not gap enough, not distance enough. Not rip enough, belonging. Belonging was too small, too small for their magnificent rage" (42). In *In Another Place, Not Here*, Brand criticizes two things: the colonization of bodies and identity politics, which recolonizes resistance. In a fusion of Western deconstruction and postcolonial analysis, Brand uses absent originary subjects, an acknowledged illegitimacy of representation, and disunified social relations to criticize neo-colonial values of legitimacy and create alternative subjectivities.

Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's anti-Oedipal theory of the rhizome helps to elucidate part of Brand's non-essentialist methodology. In *A*

Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia, Deleuze and Guattari argue that multiple territorial and deterritorializing elements anarchically destabilize meaning in any signifying system (9). In Brand's novel, the territorial black, lesbian, Caribbean, and Canadian bodies/stories raise cultural specificity. However, as I argue later, the multiple, contradictory, and at times impoverished alignments of characters and discourse create "lines of flight" (*A Thousand Plateaus* 3) from a homogeneous black lesbian Caribbean-Canadian community or individual identity. Rhizomes evade the essentialism of speaking subjects and representational language because the original parts change as they interact (8). Refuting coherent subjects, objects, and points of location (8), Deleuze and Guattari emphasize mobile "becomings" related to irresolvable difference within "alliance" (237–38). Multiple fragments and surfaces of language counter the unconscious depth of a subject, its essence. Deleuze and Guattari argue that decentralized knowledge, social relations, and subjectivities proliferate in the "micropolitics of the social field" (7), rather than in the macropolitics of identity groups and Oedipal identification. In the absence of "homogeneous linguistic communi[ties]" (7), desire functions as "a revolutionary machine" (*Anti-Oedipus* 293) as it leaps between previously disconnected elements of territorial and deterritorialized language and unties normative connections. In *In Another Place, Not Here*, the fragmentary connection and derailment of discourses deconstruct identity politics and produce new heterogeneous subjectivity: lesbian dread (Rastafari insurgency) that defies categorical identity.

Like the theory of the rhizome, Brand's anti-colonial politics is premised on the absence of legitimate definitions, origins, and self-identity. However, the destructive context of slavery in the African diaspora contradicts the liberating loss of self that Deleuze and Guattari suggest. While Deleuze and Guattari use the Bedouin, wolves, and women quite metaphorically to promote freedom in masculinist and European thought, Brand develops a two-pronged attack on legitimacy that accounts for social inequity. She undercuts exclusionary logic through the absence of legitimate selves, while she witnesses the regulation of power through the violent destruction of the self in the non-Western other. Thus her attack on the intending subject, the object, and authority suggests theories of legitimacy restrain revolutionary thought and subjectivity, but Deleuze and Guattari's motifs of self-flagellating masochism (*A Thousand Plateaus* 150–51) and of a desire to move beyond all "molar" political alignments[1] reflect a privileged, socially legitimate

subject. The contradictory pain and hope in absent selves and origins are crucial in *At the Full and Change of the Moon* and *A Map to the Door of No Return* as well, suggesting the centrality of this concept in her recent work.

The absence of originary subjects creates affirmative resistance in *In Another Place, Not Here* but also has roots in earlier material. The archaeological find, Brand writes, "is not shell, is shackle!" (*No Language Is Neutral* 15). Caribbean origin becomes abduction into slavery rather than pre-Oedipal, pre-linguistic, and pre-social bliss. Such slavery also metaphorically relates to cultural imperialism. The West's desire for the other demands the non-West be and desire the other, desire the West (Spivak, *Post-Colonial* 8). In colonial discourse, the proprietary European self (subject) names the black Caribbean through binary reflection: the other as object and chattel possession. As C.L.R. James writes, enslaved black family members would be distributed with the rest of the goods when an estate was divided (16). Through Verlia's brief reference to James (*In Another* 209), Brand links Verlia's and Adela's suicides to the negation of self (and other) in the mass suicides of the San Domingo (Haiti) slaves. As James notes, the act depleted the invader's potential goods (16). Verlia is "laughing . . . weightless and deadly" when she leaps from the cliff to the sea, avoiding the American assault on Grenada (246). She echoes the resistant suicide of the Kalinago (Caribs). Rather than submit to the 1651 French invasion, they jumped from the cliffs at Le Morne des Sauteurs, Grenada (Honychurch; LeSauteur). These cultural intertexts resonate throughout the novel, pushing the deconstruction of self and its others into postcolonial and anti-colonial resistance.

The black women dissolve the self/other and subject/object binaries: Mirelda Josefena loses her proper name and becomes known as "the woman Elizete was given to," Elizete loses self as she becomes wood lice (32), and Verlia and Adela commit suicide. As Adela reveals, the loss of self destroys the subject's power to name the object, the other: "she decide that this place was not nowhere and is so she call it. Nowhere. She say nothing here have no name. She never name none of her children, nor the man she had was to sleep with and she never answer to the name that they give she which was Adela" (18). Adela's generation "abandoned distance, abandoned time and saw everything" (43), suggesting what Homi Bhabha calls the lethal gaze of the evil eye that "defers the object of the look" (55). The evil eye "extinguish[es] both presence and the present" (Bhabha 56), thus undercutting the speaking subject's essential intent as well as the present cultural performance of inadequate, objectified language. Consequently, the

evil eye becomes a sign that is "anterior to any *site* of meaning . . . mak[ing] all cultural languages 'foreign' to themselves" (Bhabha 164). Brand twists what Bhabha calls the master's "narcissistic" and "ambivalent identification of love and hate" (149) through Adela's evil eye:

> After all that they say she kill the man that buy she and keep she in that place, for she look him full in his face until he dead. . . . They say she could work good obeah but she say is not obeah what kill him, is his own wicked mind what make him die in his wicked name. She had spit all his evil into that circle and he could not resist himself. (18)

In this description of Adela's agency, Brand criticizes the dominant subject's gaze without inverting the subject/object binary. Adela mirrors the contradictory exclusion and assimilation of the other that form the 'proper self.' Her suicide fulfills the master's (self's) violent desire and, conversely, annihilates the spiritual, economic, and cultural elevation she provides him as the other. Such loss of self undercuts binary legitimacy while still criticizing its violent, dominant deployment.

Brand challenges the originary legitimacy of pre-Oedipal subjects and the social legitimacy of Oedipal subjects. The child is "not a gift" (28) that enables a pre-Oedipal flow of bodily sensations and resists the objectifying Oedipal symbolic. "The woman Elizete was given to" has "tied up her womb in brackish water" (31) to ensure she has no children. She protests, "'God make all Adela' children woman . . . and now they come and drop a girl child on me. You see how that woman curse we'" (31). Rather than resisting linguistic objectification, mother-daughter bonds objectify. The labouring black female body produces offspring who contribute to imperial gain. Rather than orgasmic excess, the child drains the mother's resources: she is "just a mouth to feed" (28). Brand's postcolonial critique of psychoanalysis evokes Gayatri Spivak's condemnation of the "ferocious Western Europeanism" and an "implicit sort of positivism" in Julia Kristeva's "naturaliz[ation] of the *chora*, . . . of the pre-semiotic" (*Outside* 17).

Verlia and Elizete want to escape the body that ties them to animality through racist, sexist, and capitalist commodification. Verlia would "like to live, exist or be herself in some other place, less confining, less pinned down, less tortuous, less fleshy to tell the truth" (127). Elizete thinks, "Heavy as Hell. Her body. She doesn't want a sense of it while she's living on the street" (54). As Lynette Hunter argues, psychoanalysis naturalizes the regulation of capital, the commodification of desire, and the value coding of bodies. Displacement and objectification become inescapable conditions of

the human psyche. The conflation of psychoanalytic and neo-colonial *others* relegates the disempowered to "the unconscious, the body, the private. . . the 'natural,' the 'intuitive,' the 'primitive,' the 'not-civilized,' the not-articulated" (Hunter 133). With no green card to prove her symbolic legitimacy to the white law-of-the-father, Elizete lives in a city where language can kill, wound, rape, and impregnate black female bodies with impunity: "'Immigration!' What a word. That word could kill, oui. That word could make a woman lay down with she legs wide open and she mind shut" (80-81). By defining the 'real' as unspeakable corporeality, psychoanalysis subordinates the inscription of social value, regulation, and desire as necessarily inadequate. Brand, on the other hand, emphasizes the reality of language that makes bodies jump from windows and submit to abuse.

Postcolonial politics meets deconstruction as Brand exposes the plenitude of origin (pre-linguistic or pre-colonial) as a Western fiction that sublates discontent in the desire for a lost past. Susan Gingell notes that Brand encountered the "physical and psychological poverty that are the legacy of imperialism" when she returned to Trinidad (51). Verlia finds the same poverty when she returns to the Caribbean (not to Trinidad, the place of her birth, but to a strategically unnamed Grenada). She says, "All the names of places here are as old as slavery" (211). Without the plenitude of origin, Plato's argument that language is a tool to remember God, the original speaking subject, falls apart (Derrida 76–77). Rather than remember origin, Adela cultivates forgetting in a Derridean "desire for orphanhood and patricidal subversion" (Derrida 77): "every different place they put her she take an opportunity to remember all the things that she was going to forget. For Adela was remembering that and long before that, back to the ship" (21). Adela undercuts original memory as legitimate pre-Oedipal intent. As one of the first Africans brought to the Caribbean, she becomes an origin that is not: a foremother of forgetting, a beginning in absence and negation.

Brand also defers the social coding of Oedipal identification that forms citizens. "The woman Elizete was given to" becomes another evil eye that annihilates subjects, objects, and discourse (Bhabha 164) when she loses her proper name. The name, Mirelda Josefena, appears only once—in a genealogy beginning with "Adela and then . . . plenty, with no name"—and follows "Baby" (35), another improper name. The genealogy ends with the words "Mal jo" (35), truncating the Spanish words for the evil eye, *mal de oyo*. The sound "Mal jo" suggests an abbreviation and mutation of her personal name, signing the absence of a social subject. This lack of social inte-

gration prohibits Oedipal identification. Brand writes, "Here, there was no belonging that was singular, no need to store up lineage or count it" (38). The three women—Adela, Elizete's mother who cannot provide, or who perhaps simply "forgot her there" (38), and "the woman Elizete was given to" by no one because her mother forgot her under a samaan tree (38)—negate the Oedipal model of motherhood for social identification:

> She spill and spill and so she mothered not a one. She only see their face as bad luck and grudge them the milk from her breast. She eat paw-paw seed until it make them sick in she womb. The charm she tried to use against each one was left half done in them so, till all of she generations have a way so that nothing is right with them neither. (19)

On one hand, the material conditions of children with "bad mind and goat mouth" (19) and afflictions such as Verlia's insomnia criticize the imperialism that engenders such anti-maternal practice. On the other, Brand's anti-Oedipal strategies derail the criticism into a productive maternal genealogy of negative theology, unnaming, desiring abortion, decoding, displacing, deforming, and mutating.

The absence of Oedipal subjects begins to change social construction. Elizete thinks, "there is names for things," but she does not know them and "can not be sure of the truth of them" (19). She inherits an anti-Oedipal rejection of origins from Adela who "had to make her mind empty to conceive it" (20). Such negation changes Elizete: "How I reach here is one skill I learn hard. The skill of forgetfulness" (13). She begins to deform the master's tongue: "Slippery throat peas, wet sea fern, idle whistle bird, have no time bird. Is a lot of bird to name—busy wing, better walking, come by chance, wait and see, only by cocoa, only by cane, scissor's tail, fire throat, wait for death" (23–24). The absent grammatical subject reflects Elizete's distance from both pre-Oedipal origins of meaning (the speaking subject) and Oedipal objectification in language (the social subject). Rather than identify objects, Elizete names the birds in their movement, connections, and "becomings." Abandoning Oedipal desire (in which language inadequately substitutes for the original), Elizete begins to lose abjection: "Nothing barren here, Adela, in my eyes everything full of fullness, everything yielding. . . . Adela, the samaan was my mother. She spread and wave and grow thicker. Is you I must thank for that. Where you see nowhere I must see everything. Now I calculating" (24). Such calculation raises Derrida's argument that mathematics, a sign system designed to supplement memory (100), actually displaces the origin (81) and the dominant cultural

values the fictional origin embodies. Absent original meaning changes the substitute into all there is, as Elizete says about desire: " I love that shudder between her legs, love the plain wash and sea of her, the swell and bloom of her softness. And is all. And if is all I could do on the earth, is all" (5). Anti-Oedipal desire negates identity, originary substitution, and unified concepts or objects. No longer a substitute for the original, the samaan tree that partially shelters Elizete *is* a mother. Without full containment by the subjects or objects of neo-colonial abjection, anti-Oedipal desire allows Elizete to grow.

In the loss of discursive containment, freedom and revolutionary strategy have no originary meaning or organizing ends. The American invasion of Grenada to ensure "democracy" (read: the military enforcement of capitalism against Grenada's growing socialism) enacts the "*menace* of mimicry" that "disrupts its authority" (Bhabha 88) by suppressing the democratic will of the People's Revolutionary Government. Liberty and democracy are also impossible to define within the smaller identity groups. Rastafari Isaiah beats Elizete, sundering common Caribbean struggle against racist capitalism. A white woman verbally assaults Verlia, tearing gender cohesion: Verlia "expects to find reassurance [but] . . . had not expected it [the letters KKK] engraved on her breast. She had not even expected it in a woman" (173). Concerning similarities of race, gender, sexual orientation, and Caribbean-Canadian nations, Verlia, Elizete, and Abena disagree about appropriate politics. Abena cautions Verlia to be careful and gives up hope for radical change. She says to Elizete, "No revolution is coming baby, no fine bright morning. . . . You cannot last, you cannot out-vigil this jumbie, honey" (110). Elizete initially resents the impracticality of Verlia's Marxist analysis: "I walk past because I have no time for no woman talking. It don't mean nothing. . . . Revolution, my ass. Let foolish old people believe she. Is only them have time to sit down and get wrap up in her mouth and think Oliviere and them will let go any land" (13–14). Rather than defining a liberating end or a beginning that has been corrupted, Brand deconstructs the legitimacy of identity politics and explodes the struggle into multiple, changeable, and even contradictory fronts.

The uneasy alliance of anti-foundational coalition politics also challenges personal identity at a microscopic level. Even though Brand, for the most part, characterizes Verlia as the theoretical embodiment of air and Elizete as the material embodiment of earth, territorial and deterritorial alignments continually derail identity. Brand generally associates Verlia with Marxist

analysis that is deterritorialized and abstract in its global scale. While Verlia occasionally engages in guerrilla warfare, she discusses, more than enacts, the "transla[tion] of theory" into the "crucible of practice" (207). Verlia refers to a wide range of nationalist, independentist, proletarian, race, gender, psychoanalytic, grassroots, and cultural struggles (157–61, 175, 206–09) that form a rhizome of Marxist and Marxist-influenced thought.

Territorial alignments, however, cut through abstraction and Marxist theory. Her leap off the cliff resonates not only with the historic act of the Kalinago (Caribs) and Adela's suicide to resist enslavement but also with the "dialectic culture of the West Indies" (Chamberlin 56). An intense symbol of life in her death, Verlia leaps between the liminal borders of the real and the ideal. She echoes the "realistic attention to the conditions of poverty and suffering," on the one hand, and "visionary idealism," on the other, that characterize Rastafari and the "life and literary imagination of the West Indies" (Chamberlin 56–57). Caribbean spiritualism marks the abstract intensity when Verlia "run in the air without moving . . . all the time moving faster than the last thing she say," and materializes by "transport" (bus) at the "junction" (7). People "'flying' [to heaven] or travelling quickly from place to place" are common in Jamaican Myalism and revivalist worship (Chamberlin 56). Religious and Marxist doctrine meet tensely and tentatively as Verlia's "elsewhere" remains the material here: "She didn't want to be anywhere but now, nowhere but the what to do about" (183). The religious allusions become part of territorial narrative rather than theological belief. By combining the religious and Marxist narratives that should not meet, Verlia changes the real: "Verl is sure of what she make in her own mind and what she make didn't always exist" (7). The displacements of Marxist idealism into spiritualism and of spiritualism into narrative create intense deterritorializing *jouissance* that keeps Verlia's abstract characterization culturally specific.

Verlia also signs a territory that is female, black, and educated more by Caribbean than by European culture:

> She wanted to say something like Che. . . . *You are nothing but an instrument of the ruling class, a brutish automaton lacking humanity, used to repress the body and spirit of the people*. . . . She wanted to say something to read him back into his mother's womb. . . . When it came out of her mouth it wasn't only out of her mouth but first her finger marking his face, an old gesture marking an enemy, and then she spat on the floor in front of him. "Never have a day's peace. Look for me everywhere." Such an old curse creeping out of her. She did not remember learning the gesture. (184)

Her body and language displace the Marxist homogeneity in Guevara's

"non-territorial" and "vehicular" language of "bureaucracy" (Söderlind 9). Bureaucratic language, while posing as "expedien[t] . . . pure information" based on the "division of labour" (Söderlind 9), deterritorializes linguistic bodies into an impossible universal neutral *("the body and spirit of the people*"). Verlia's translation into territorial language emphasizes cultural, embodied difference. Combining curse words, spitting, and a voodoo-like marking of the face, Verlia uses untranslatable sacred language: the tenor (meaning) cannot be separated from the vehicle (sign) (Söderlind 9, 12). Her resistance to universal Marxist language echoes the spitting resistance elsewhere to other Western theories (colonial, psychoanalytic, Deleuzian, or feminist). Deconstructing the self/other binary, Adela "spit[s]" back the master's evil (18), but her selflessness is abject. As the "spitting image" of Adela (35), Elizete dreams "I spit milk each time my mouth open" (12). The relation to the white-inked (m)other milk of Hélène Cixous' *l'écriture féminine*[2] is unmistakable though twisted critically in anger. These links to theory associated with other territorial characters contradict Brand's dominant inscription of Verlia as air, abstract analytic energy, and deterritorialized global politics. While the contradictions defer an individual's coherence (essence or construction), they embody cultural specificity that resists global assimilation by the abstract rhizome. Consequently, Brand's deconstruction of identity is not politically deadening. Further, the multiplicity in Verlia enables connection with the different struggles of Elizete.

In her territorial language and body, Elizete inscribes an earthy contrast to Verlia's airy abstraction. However, as Elizete crosses between territorial discourses without fidelity to any, she deterritorializes concepts and develops an activist poetics. According to Deleuze and Guattari, voice (body) and writing continually cut through each other in territorial representation (*Anti-Oedipus* 203). Such interaction challenges the subordination and subsequent erasure of the body in language (*Anti-Oedipus* 205). Territorial language increases rhizomatic movement:

> [T]he chain of territorial signs is continually jumping from one element to another; radiating in all directions; . . . including disjunctions; consuming remains; extracting surplus values; connecting words, bodies, and suffering, and formulas, things, and affects . . . , always in a polyvocal usage—*a way of jumping* that cannot be contained within an order of meaning, still less within a signifier. (*Anti-Oedipus* 204)

While Verlia represents such territorial leaping, both at the junction and off the cliff, Elizete's character, language, and thought fully enact its practice.

Marked by the scars of the cane field and patriarchal discourse, Elizete strikes back in the arc of her arm, one with the machete, sweeping between earth and air, nature and construction, in a "gesture taking up all the sky, slicing through blue and white and then the green stalk and the black earth. . . . metal and dust and flesh . . . whirring, seeming to change the air" (202–03). Through arcs, tunnels, and points that connect and derail thought, Elizete deconstructs the stability of discourse and identity. She tunnels into the earth of the quarry to defuse the power of Isaiah's assault (11) and rearranges language in the wood-lice holes in the walls "where the wood was softened by chewing" (32) to alter her abject social identity.

Destabilizing and leaping between the heterogeneous elements of past narratives, Elizete begins to create new sense. Her negation of self undercuts Oedipal abjection. In Oedipal theory, "identification seeks to produce a [body] ego . . . in compliance with the symbolic position" (Butler 105). The "failure to comply with the law produces instability of the ego at the level of the imaginary" (Butler 105–06) and "abject homosexuality" (Butler 97). While abjection may be eroticized and resistant to normative heterosexuality, it does not change the law: "The imaginary practice of identification must itself be understood as a double movement: in citing the symbolic, an identification (re)invokes and (re)invests the symbolic law, seeks recourse to it as a constituting authority that precedes its imaginary instancing" (Butler 108). "The woman Elizete was given to" swears against these Oedipal phantasms of subject formation, but Adela's abjection persistently speaks through the subject/object split ("I"/"she"):

> Her mouth taste the cool charm of a stone past and I determine to stop this imperfect persistence of flesh jostling the air. Now this time I . . . she dreamless, she . . . I done imagining. Leave is all I could think to do. My hand don't follow me, every piece of she have a mind by itself. I . . . she say is so things is. I dreamless. I see my hair taken to the four corners of the earth. The parts of me fly 'way, my head could not hold them together. (36; ellipses in original)

Rejecting the Oedipal foundations of identity, the imaginary, and the symbolic, Elizete reformulates the woman's words. She links the disorganization of bodies to the disorganization of language. Through the unstable referent of "she" and "I," Elizete becomes an Adela who is not Adela's original or the abject woman: "Adela' voice hovered on their hot cold lips, the two of them, one standing at the wall tracing wood lice the other her head in bay rum, her mouth working coconut to milk" (37). In the maternal genealogy of intoxicated forgetting, the absent sign of possession (*s*) in the demotic

"Adela'" becomes rhizomatic potential in the contradictory "hot cold," the coconut as milk, and the absence of legitimate ownership over signification.

Through the pronoun "she," Brand connects "the woman Elizete was given to" with Elizete, who twists the woman's resistance to the Oedipal symbolic with the power of negation in Adela's evil eye:

> [The woman protests] . . . how she had been left a head that pained her and that would only stop for her hands in the earth, and how throwing words was no use to a woman long dead and gone and who never was here; and how the trouble with the dead is they don't care and this world don't mean nothing to them; and how she'd been left a tongue that any devil want to light on and take liberty. She falls asleep standing up before the woman releases her, dropped and half awake she murmurs more names for Adela—donkey eye stone, blue finger yam. (37)

The third person exists only in language as a spoken subject, not a speaking subject. Consequently, "she" has no intent. Following territorial derailments, Elizete ignores the woman's comment about "no use," as well as the protest against "a tongue any devil want to light on," and begins "throwing words" and stones, or "summoning the spirits, getting on their nerves" (34). She follows linguistic drift to ease abjection. The woman's earlier reference to the ritual power of Yoruba stones (Simpson 1207)"the cool charm of a stone past" (36)—loses nostalgic fertility and becomes, in Elizete's language, a barren "donkey eye stone" (37). Without desire for originary spirits or intending subjects, Elizete's territorial liberties become the creative unchained leaping of a devilish tongue between multiple unstable bodies and languages.

Elizete takes pieces of Rastafari, Yoruba, and Christian discourse to decolonize the subject in a mobile "avenging grace" (203). While maintaining cultural specificity, the fragments develop rhizomatic connection, contradiction, mutation, and derailment that resist assimilation and create new subjectivity. She draws on a Rastafari violent purification: "I dream of taking his neck with a cutlass. . . . I imagine it as a place with thick and dense vine and alive like veins under my feet. I dream the vine, green and plump, blood running through it and me too running running, spilling blood. . . . Is like nowhere else. I destroying anything in my way. I want it to be peaceful there" (12). The return of the Sons of David to Zion, a land violently cleansed of the Babylonian Western colonizers, partially informs Elizete's thought. Contradictions, however, arise in the similarity of the scars Elizete receives from Isaiah, her sexist Rastafari partner, and capitalism: "All over from one thing and another, one time or another, is how Isaiah whip them [her legs] for running, is how he wanted to break me from bad habit. . . . Is how the cane cut them from working. Same rhythm" (55). Since anti-

capitalism infuses Rastafari politics (DeCosmo 150), the equation of the scars creates irreconcilable contradiction. Through Isaiah, who reads the Bible (11), Brand alludes to the book of Isaiah, which supports Rastafari protest against the occupation of Judah by "aliens" (Isaiah 1.7), but censures Elizete's sexuality. Biblical Isaiah rants against sodomy (3.9), proclaims glory will come when women submit to patriarchal rule and "name" (4.1–2), and attacks women's minds and bodies: the Lord will smite with a scab / the heads of the daughters of Zion, / and the Lord will lay bare their secret parts" (3.17). The Lord's scabs become Elizete's scars. While the Rastafari intertext inscribes anti-colonial resistance, feminism and homosexuality remain incommensurable with hetero-patriarchal justice.

Corresponding with Rastafari assimilation of pre-colonial African cultures, Elizete's thought includes Yoruba deities. Oddly, though, Elizete's first- and third-person narrators use them against Rastafari discourse, especially its sexism. Shango's talismanic stone and "moral agency" (Wolff and Warren 36) appear in Elizete's protest that Isaiah "cut at the red stone in me" (11). Additionally, "the salmon dank sides" of the sand quarry (11) suggest Oya. Like Shango's, Oya's symbols include the colour red and the thunderbolt, but water and vengeance (Iverem), which troubles the single perspective of justice, are two of Oya's aspects. The fiery Shango and watery Oya also meet when Elizete's narrator describes Verlia throwing the Molotov cocktail into an Aryan bookstore: "She needed fire now. A raging in the throat like water" (97). As the Rastafari and Yoruba narratives of justice and vengeance meet living and working conditions, Elizete begins to develop an analysis of racist and sexist oppression. Rather than rely on an essential subject that struggles against its objectification in language, Brand shows the creation of Elizete's thought as bits of narrative press against each other.

Oya's symbol of the cutlass and her dance, "one hand on the waist, the other trembling in the wind" (Iverem), create points of contact for the feminist struggle of Elizete and the Marxist struggle of Verlia. When Verlia says, "Sister," after Elizete dreams of vengeance against Isaiah, Elizete hears a sound "like bracelets" in the breeze: "Sister. Silvery, silvery the wind take it" (14). Oya is the "'goddess of edges, the dynamic interplay between surfaces, of transformation from one state to another'" (Gleason, qtd. in Renk 105). While Oya's narrative enables a feminist alteration of the Rastafari and Marxist narratives, Brand defers its dominance. Elizete comes from an anti-maternal genealogy that contradicts Oya's aspect as the thunder mother (Iverem), and Verlia defies Oya's role as Shango's wife (Iverem): Verlia "hates

the sticky domesticity lurking behind them [the bed, the kitchen, the key]" (204). Rather than suggest return to Oya, Brand's allusions pose Yoruba alternatives to Western and Rastafari narratives while simultaneously resisting the nostalgic legitimacy of pre-linguistic or pre-colonial essence.

The potential for "grace" to decolonize bodies is vital, but Elizete pushes the meaning from Christian theology to movement between discourses without fidelity to any. Elizete says in the first words of the novel, "Grace. Is grace, yes. And I take it quiet, quiet, like thiefing sugar" (3). The theft of Christian discourse is, perhaps, the most extreme transgression in the novel. Drawn from the water (Exodus 2.2.10), patriarchal Moses resonates in Elizete's Rastafari perception of Verlia as "brilliant" from her sweat and looking "as if she come out of a river" (15) at the same time that Elizete's lesbian desire contravenes the suggestion. Like Moses, Verlia's body and gaze hold the possibility of release: "I could see she head running ahead of we, she eyes done cut all the cane" (15). However, unlike the Rastafari translation of Christ into Haile Selassie (Redington), Elizete and her narrator's references to Christ become empty interjections: "In trying to get to whatever place was in between—Jesus Christ!—she was dying" (105). Kathleen Renk argues that the transgression of mythological systems enables Brand to evoke a black female agency for change when a character from another story calls to the Christian god, but Oya answers instead (105). *In Another Place, Not Here* troubles teleology further. Elizete evokes no god, but echoes of Haile Selassie, Shango, Oya, Christ, Moses, and several women—Adela in the absence, Verlia who is Elizete's "grace" (5), and the absent character Grace[3]—answer through the leap of territorial language.

A potentially decolonizing desire develops in the anti-Oedipal leap of multiple, uncontrolled "partial objects [that] lack nothing" (Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, 295). Problems with Oedipal desire have long troubled lesbian and feminist theory, and Brand's deconstruction of self/other does reflect Marilyn Farwell's view that "sameness and differences" in lesbian fiction and poetry avoid the phallic construction of a speaking subject and an object of desire (87). However, Brand radically pushes beyond Farwell's integration of these concepts into "identity politics" (23) and a communal "I" (134). As each other's "grace" (3, 203), Verlia and Elizete contradict identification with the self-same. Instead, desire leaps from a point of similarity into difference as a "bridge" (16), an "arc" (246), or "tunnels" (32) link and derail the discourses of earth and air, theory and practice, Marxism and feminism, and poetry and analysis.

As Brand moves beyond identity, categorical difference destabilizes. Subjects, verbs, and objects lose definition: "Always the door creaks, a dog barks, a frog's well throats inky, a curtain moves in a breath of wind, a tree yields to a breeze, the constant flute of a *mot mot* hesitates and she [Verlia] thinks someone is out there" (121). Farwell's shifting subject/object relations and communal identity give way in Brand's text to the unstable linguistic presence of "I" and "I," "you," "she," "her, "and the "*mot mot*," name, voice-sound, or movement in the absence of any stable or originary subject. Elizete thinks,

> Better she than me. Yes. Leave is all I . . . she could think of. All the marks on she . . . me is for thinking of leaving. Each time she . . . I see leaving I . . . you could not stop it. As if my hand was out of control or heading for where it ought to be, as easy as if it was coming to rest at my . . . she side. Leave . . . I . . . she ought to be a woman her dress tail disappearing toward the dense rain forest of Tamana going to my life, she marronage, rain, drenched, erasing footfalls. (36, ellipses in original)

As Elizete becomes a multiplicity of "I," "she," "you," and "her," the female subject/object pronouns displace the patriarchal "I and I" of Rastafari, as well as its essentialist sense of "self-discovery" and community "with JAH present" (Redington). Consequently, the *marronage* becomes a guerrilla attack through poststructuralist language. The originating subject and the object of representation disappear, leaving "signs" that "are empty and slap wet against the face" (70) but decolonize sense.

Particularly during Elizete's descent into the volcanic La Soufrière, Brand resists the enclosure of representational language. Contradictions such as "walk fast girl, be still" (107) defy logic. Representational substance disappears as "The fifteen-seater poised, plunged into the hot bed of La Soufrière, bird instead of plane" (105). Borders blur: "She did not know the end of the plane and the beginning of the clouds" (106). Self and other meet: "She had . . . slipped into Verlia's skin until she could not tell who had died and whatever she was living and touching was another life and numb to the bone" (105–06). Elizete crosses between body and language in her desire "to dance the mash potatoes with her [Verlia] in the well of some garden" (105). The plural "potatoes" resists recuperation by the dance called "the mash potato," thus emphasizing both the territorial (food) and deterritorialized (language) drives of the mouth (Deleuze and Guattari, *Kafka* 19-20). Through the poverty and excess of signification in Brand's language, "nothing remains but intensities," a strategy of minority writing that Deleuze and Guattari argue resists the cultural encoding of the majority's language (*Kafka* 19).

Allegorical displacement also "unhinge[s] the given symbolic order . . . [and] evoke[s] a peculiar decentring of modern power" (Koepnick 61–62). In "the volcanic garden" and "the sulphurous mouth" (105) of La Soufrière, the context of volcanic beauty and the American coup prohibit resolution into a simple paradise and hell. The territorial mouth spits back the allusion, just as Verlia "spat on the floor" (184) of her jailer. Symbolism returns as deterritorialized interjections that are full of emotion but empty of content. For example, Christian redemption becomes "Jesus Christ!—she was dying" (105), and the undetermined symbolism of Verlia's repeated dream of "pillow trees" becomes "exclamation points" (126, 246). The source of life and heart of civilization in the word *well* becomes emphatic hesitation: "And the woman with the bucket, well at the heart there was no bucket, and no woman either" (41). Such displacement resists colonizing inscriptions of the subject by increasing the level of disjointed noise in the language.

The cultivation of noise not only derails the minority text from the majority language but also troubles coherent minority communities that create legitimate interpretations. As Françoise Lionnet notes, the difference between noise and communication depends on familiarity and focus. If one speaks the language or answers the interruption of a telephone, noise changes into communication (Lionnet 331–32). Brand removes the gaze from neo-colonial imperialism, which becomes the "everlasting noise" of the enormous capitalist "machine" (69), the noise of "*po, po, po, po, pound*" (246) and "the grit, grit, groaning bombs' groan" (244). Rather than refocus the gaze in the minority community, however, Brand inscribes agency for new meaning in the "murmuring nothing" or noise of Adela and "the woman Elizete was given to" (26). The American bombing is answered by more noise as "the sound of bees and cicadas singing tautly tightened the air. . . . Their singing thick as electric wires . . . suspended the island" (117). The electric charge in alliteration, rhythm, and repetition echoes Verlia's body leaping and shot full of holes: an "electric current, the sign of lightening left after lightning, a faultless arc to the deep turquoise deep" (247). The physical sound of poetic language, rather than the gaze of a speaking subject, temporarily connects the insects and Verlia in unresolved resistance. Body and language cut through each other, destabilizing singular focus. The discordant nouns and verbs—"the bees barking, the cicada shouts" (245)—increase the incoherent yet resistant energy. The beauty of resistance and pain of slaughter commingle in the absence of a singular gaze. While Brand witnesses the devastation, a heterogeneous "noise like the world cracking"

(245) begins to create an anti-utopian hope that defers complete abjection in its multiple resonances.[4]

Brand does not romantically erase communal loss. Elizete initially feels devastated: "She wanted her [Abena] to know without saying . . . to remember . . . in that darkness with those words between them blooming" (111–12). Communication needs at least one other to legitimize knowledge by agreeing on a set of criteria (Lyotard 19). However, Elizete tells Abena, "You wasn't enough and I wasn't there" (240). The speech act moves away from the legitimacy of communal interpretation and into multiple contexts. Verlia says to Elizete, "I have work here. Nothing is safe. . . . I cannot take care of you like that; a man can promise things that will never happen not because he is lying but because they are within his possibilities in the world. . . . I can't promise you" (72–73). The refusal contradicts J.L. Austin's example of promised realization in the words "I do" performed at the wedding ceremony (Lyotard 9). Unlike Austin's stable performative context for meaning, the absence of a contract between the speaker, the spoken, and the addressee means there is no safe space.

The contract, even within the shifting pronouns of lesbian writing, resurrects self/other violence. As Elizabeth Meese argues, the shifting pronouns seduce the reader (86). Significantly, Brand equates seduction with the colonization of desire. Verlia wants sugar, even though "the smoke from the [cane] factory so sweet it stink" (84) from slavery and present labour practices: "Sometimes she would wake up with a need to taste sugar. . . . She hates it in the blood, it tastes like saliva, sweet at the bottom of her tongue. It makes her mouth spring water, yet she cannot understand why really . . ." (147). Seduction creates a contract in language, inscribing and regulating desire. As Meese writes, "When I say 'I love you,' I want my words to perform their function, to turn you on" (86). In contrast, Verlia says, "Look Elizete, don't try and seduce me. I don't believe in seduction" (74). Assimilation into racist Sudbury is "donut smelling walking death sepulchral ice" (149). Such opposition suggests the potential to decolonize desire in the acknowledged absence of common ground between the speaker, the spoken, and the addressee.

Without the contracts of Oedipal subjects and communities, a language of noise, like Deleuzian rhizomatic music (*Thousand Plateaus* 11–12), emphasizes nonlinear, heterogeneous, and even incoherent sense. Deleuze and Guattari emphasize the flows of the rhizome rather than "points or positions" (*A Thousand Plateaus* 8). Brand, however, follows the political

principle of anti-foundational coalition in her rhizome. She stresses the embodied points and positions that resist neo-colonial identities as well as the need to deregulate the heterogeneous flow. She writes, "the verb is such an intrusive part of speech . . . suggesting all the time invasion or intention not to leave things alone . . ." (*Bread* 52). In anti-foundational coalition, Elizete and Abena begin to speak simultaneously. Abena starts "playing with the sound of herself until only the sound itself mattered . . . and Elizete lying under the window murmuring her names did not stop but gave her the music to finish. Blue fly, bottle fish, butter nose, sugar head, ant road, sandy house" (237). Abena empties intended signification, while Elizete enables unchained flows between nouns marked by the multiple lesbian, Caribbean, and Canadian sounds, words, bodies, narratives, people, and landscapes. Such language without stable consensus enables Elizete to speak her life with Verlia: "Rock leap, wall heart, rip eye, cease breath, marl cut, blood leap, clay deep, coal dead, coal deep, never rot, never cease, sand high, bone dirt, dust hard, mud bird, mud fish, mud word, rock flower, coral water, coral heart, coral breath . . ." (241–42). Nouns associated with Verlia's leaps collide with nouns associated with Elizete's descents into the mud of La Soufrière, the language tunnels of the wood lice, the walls of the quarry, and the sands of dissolving self (92). Elizete decolonizes language in a rhizome of sound, words, resistance, love, anger, sorrow, joy, persistence, death, rhythm, heartbeat, and breath: incommensurable elements that crack the definable world as they abstract and intersect.

Brand criticizes the ability of identity politics to decolonize writing and subjectivity. Theories of legitimate identity frame the subject in Western thought, drawing essentialist presumptions and perpetuating violent self/other desire. To decolonize subjectivity, Brand negates legitimate subjects, objects, communities, and origins. Simultaneously, she witnesses the reality of neo-colonial violence that attacks bodies and selves, in historic slavery, the Grenada massacre, as well as in contemporary Toronto and the Caribbean. In the two-pronged attack on legitimacy, a shifting third term develops that is neither abjection in otherness nor legitimacy in authentic or proper selves. Brand pushes discourses beyond their proper bounds, developing rhizomatic intersections with other discourses that derail and change the original, developing new, anarchic, and mobile subjectivites for Elizete and Verlia. While much of the methodology in *In Another Place, Not Here* seems parallel to Deleuze and Guattari's theory, Brand's differs significantly. Racial, gendered, sexual, cultural, and national texts inscribe desire,

but they also inscribe legitimacy and exclusions that ghettoize and abject. Brand's contradictory pain and hope in the lost self and emphasis on the points of political struggle link the deregulated rhizomatic flow to multiple political movements and the need for material change. By deconstructing legitimacy and identity, Brand changes the reading act. Rather than construct a readership based on common ground and exclude those who feel insulated from the neo-colonial violence, Brand interpellates readers in a culturally hybrid, rhizomatic coalition. As the relationship of Elizete and Verlia suggests, some point of momentary alliance between incommensurable elements may enable the territorial signifiers of the author and her characters to leap into those of the reader.

NOTES

1 Deleuze and Guattari acknowledge that micropolitics works between the State and the multiple differences in individuals. They also admit group political action is necessary for subordinated groups (*A Thousand Plateaus* 217, 276). Nonetheless, their ideals espouse "n sexes" that erase differences of gender construction (*Anti-Oedipus* 296), a "tantric egg" that is everything and nothing (*A Thousand Plateaus* 153), a "becoming everybody/everything" (*A Thousand Plateaus* 280), a "becoming imperceptible" (*A Thousand Plateaus* 282), and a nomadic absence of history (*A Thousand Plateaus* 393). As goals, these concepts push the "abstract line" (*A Thousand Plateaus* 280) into a new version of universality that erases differences.

2 Elizete, like Cixous, dreams a female embodied voice. The act of spitting milk, however, conveys Brand's quarrel with the liberating potential of the *other* (Cixous 93–94), the unknown metaphorical "dark continent" (Cixous 68–69), and a maternal embodiment that resists self/other violence and phallic language (Cixous 87).

3 While Grace never appears as a character in the novel, Elizete's rant on women's names (85–87, 91–92), the capitalization of "Grace" (3), and the repetition of the word raises her spectre.

4 Brand elicits a collision of Walter Benjamin's description of the "angel of history" (392) and Wilson Harris' argument that the non-realist historical novel "begin[s] to displace a helpless and hopeless consolidation of powers" (12). See Stephanos Stephanides' brief relation of Harris and Benjamin (113).

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Theresa Muñoz

Notes on Clara Schumann Visiting Johannes Brahms' Family

By hand he leads me to 60 Speckstrasse
an apartment the south side of Hamburg,
the two small rooms where he grew up.

The sidewalk dusts our shoes
as we approach his grieving building,
its broken shutters and peeled paint.

Johannes mumbles a blur
of apology and haste.
Tangled curtains on the first floor quiver,
his parents are waiting for us.

Dear friends he and I have become
the old bitterness fallen like buttons
from coats, worn and lost
some place in our paths.

Now the intimate *du* in our letters, the
first row seats at each other's concerts,
the climbing left hand chords in his sonatas
reminding me of breathing
in, then out, again.

Ahead of me, he opens the iron gate
where children in the courtyard
stop their game
of balls and sticks. Their faces curious and shy,
smudges of dirt on their chins.

And Johannes' own visage,
gruff and covered with blond beard
as sincere as the porch's
four crooked steps

where the bottom plank is cracked and sullen,
                        a split lip in the wooden middle
its brokenness not unlike longing.

Mary Eagleton

What's the Matter?

Authors in Carol Shields' Short Fiction

In all her fiction—long and short—Carol Shields returns repeatedly to the figure of the writer, usually but not always female. Judith Gill in *Small Ceremonies* is a writer of biographies who has also tried her hand at fiction, a novel based on a plot which she has filched from her English exchange partner, John Spalding, and which is in turn filched by her novelist friend, Furlong Eberhardt. Fay McLeod in *The Republic of Love* is a folklorist researching a study on mermaids. Mary Swann in the novel of that name is a brilliant woman poet lost to literary history and gradually being reclaimed by literary critics and the biographer, Morton Jimroy. Reta Winters in *Unless* is an author of light fiction, and translator and editor of the work of Danielle Westerman. Shields is also preoccupied with the work of "real" authors: several famous names feature in the literary field sketched out in *Mary Swann*; like many Canadian women writers, Shields is haunted by the work of Susanna Moodie—she has written a biography of her and Judith Gill is doing the same. Shields has also written a biography of Jane Austen.[1]

Though Shields is not writing in deliberate dialogue with critical theory, as one would find in the work of Umberto Eco or J. M. Coetzee or Gilbert Adair, an awareness of recent debates on authorship certainly informs her creative work. The theoretical language and the intellectual shenanigans of the academic author are always satirised by Shields. In "Ilk" (*Dressing Up for the Carnival*), for instance, she combines a clever spoof of academic-speak on narratology, some sharp comment on women's difficulty in getting tenure and a hesitant, more tender narrative of past tragedy (a suicide) and

possible future love.[2] Yet she recognises the constructedness of authorship, asking questions that echo Michel Foucault's "What is an author?" (141–60). She seems to share Foucault's interest in authorship as a position, its function, and what the name of the author signifies in history and discourse. Shields also understands Pierre Bourdieu's question, "Who creates the 'creator'?" (76–77). The creative person is not an inexplicable genius, as the "'charismatic' ideology" that Bourdieu critiques would have us believe, but the product of a network of internalised social and historical determinants that sanction the creative person's thinking and acting. *Mary Swann*—exploring competing forces in the literary field and attempting to create not only Swann herself as a poet of distinction but even her damaged and lost poetry—particularly lends itself to Foucauldian and Bourdieuian analyses.[3]

The capital "A" Author, the master of control and meaning that Roland Barthes has so influentially discussed, makes few appearances in Shields' work (142–48). When it does, this author figure is always male and always debunked. Morton Jimroy in *Mary Swann*, or the Professor from Massachusetts in "Mrs. Turner Cutting the Grass" (*Various Miracles*) may have pretensions to this status but they are never fully realised. Like Barthes, Shields would like to remove the author from a revered position. Her aesthetic philosophy is thoroughly democratic: she believes that creative ability or an aesthetic sense may emerge in the most unexpected people or circumstances. But Shields is loath to abandon the authorial subject. In "Absence" (*Dressing Up for the Carnival*), the loss of the letter "i" from the writer's keyboard does not have consequences simply for her composition; it proves how indispensable is the authorial "I."[4]

My focus on the author in Shields' short fiction emphasises materiality. Shields understands the author and writing, particularly within gender politics, as produced in specific material conditions. Her creation of the woman author—frequently on the margins of the literary field, devalued by critics, involved in subtle negotiations and accommodations with domesticity and family life, enabled, in recent years, by the discourse of feminism and changes in markets—relates closely to a materialist-feminist critical line from Virgina Woolf to the present. But another order of questioning in her work prompts me to explore Shields' response to materiality in three ways. Firstly, through her perspective on the nature of creativity and its resistance to a materialist explanation. Shields is intrigued by what *isn't* easily explicable in materialist terms and looks to explore these areas without falling back on a Romantic or transcendental view where authorship is inspiration and

the domain of a chosen few. Secondly, through her interest in the material as subject matter and the ethical questions raised in the author's handling of subject matter; here ethics and aesthetics can be at odds. And, thirdly, through the challenge posed in her texts to the materiality of the author as a coherent subject in control of her/his writing and placed in a recognisable material world.

Materiality and Creativity

Herb Rhinelander, a syndicated columnist, believes that, "The quotidian is where it's at," ("Soup du Jour," *Dressing Up for the Carnival*, 162). As the narrator says a few lines later, "The ordinary has become extraordinary" (163). The narrator's comment is almost a synopsis of many reviews of Shields' work. Everybody recognises Shields' interest in materiality, particularly the everyday, the small scale and a carefully realised world of the family, the married couple, the close friends. But the everyday is often defamiliarised. Shields likes the non-dramatic gestures that are charged with history or, as in "Keys" (*Dressing Up for the Carnival*), the inconsequential objects that are redolent with metaphorical suggestiveness. Small material details signify in larger and more abstract ways. In what is generally a positive review of Shields' *Collected Stories*, Hermione Lee indicates the danger: "The risk of this attention to the overlooked and everyday is that it can edge into banality and coyness . . . a penchant for happy endings (which she can satirise in herself, too) for cutely punning titles, folksy parables and comforting adages" (26). An equal danger, among some reviewers and critics, has been to turn to an elevated aesthetic vocabulary as a way of explaining Shields' preoccupation with the commonplace while giving status to her writing. Thus, the extracts from reviews used as puffs on the back of the Fourth Estate edition of *Various Miracles* refer to "sentences [that] transmute base metal into gold," "moments of supernatural transcendence," "a fragile incandescence," and "transfiguring the mundane with meaning." Evidently, an idealist aesthetic is good for selling books. From this perspective, the everyday is either sadly suburban or meaningful only when it is no longer everyday.

This view of writing as alchemy is one form of the historic image of the writer as the conjurer, wondrously bringing life out of nothing but also dangerous. While Shields would not ally herself with this magical view of writing or with the charismatic ideology of which Bourdieu speaks and to which the Professor in "Mrs. Turner Cutting the Grass" seems attracted, she

is aware that not everything in writing can be explained by the material conditions of the author or by the demands of the literary field. Hence, one can understand Meershank's writer's block in "Block Out" (*The Orange Fish*) as the product of a series of incidents that have dented his confidence. But there is no explanation for how Meershank gets through his writer's block. The lead character in his new novel is Mimi Cornblossom, who wakes up one morning with a song in her head, a song which everyone thinks is going to be a winner. The essential difference between the old Mimi (manicurist) and the new Mimi (show-biz star) is specifically *not* of material substance or circumstances. It is "the thinnest of membranes. It's made out of air. It's colorless. It's not in the dictionary, not in the phone book, not in the bureau drawers or hall cupboard" (109). This tremulous insubstantiality is both the coming into being of Meershank's character and Mimi's unexpected talent.

In *Negotiating with the Dead: A Writer on Writing*, Margaret Atwood suggests that creativity in this sense is in the nature of a gift. Making use of Lewis Hyde's *The Gift: Imagination and the Erotic Life of Property*, Atwood claims that

> the part of any poem or novel that makes it a work of art doesn't derive its value from the realm of market exchange. It comes from the realm of gift. A gift is not weighed and measured nor can it be bought. It cannot be expected or demanded; rather it is granted or else not. In theological terms it's a grace proceeding from the fullness of being. (60)

Elsewhere in the book, Atwood tries to describe that elusive moment when writing takes place. She quotes the end of Primo Levi's *The Periodic Table* where Levi, a chemist by training, traces the movement of an atom through the body to the point where a hand, his hand, writes a dot on the page. Atwood rejects this narrative as "too bloodless" (49). Atwood's own suggestion is that writing takes place when, like Lewis Carroll's Alice, the author "passes through the mirror. At this one instant the glass barrier between the doubles dissolves, and Alice is neither here nor there, neither art nor life, neither the one thing nor the other, though at the same time she is all of these at once" (49–50). These proposals are suggestive but problematic. Atwood is right that creativity cannot be understood solely in material terms, in this case through a work's market value. But her reference to the gift—gift from whom?—and to the theological places creativity once more in the realm of the transcendental. What Atwood sees as "too bloodless" in Levi's example strikes me as an exciting combination of the material in the

form of the corporeal and the fantastic improbability of the atom's journey. But if Levi's account explains, to some satisfaction, this dot on the page, it does not necessarily account for all the other dots and signifiers that make up the complex sign system of a text. Both the Levi and Carroll examples suggest that creativity is momentary—that dot, that "instant" of dissolution—which does not help us understand creativity as a sustained process. However, Atwood's working of the Carroll image teases out the doubleness of the author. The author is both a material self in a material world and someone else who is somewhere else.

Shields also suggests the link between creativity and the psyche. In "Death of an Artist" (*Dressing Up for the Carnival*)—a title which, of course, recalls "The Death of the Author"—a troubled past is hinted at in the childhood toys which the author wanted to ignore, including a silver cup on which his name is misspelled and a red crayon. Without the red crayon with which he wrote his eight volumes of diaries, "his name would be only a name and his life less than a life" (190). He uses the red crayon on his last page to say how alone he is. The crayon may be the final pose or it may, like Charles Foster Kane's "Rosebud," signify the loss in childhood that drives his desire, in this case to write his name correctly and to have his name known.[5] But more frequently, Shields ties the insubstantiality of creativity to serendipity. We can recall that her companion novels of a husband's story and a wife's story are called, jointly, *Happenstance*, and one volume of her short stories, *Various Miracles*.

"Miracles" may, again, suggest the theological but in the title story it is the miraculous as chance, coincidence, unexpected insights or connections that can fuel the creative process. The author, Camilla LaPorta, has been criticised by her publisher for relying too much on coincidence and, acting under her publisher's direction, has removed from her latest novel all incidences of "fate, chance or happenstance" and replaced them with "logic, causality and science" (43). Having dropped the manuscript on the way to the publisher's office, she loses the key page, "the page that explained everything else" (43–4). The twist is that the loss of the explanation improves the novel. Now the publisher believes that "[s]ometimes it's better to let things be strange and to represent nothing but themselves" (44). The missing page is picked up by an actress who reads on it a description of herself and what she is doing at that moment. This is the last of a number of "miracles" related in the story, all of which test the reader's credulity and would fit happily into the "strange but true" section of a tabloid. In trying to account

for everything, Camilla LaPorta's publisher has restricted the range of possibility. Shields, on the other hand, stretches her basically realist mode into a realm of uncertainty and wonder but does not see the need to reconcile the two.

Finding the Material

Writing as magic and alchemy features also in Alice Munro's short story "Material" but here "matter," in the sense of the subject-matter of the work and the materiality of the lives that form the subject-matter, takes the reader as much into ethics as aesthetics. Reading a story by her ex-husband, Hugo, the narrator recognises how he has turned into "Art" the life of Dotty, the woman who lived in the basement flat when they were young and first married, and appreciates that it is "an act of magic," "a special, unsparing, unsentimental love" (35) that makes this possible. But the letter of congratulation that she begins to pen to Hugo somehow changes into a diatribe. In the wife's eyes, the creative transmutation does not compensate for Hugo's being a "filthy, moral idiot" (33), for being able only to "dramatize" rather than "realize" (34). "Realize" here means to see the effects of his actions, to understand what is happening around him in the context of social exchange and responsibility rather than as fodder for "Art." A moral ambiguity at the centre of Hugo's art is produced from a blindness to others' needs and yet his writing remains something of value.

Shields fully understands this ambiguity. In several stories she questions the responsibility writers have to their material: is the relationship simply instrumental; does everything bow before the demands of "Art"? In Munro's story, the figure who is ignored in life is dignified in writing; in "Mrs. Turner Cutting the Grass," the figure who is despised in life is vilified in writing. Mrs. Turner's particular sin, in the eyes of the Professor, is her "defilement" of Art; her body, her accent, her behaviour, her conversation, the tawdry contents—in his view—of her bag are all an affront to this purveyor of "taste" (36). The Professor's sense of disgust at this "little pug of a woman" with "the red toenails, the grapefruity buttocks" is visceral (36). Mrs. Turner represents "vulgarity" and "tastelessness" and the poem he writes about her reminds the listeners of the "unspeakable," the "tacky," and "banality" while the Professor experiences "transcendence," "sublime beauty," and appreciates the "ancient and exquisitely proportioned" (36–7). Shields satirises here the politics of a transcendental aesthetic and illustrates what Pierre Bourdieu would call the "symbolic violence" integral to the "high" aesthetic the Professor supports. In *Distinction*, Bourdieu's monumental

study of taste, he shows how fully our concepts of "taste" and "tastelessness" are implicated in systems of social difference and how violently "the infallible taste of the taste-maker" seeks to expose "the uncertain tastes of the possessors of an 'ill-gotten' culture" (91). As Shields makes clear, the material factors of gender difference, class difference and the Professor's greater cultural and symbolic capital support his elevated view.[6] Mrs. Turner's delight, as she travels the world, in seeing carrots and lettuces, fences or telephone poles would be dismissed from this perspective as "facile" or "childish" or "primitive."

Shields sees not only the presentation of subject-matter but the actual gathering of it as a potentially suspect activity which can place the author in a dubious, at times almost corrupt, position. In *Mary Swann* she refers to "duplicity" and "deception" (163), "subtle thefts and acts of cannibalism" (231); in *Small Ceremonies* writers are described as "no more than scavengers and assemblers of lies" (144). The title of Shields' story about two writers driving round the UK and picking up hitchhikers just so they can hear their stories is called "Poaching" (*Various Miracles*).[7] The writers feel that what they are doing is "like stealing" (90) and that, parasitically, they live "like aerial plants off the packed fragments and fictions of the hitchhikers" (91). In this pursuit they are ruthless, favouring the "slightly distraught" (92), who more easily reveal things; others have to be "kindled" (93) while some they need to "wring dry" (92). There is something passive-aggressive in their concealing of their occupations and purpose, and something chilling in their strategies to get others to reveal themselves.

Yet, as is common in Shields' short fiction, the story's proposition is complicated or turns ironically at the end. In "Mrs. Turner Cutting the Grass," not only is Mrs. Turner's unsophisticated aestheticism upheld but she herself is aestheticised in ways less cruel than the Professor's. Mrs. Turner, "a sight" that is appalling at the start of the story, becomes "a sight" that is admirable by the end (27, 38); she also enjoys how the cotton underdrawers she made as a girl have become a cultural artefact in the town's local history museum. Equally, the Professor, who has so traduced Mrs. Turner, is described unironically by Shields as having an "authentic" and "spiritual" experience on his trip to Japan, which produced poetry of quality ? "He wrote and wrote, shaken by catharsis, but lulled into a new sense of his powers" (35). She shows him realising that his poem about Mrs. Turner was short on aesthetic value, "a somewhat light piece" and a "crowd pleaser" (35). Like Hugo, a lack of ethics does not necessarily inhibit an engagement

with the aesthetic. Finally, Dobey in "Poaching" pumps people for material but, unlike the Professor, acknowledges that everybody has material that is worth more than ridicule: "Behind each of the people we pick up, Dobey believes, there's a deep cave, and in the cave a trap door and a set of stone steps which we may descend if we wish" (94). The deep cave in Mrs. Turner's life—the birth of an illegitimate child to a black father and her abandonment of it in a baby carriage outside a large house—is an event that could easily have been aestheticised in tragic or heroic mode but it remains unrevealed.

In "New Music" (*Dressing Up for the Carnival*), the woman author does not think herself superior to the quotidian, material world of family life or that she has to remove herself physically from it but, when writing, she is estranged from the everyday. Working on her 612-page biography of the sixteenth-century composer, Thomas Tallis, the author forgets her wifely and motherly duties and rises early not to bake scones but to write. The family accepts the intensity of the author's involvement that takes her "elsewhere," leaves her *distrait* with some of the domestic duties undone. This distance provokes an objectivity between her and her family and opens up the possibility of the family, specifically her husband, becoming unanticipated subject-matter. For the first half of the story we think that the narrator is an impersonal, omniscient narrator who tells us of the author's meeting with her husband and of her interest in Thomas Tallis precisely because he is considered second to his pupil, William Byrd. As the writing of the biography comes to its end, a first-person, singular pronoun intrudes—"She's spent four years on this book. I've already said that, haven't I?" (155)—and then, the first-person plural possessive pronoun as the author lies down on "*our* canted, worn sofa" (155; my emphasis). The singular pronoun enters on three further occasions, always with a rather self-deprecating tone: on Tallis, "I'm no expert, but I've been told" (155); on Tallis' portrait, "I am not a particularly tall chap myself, and so I instantly recognise and connect with a short man's uneasy gaze" (156); and on imagining the author as "a girl just twenty-one years old," "I'm aware that I probably should say 'young woman'" (159). The first-person plural features again when the author, on finishing her book, stares at her family "as though *we* are strangers. . . . *We're* not exactly unwelcome, her look tells *us*, but the nature of *our* presence has yet to be explained" (157; my emphasis).

At this point the reader's suspicion is confirmed; the narrator is the long-suffering husband, the one who has to wake every morning to a cold bed. That disconcerting look returns a year later when the author begins to work

on William Byrd and regards her husband "with an odd, assessing measuring clarity" (161). What does she see? Shields subtly hints that this modest man—himself an author of *Distribution of Gravel Resources in Southwest England*—is included in her fascination for the second best. His presence might have informed her work on Tallis in some imperceptible way and now, as Tallis' star rises and Byrd's begins to dip, the shifting status is driving her work on Byrd. All the husband knows is that it is best to stay out of her way and that he is once again referring to himself in the third person. He is becoming a stimulus to her subject-matter, her subject rather than his own, "he" rather than "I." To be a writer is, it seems, to have a sliver of ice in the heart.

The Material Subject

Shields' work is uncertain about sources of creativity, and about authors' finding and managing their subject matter. It also puzzles about who the author actually is. On one level, Shields leads us to believe we know the author. She works in a realist mode; her characters have credibility, and they live in recognisable social settings. Moreover, Shields' interest in both biography and autobiography encourages traditional associations with the authentic revelation of a human subject. Shields' openness about her own life and writing lend support: she gave many readings and interviews throughout her life; her daughters and friends have written warmly about her; and the special issues on her work, from *Prairie Fire* and *Room of One's Own*, are full of family photos, including, on the cover of *Room of One's Own*, of Shields as a bride. We might feel that we are getting to the truth of Carol Shields but, then, we remember how, in *The Stone Diaries*, Shields plays with both biographical and autobiographical modes and how the photographs in that novel—some of which, interestingly, are of Shields' own family—heighten the sense of verisimilitude. So photographs of a real family are employed in fiction to establish the "reality" of a fictional family.[8] In the short fiction too, Shields indicates that neither biography not autobiography necessarily helps us in understanding who the writer is. In "Collision" (*Various Miracles*) the universe is saturated with "biographical debris" (139); it is a "narrative litter-bag," which remorselessly and indiscriminately absorbs material (140). The author's concern should be with "the harvest, the gathering in, the adding up, the bringing together, the whole story" (158). But elsewhere Shields illustrates how such wholeness is impossible. The literary fields themselves are riven with the combative and the self-interested. Biographers, and particularly autobiographers, have

good reason for believing that they "know" the author but they may also have questionable motives and be subject to conscious or unconscious pressures to fashion their material in a particular way. Furthermore, in poststructuralist terms, the materiality of the author as a consistent, knowable human subject is fractured, rendered unknowable and constantly in process however much the individual may deny this.

The biographer of Edith-Esther ("Edith-Esther," *Dressing Up for the Carnival*), an eminent novelist now reaching the end of her life, jollies her along by saying "You're exactly who you are," to which she replies sardonically, "Whoever that may be" (143). This biographer is determined that he knows who Edith-Esther is, though her hyphenated name already suggests that her subjectivity might be more complex than he thinks. He wants to produce what Liz Stanley calls the "modern biography," as opposed to the postmodern, through a detailed, linear, developmental reconstruction of "a great life." As Stanley indicates, such a view depends on believing that the past can be discovered, that biography can give us the truth of a person—and, indeed, that a consistent, rational self is reclaimable—and on ignoring how "any biographer's view is a socially located and necessarily partial one" (7). Shields' story undercuts the first two claims and confirms the third. While Edith-Esther cannot always remember the details of her past—was *Wherefore Bound* "[p]art of an early trilogy? The second volume? Or else the first?" (141)—the biographer's reconstruction of her life-narrative as a "spiritual odyssey," as his biography is ultimately called, is an imposition. He forces on her life a narrative which is at once impossibly coherent, as everything has to fit this predetermined pattern, and which ignores the resolutely secular nature of Edith-Esther's work. This view of her life can be established only by a process of omission, wilful misinterpretation and overinterpretation, all in the name of some "kernel of authenticity" (140). Edith-Esther recognises the vested interests that are at play, how her biographer's insistence on a spiritual underpinning comes from his own needs and is, at the same time, a useful marketing strategy: "I'm praying that it hits the bestseller lists by next week" is the biographer's wonderful conflation of the spiritual and the material (147). She sees also how the feminist content of her work is excised: "Other times, other rhymes," says the biographer dismissively (147).

What Edith-Esther ruefully thinks of as "death by biography" (137), the fear of every famous writer, probably comes to pass; the story ends with her having some kind of seizure as the biographer's final harassing phone call

reveals how fully her life and work have been distorted. Throughout the story is a recurring image of the field. Edith-Esther believes all her novels "blend into the width of a long, grassy field" (135); thinking of her early work she sees "a meadow landscape, classic birds, wild grasses, a blur of shredded cloud" (141). As her health fails, the nature of the field changes. She finds herself "stumbling across a width of unlevelled ground, still wet with the morning's dew" (144) and, in the final, extended image at the end of the story, the field becomes "a garden in a state of ruin"; disappointment mingles with ugliness, and weeds and sedges attack her (148). Edith-Esther remembers her friend, Magdelena, the one to whom the biographer had wanted to give a religious connotation; she remembers the literary groupie who took her pencil jar, an earlier literary exploitation. The letter opener Magdelena gave her becomes the blade with which she attacks "the savage purple grass rising up around her" (149); the word "purple" reminds us of an earlier moment when she had looked at her aged arm and seen "a veiny ridge of fine purple" (137); the Latin words, RARA AVIS, on the handle of the letter opener are, perhaps, a too obvious comment on Edith-Esther herself or link back to the "classic birds" in the field. The irony is that the biographer never knows these more allusive, associative processes in Edith-Esther's creativity—could never know them as, by this stage, they are unspoken, barely conscious—but is also inhibited from knowing by his own absolutism. His limited pursuit of facts or synthesising theories, a strategy followed also by Morton Jimroy in *Mary Swann*, is always deadly—almost literally deadly for Edith-Esther and metaphorically deadly in its restrictive control. It misses that other narrative, which is richer but more difficult to handle.

If the biographer is not to be trusted with the material identity of the author, neither is the autobiographer. Atwood writes in *Negotiating with the Dead* about the doubleness of authors generally. Doubleness has an ontological dimension—the person who lives an ordinary daily life is not quite the same person who writes the books—and a historical one—the person who writes the books is not the same person as the author one reads. Such difference, Atwood tells us, is essential to that move through the mirror from self to other, from here to there on which Atwood as an author relies but it is also a convenient way for the author to deny responsibility for what she writes and the effects the writing has. In doubleness, then, Atwood also sees duplicity and she surveys a fascinating range of literary examples—the doppelgänger, the alien that inhabits the human, the virtuous twin and the evil one, the uncontrollable hand that separates from the body, Dorian

Gray, and the quintessential example of doubleness, Jekyll and Hyde. "Which half of the equation, if either, may be said to be authentic?" Atwood asks (39). The hope that the two halves might be brought together in autobiography has not survived deconstruction. As Laura Marcus writes: "Either the autobiography serves to create an illusion of a unified self out of the fragments of identity, or the text reveals, in its fissures, its doublings and its incompleteness, the fragmentations of the subject and its lack of self-confidence" (218).

In Shields' "Death of an Artist" (*Dressing Up for the Carnival*), the double, the empirical person and the author, come together not through a common authenticity but a common inauthenticity; the author's whole life has been a consummate performance of the cultural conventions of "the author." What he *is*, is no more than a compilation of writerly personas. The story suggests both biographical and autobiographical modes, biographical in that it narrates the author's life, in this case retrospectively, from his death at the age of 88 to his childhood, and autobiographical in that we see how, in Paul de Man's words, "the autobiographical project may itself produce and determine the life and that whatever the writer *does* is in fact governed by the technical demands of self-portraiture and thus determined, in all its aspects, by the resources of his medium" (69). Shields' story could be read as a humorous take on de Man's comment as the author appears to have lived every moment with a consciousness of autobiography and with his epitaph in mind. De Man describes the "dominant figure of the epitaphic or autobiographical discourse" as "the prosopopeia, the fiction of the voice-from-beyond-the-grave" (77). Tracing the etymology of the rhetorical term, he links from voice to face: "*prosopon poien*, to confer a mask or a face (*prosopon*)" (76) and the word "face" then suggests "deface, *figure*, figuration and disfiguration" (76). Thus Linda Anderson explains:

> What the author of an autobiography does is to try to endow his inscription within the text with all the attributes of a face in order to mask or conceal his own fictionalization or displacement by writing. Paradoxically, therefore, the giving of a face, prosopopeia, also names the disfigurement or displacement of the autobiographical subject through tropes. (13)

In "Death of an Artist," the author's literary output and his carefully-scripted, life-long performance establishes this memorable voice and face which, together with the investment of the literary field, will ensure that he lives beyond the grave. But the artifice of the whole process also suggests his disfigurement, that there is no substance subtending the tropes.

The decade-by-decade review of the author's life approximates in form an obituary or a published memoir but the language and tone is cutting. The contradictions of his life invite a deconstructive reading. He is a success: people file past his coffin; the progress of his life has been recorded by microphones and cameras; he has several biographers; he is pursued by the paparazzi; he is highly sought after in the right social circles. He is also a failure: he is "furiously unproductive" (185) and what he does produce is incomplete or contrary—"undiaries," an "anti-journal," "neo-diaries" and "crypto-diaries". The literary forms he uses indicate revelation and, yet, the prefixes with their suggestions of negatives and deviations from the forms, and his mannerisms and props, which change by the decade, point to fictionality. Unlike Edith-Esther, this grand old man of letters has provided copious evidence for his readership but all this materiality tells us little about the author. The narrator—and the author's words confirm this—describes him as role-playing and amid disguise, theatricality, masquerade, posturing and chimera. Every casual *aperçu* from the author is, in fact, always rehearsed. Can any authenticity be found in this labour-intensive creation of "the author"? To understand this author one would have to be suspicious of the "face" the author has constructed and move back and forth between success and failure, revelation and disguise, arrogance and vulnerability.

Conclusion

The preoccupation with authorship in Shields' work belongs to a metafictional strand in contemporary fiction. There can be playfulness and knowingness as the author speaks to other authors and an educated readership about the tricks and the vicissitudes of the trade. But metafictional writing encourages also a serious engagement with the nature of writing and the role of the author. Shields' questioning, in a number of ways, about materiality undermines the "cosy" view of her work that Hermione Lee touches on in her review. She can at once value and be self-consciously mocking about small-town life; she can at once work her narrative through the daily engagements of families, partners and friends while also asking important questions about her craft. Shields operates on a border between the everyday and the ethereal, the known and the unknown; she assumes a non-prescriptive position with an openness to possibility and doubt. That the source of writing or its production can never fully be explained or that the author can never fully be known does not detract from the writer's belief

that she is involved in something important and urgent, something that *matters.* As Reta Winters says in *Unless*, in what one inevitably reads posthumously as the final attestation of Shields, "the writerly impulse, or the 'long littleness,' to use Frances Cornford's phrase, of a life spent affixing small words to large, empty pages . . . matters, the remaking of an untenable world through the nib of a pen; it matters so much I cannot stop doing it" (208).

NOTES

I should like to thank the anonymous readers of this essay for their extremely helpful comments.

1 Shields' *Mary Swann* was published in Canada and the United States under the title *Swann: A Mystery* and in the General Paperbacks edition in Canada, *Swann: A Literary Mystery*.
2 Shields herself is no slouch on theories of narrative. See her essay, "Narrative Hunger and the Overflowing Cupboard" in Eden and Goertz.
3 Bourdieu asks this question frequently. See, for example, *The Field of Cultural Production*, 76–7; *Sociology in Question*, 139–48. For a Foucauldian study of Shields, see Brian Johnson (1995); for a Bourdieuian analysis, see Mary Eagleton (2003).
4 A fuller discussion of this story with respect to Barthes' concept of the death of the Author is included in my forthcoming *Figuring the Woman Author in Contemporary Fiction.*
5 I refer here, of course, to Orson Welles' film, *Citizen Kane*, which memorably features the image of Kane's childhood sled with the name Rosebud on the side.
6 Bourdieu's concepts of "symbolic violence," "cultural capital," and "symbolic capital" are developed and explained throughout his work. A useful introduction to these concepts is in Webb, Schirato and Danaher, *Understanding Bourdieu.*
7 I say "writers" though the two characters are so circumspect that it is never made explicit in the story what form their interest in narrative takes.
8 Shields' use of photographs in *The Stone Diaries* has been discussed by Deborah Schnitzer, but there is another essay to be written about the use and effects of Shields' family photos in essays about her work.

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John Barton

Polygonics

though you are afraid of heights walk with me along the breakwater
its narrow double-jointed finger crooked straight across the flat

plane of the sea, mountains the sun cuts jagged against the distant
shore turning as we turn, each windblown angle we negotiate

widening our prespective, pivoting us farther out than we expect
stepping tentative along concrete poured high above the endless

vertical skindivers travel along below the ocean's surface
tangents you or I may fathomless have followed part way down

with other men, turning waterlogged back, amnesiac and gasping
for air, intake lines tangles, guessing afterwards at wrecks we are

sure must list deeper still, literal and barnacles with what we let fall
inadvertent, turning, slipping unnoticed through the currents past

waving skeins of kelp towards vanishing points few dwell beyond
the lonely plane of the sea a polygon whose arbitrary shapes

alter as we zigzag along, the strait unhinghing, bisected by migrating
birds and Cessnas, tugs and kites, our faces triny with sun-shined

breezes, the extinguised navigation beacon a terminus where unblinking
we stop at the vortex of deafening, unheard-of waves, no caring what

vectors may later point us elsewhere while we take in the fresh sweep
of the horizontals about us: ocean, sky, and shore flat and thunderous

horizons dazzling as lightning shaken out in sheets, the breakwater
the long arms of a compass projecting a direction for every line

across other lines, many lovers walking arm in arm with us or away
our arc ascendant, a half moon carrying us forwards unobserved

under open skies, geometries beyond the everyday plotted on the sea
you and I: both of us graphing possible trajectories of the limitless

Stephen Dunning

Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake*
The Terror of the Therapeutic

In *Brave New World Revisited,* Aldous Huxley distinguishes between the oppressive regime of George Orwell's *1984*, which maintains itself by "inflicting pain," and that of *Brave New World,* which prevails by inflicting "a hardly less humiliating pleasure" (42). Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985) clearly stands within the Orwellian tradition, though in this case the oppressive regime is religious rather than political. *Oryx and Crake* (2003) returns to her dystopian concerns, but now in a markedly Huxleyean mood. It finds our current vulnerability to unprecedented disaster arises not from dystopian societies with hostile political structures, underwritten by oppressive metanarratives, and established through threat of imprisonment, torture and death, but rather within the qualitative vacuum of a culture that has lost its "great" narratives. This culture grinds on without what Neil Postman labels a necessary "god," without a story that "tells of origins, and envisions a future, a story that constructs ideals, prescribes rules of conduct, provides a source of authority, and, above all, gives a sense of continuity and purpose" (5–6).[1]

Atwood's shift from Orwellian to Huxleyean nightmare reflects an essential feature of what I call late modernity,[2] which has witnessed the failure—most dramatically in the fall of the Soviet Union—of all secular political substitutes for the Judeo-Christian narrative it originally rejected. Such failures appear inevitable given the ethos of the scientific revolution that inaugurated and continues to drive modernity: quantitative description and manipulation displaces qualitative discourse, a disastrous development the novel captures precisely in the relative valuation of "word" and "numbers" people.

Atwood recognizes that a world devoid of qualitative distinctions will be driven by base appetites and fears, stimulated by the latest technological innovations and marketed for maximum profit. But the novel does more than simply warn us against pursuing a purportedly therapeutic scientific project shaped ultimately by the laboratory and ledger. It also insists that sacred narrative cannot be excised without the loss of our humanity, and that we will not recover ourselves until we recover the stories that tell us who we are.

Atwood has captured precisely modernity's ethos, and portrayed its potential for disaster. At the risk of vastly simplifying, we might say that modernity began with a deliberate rejection of the received Judeo-Christian narrative, at least as embodied in mediaeval scholasticism, in favour of science's epistemology and precise quantification, which most apologists believed would inaugurate an era of universal health and prosperity. And modernity undoubtedly began as a therapeutic project intended to free society from the repressive pathologies of the past. Modernity's therapy has proven fatally hedonistic, simply because it debunked medieval asceticism without providing its own effective alternative ethic. Indeed, modernity's essentially quantitative discourse equates "more" with "better"—at least of those activities that satisfy what Robert Doede labels "first-order" desires (12). These desires push the individual in the direction of immediate gratification. Modernity can offer no convincing rationale for pursuing second-order desires, which require the suppression or deferment of first-order desires to achieve higher ethical (often communal) goals, precisely because, as both Huxley and Atwood recognize, modernity rejects the traditional cultural narratives that give such goals their authority.

Galileo's famous identification of mathematics as Nature's language thus represented a decisive shift that, over several centuries, displaced natural languages (and their attendant organizing narratives) from the centre to the periphery of cultural authority, where they prove—as the novel's narrator (Snowman) aptly puts it in describing his own linguistic labours—mere "window-dressing . . . decorating the cold, hard, numerical real world in flossy 2-D verbiage" (188). Descartes, brilliant mathematician and seminal voice of modernity, may have inspired Atwood's creation of Crake, the novel's destructively alienated antagonist. In any case, he shares Descartes' rejection of received authority, his desire to work within a comprehensive epistemology founded on ideas as clear and distinct as mathematical proofs, his preference for mechanical models of living beings,[3] his identification of the self as

res cogitans (the original ghost in the machine), and his misrelation to the feminine, or Nature.[4] Bacon's rejection of traditional wisdom for effective technical power also captures something of the modernist project as incarnated in Crake.

It is perhaps one of history's more exquisite ironies that many (if not most) of the first scientists and most eloquent apologists for the modern revolution were theists more or less within the orthodox Christian fold. What they did not realize, and what we have been gradually (and unavoidably) discovering, is that the displacement of traditional cultural narratives by science has produced comprehensive upheavals, a complete reshaping of the human landscape. Nothing escapes—at least where science rules unimpeded, as it does in Atwood's novel. Perhaps the original scientists imagined that their religious (and most certainly ethical) convictions would remain unscathed by the new epistemology, by the new authority of quantitative discourse. If so, we know that they were wrong. But the knowledge of loss came only gradually. Laplace's well-documented exchange with Napoleon regarding his revolutionary treatment of planetary movement encapsulates science's triumphalism quite precisely. Napoleon, hoping to embarrass Laplace by pointing out that his book on the system of the universe contained no reference to the Creator, received the following reply: "'Je n'avais pas besoin de cette hypothèse-là'" (Wilkins). And indeed, this dismissal typifies the fate of what has been called the "God of the gaps"—a sort of death by inches. God, and indeed everything originally lying outside science's sphere, survived only as embarrassing hypotheses (usually in some form of vastly reduced significance), useful only until science could dispense with them. This shifting involved both the expansion of science into realms traditionally reserved for qualitative discourses, such as theology or philosophy, and the reduction (or recasting) of these subjects in forms amenable to scientific discourse, as we see for example, in behaviourist psychology.

As science progressively eroded confidence in the traditional cultural narratives, it also offered rival accounts (most decisively those treating of origins and human nature) that further displaced our received notions of ourselves and of normative behavior. Very few realized what this loss might eventually entail. Thus, while individual crises of faith often find self-conscious expression in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century novels, only in the twentieth century do we encounter dystopian fictional worlds in which these crises have collectively worked themselves out.

Oryx and Crake offers a darkly comic critique of our triumphant scientific

modernity that is only now beginning to reveal its true shape, having finally exhausted the resources of the world it has systematically destroyed. The admittedly odd title refers to two main characters, whose names derive from animal species, now endangered, but extinct in the near future of the novel. Snowman, the narrator,[5] has close ties to both characters: Crake is his only friend; Oryx, the only woman he has ever loved. Like Offred, the narrator of *The Handmaid's Tale*, Snowman begins speaking as the devastated survivor of a carefully calculated catastrophe that the book gradually discloses. But here the catastrophe goes well beyond the predictable (though painful) cycling of political regimes, for Snowman initially appears to be the only *human* alive.

Crake masterminded this "final solution" designed to eliminate everyone but Snowman and the Crakers (a select group of genetically-altered *homo sapiens*), and thus the novel is arguably Crake's story, at least in so far as we must grasp Crake's relation to his world to understand what drives him to this radical therapy—and the irony is that (like the first advocates of the new science) he clearly acts with therapeutic intent. Oryx's role in the work is much more enigmatic. She emerges as the oppressed, exploited "Other," incarnating possibilities of communion and love that neither Snowman nor Crake can fully grasp. Yet paradoxically, she also inspires Crake, believes in his therapeutic mission, and assists him (albeit unwittingly) in bringing about the catastrophe. But if she is the abiding mystery at the heart of the story, a mystery I will examine more closely later, he remains its prime agent.

Crake's drastic therapy seeks to remedy the ills of a world in deep distress on almost all levels of description or organization. Three centuries (or more) of technological innovation—effectively unrestrained by qualitative human concerns—have devastated the physical environment, making it less and less viable for more and more species—including humans. The trajectory of environmental degradation coupled with population growth becomes very clear to Crake. He responds to Jimmy's query about his company's new pill, BlyssPluss, a drug that increases libido, protects against all forms of sexually-transmitted diseases—and sterilizes:

> "It's not altruism exactly," said Crake. "More like sink or swim. I've seen the latest confidential Corps demographic reports. As a species we're in deep trouble, worse than anyone's saying. They're afraid to release the stats because people might just give up, but take it from me, we're running out of space-time. Demand for resources has exceeded supply for decades in marginal geo-political areas, hence the famines and droughts; but very soon, demand is going to exceed supply *for everyone*." (295)

The italicized words are telling, for Crake's is a distinctly hierarchical world, divided visibly into the few haves and the many have-nots. Those gifted "numbers" people who can serve their commercialized technological society profitably find refuge behind highly fortified corporation compounds (explicitly likened to castles), while the ungifted or unfortunate find themselves banished to the "pleeblands" (28).[6] Life for the unprotected is brutal, in large part because of the environmental damage produced by precisely the same technology that offers protection to those who can afford it. In the compounds, the elite rattle around like miserable, voyeuristic ghosts, starving in ways they cannot even begin to describe or address—living in various degrees of frustration, anxiety and isolation.[7]

Education provides a good point of entry into this decidedly elitist, technological society. Nothing resembling universal public education survives. Corporation compounds provide their own technical training for the children of their employees. Post-secondary education again functions under corporate auspices, and as with the compound schools themselves, the degree of security (and hence isolation from the pleeblands) is directly proportionate to the institution's educational status.[8] "Numbers" people, those gifted in the sciences and technologies, are systematically (even exclusively) privileged. Exceptionally gifted numbers people, like Crake, find themselves aggressively recruited by these institutions that feed students seamlessly into the elite corporate universe. "Word" people, like Jimmy, however, can succeed only by proving themselves profitable in some manner, usually by helping to produce psychologically manipulative (and misleading) advertising.

Significantly, however, Jimmy prefers the society of his peers within the squalid conditions of his school to the company of Crake's pampered, socially retarded, corporate student associates who lead painfully impoverished lives, and appear incapable of any intimacy lying outside the narrow definitions of their work. Like Jimmy and Crake, they have grown up in a world of emotional impermanence, dictated by corporate whim, a mood the narrator captures well in recounting Crake's appearance in his life: "He was a transfer, the result of some headhunt involving a parental unit: these were frequent among the Compounds. Kids came and went, desks filled and emptied, friendship was always contingent" (71).[9]

A similar emotional dysfunction characterizes relations among adults. Both Crake and Snowman come from broken families, and where relationships survive, they do so only on the basis of cynical mutual exploitation and convenience. Indeed, Jimmy's preferred form of recreation as a new

corporate employee is simultaneously distracting, and being distracted by, as many bored compound wives as possible. None of this gesturing truly touches anyone, though it is telling that they find his considerable linguistic skills appealing, suggesting that on some level, they recognize the nature of their deprivation, the cause of their extraordinary loneliness. Community, even a community of two, requires communication.

That the culture's quantitative ethos and dominant technologies—especially "communications" technologies—militate against authentic community becomes particularly clear in Jimmy's and Crake's relationship, which remains the closest thing to a recognizable friendship that we find in the novel. Again, they do not use these technologies to communicate, so much as to entertain and distract themselves, a point Atwood emphasizes by having them augment their voyeuristic excursions into the Internet with mind-altering substances. Even their preferred Internet information service—the Noodie News—makes no claims to seriousness, for the boys merely enjoy the broadcasters' pretence that "nothing unusual [is] going on," as they "studiously avoided looking at one another's jujubes" (81–82). Such pure entertainment pushes to secure the largest possible market share by appealing to the ever more grotesque violations of moribund convention and taboo.

Computer games provide the boys' other main form of entertainment and formative education. Blood and Roses, a particular favourite, is a trading game, something like Monopoly, in which the Blood side plays with human atrocities—"massacres" and "genocides"—as counters against the human achievements of the Roses side—"artworks, scientific breakthroughs," and so forth, referred to as "[m]onuments to the soul's magnificence" (78). In hindsight, Snowman describes this as a "wicked game" (79), in particular because it allows a quantitative playing off of atrocities against achievements, so many Hiroshimas against a *Divine Comedy* or two; Mozart's music against Pol Pot's Killing Fields. As in history, the bias inclines to the Blood side, though as Snowman points out, the winner inherits a wasteland, very much like the one in which the narrator finds himself (80). Extinctathon, on the other hand, domesticates death through naming it. Snowman describes it as an "interactive biofreak masterlore game" in which players adopt the names of extinct animal species (hence Oryx and Crake), and traffic in the data of biological genocide. The game thus exploits the culture's pervasive anxiety over death by offering players like Crake positions of authority, rather than simply leaving them to wait passively for their own extinction.

Atwood also employs this world of terminal entertainment to symbolize other kinds of privation and loss. Crake has two computers, allowing him and Jimmy to sit back to back, even while playing virtual versions of traditional board games. This image, of two friends facing away from each other, intent upon a two-dimensional visual world that mediates their relationship, captures something of both the forces that violate human communion and the results of that violation. They neither look at, nor talk to, each other. In a sense, they are not present to each other at all, or perhaps virtually not present. We learn linguistic social graces through extensive enculturation, itself necessitated by our physical proximity to each other. That this universal aspect of all culture arises from the brute fact of our embodiment may seem too obvious to mention, but it may also be so obvious that we simply miss it, thus failing to recognize some of the consequences of our technological preoccupation with escaping (or ignoring) physical limitations.[10] The boys *are* attending to a predominantly visual medium (while language has its roots in aurality), one that also privileges and reinforces those skills covered under the novel's rubric of "numbers." Such extended attention produces the likes of Jimmy's step-mother, Ramona, a highly gifted technician, who talks "like a shower-gel babe in an ad. She wasn't stupid. . . . she just didn't want to put her neuron power into long sentences" (25).

Thus the cycle continues. As the quantitative technological society advances, it reduces both our need of, and capacity for, linguistic subtlety, emotional precision and nuance, indeed for all those skills that permit and preserve fulfilling, embodied collective human existence. We eventually "see" the world as technology relentlessly parses it for us. And as we progressively forget the virtues of our former world, we turn more and more to those media that answer to our new skills and ever more urgent (and crude) desires. The novel also suggests that our new technologies rob us of precisely those qualities that help us resist the dehumanizing forces through which we amuse ourselves. Like Orwell and Huxley before her, Atwood laments the loss of a rich linguistic heritage for socio-political and psychological, rather than merely aesthetic, reasons. Snowman, a living repository of rare antiquarian words, long recognized the poverty of his world: "He compiled lists of old words too—words with a precision and suggestiveness that no longer had meaningful application in today's world, or *toady's world*, as [he] deliberately misspelled it on his term papers" (195).[11] But toady to what? And at what price?

The ultimate cost of living in an advanced technological society appar-

ently involves profound divisions within the self, including the fundamental splitting off of the body from the locus of self-consciousness. Snowman reflects on the significance of the Internet's preoccupation with violence and pornography:

> When did the body first set out on its own adventures?. . . It must have got tired of the soul's constant nagging and whining and the anxiety-driven, intellectual web-spinning of the mind, distracting it whenever it was getting its teeth into something juicy or its fingers into something good. It had dumped the other two [mind and soul] back there somewhere . . . while it made a beeline for the topless bars, and it had dumped culture along with them: music and painting and poetry and plays. Sublimation, all of it; nothing but sublimation, according to the body. Why not cut to the chase?
>
> But the body had its own cultural forms. It had its own art. Executions were its tragedies, pornography was its romance. (85)

This passage, of course, inverts the relationship between mind and body, and thus misrepresents both the cause of the division and the appeal of the Internet's grotesque violence and brute sex. First, the separation between body and mind—which arguably began with the Greeks, was articulated most clearly by Descartes, and is prominent in our time—was obviously an intellectual (not somatic) innovation, and perhaps inevitable, given both the predominance of vision over the other senses.[12] Second, the adventures to which the passage refers are not the body's, but rather those of a disembodied, transcendent consciousness desperately seeking immanence, reentry into the ground of its being, reintegration of the self.[13] Thus the Internet is not populated by soulless bodies, but rather by disconsolate ghosts. In the novel, we witness an elite culture of disembodied voyeurs, who can only "experience" the shock of their own reality through ever more extravagant means.

In some sense, these desperate adventures may be seen as quests for legitimate limits, particularly ethical limits, at least for those, like Jimmy's true mother, who sense that ethical convictions cannot be reduced to psychologically-inconvenient biochemical states. She objects to her husband's current research: "'there's research and there's research. What you're doing—this pig brain thing. You're interfering with the building blocks of life. It's immoral. It's . . . sacrilegious'" (57). Others, like Crake, however, recognize neither natural limits nor ethics of any kind. These qualitative categories have no meaning in science's quantitative universe, and Crake's numbers tell him that something must be done. His virtue (and vice) is that he is willing to follow thoughts through to their conclusions, unhindered by questions of

metaphysics or ethics (69). God, for Crake, is simply an excisable neural cluster (157). The new god, of course, wields the genetic scalpel.

Crake's therapeutic approach to the pathologies of his world proves to be tellingly Freudian, a psychoanalytic tradition significantly shaped by the ethos of modernity. He remains clinically detached, despite the unacknowledged personal agony that drives him chronically to scream in dreams. Crake's analysis of our predicament also displays a typical Freudian pessimism.[14] Essentially, the ego must fight to maintain itself against the encroachments of both the instinctual id and the cultural superego, or (under fortunate therapeutic circumstances) to increase the ego's territory. With Freud, Crake (in contrast to many sanguine post-Freudians) recognizes the murderous threat posed by unrestrained instincts. Similarly, he treats high culture as a sublimation of genital urges (168).

The ego itself carries its own dangers. Crake traces the current environmental predicament to our peculiar mode of self-consciousness that allows us to *imagine* our own death at times of physical privation, and thereby encourages us to procreate at precisely the wrong times to achieve a kind of indirect immortality. Thus we find ourselves doomed as a race by hope born of individual desperation (120). Similarly, we repeatedly demonstrate our "cretinous" incapacity to make short-term individual sacrifices to secure long-term collective gains (243).

His evaluation of the cultural superego is likewise distinctly Freudian. All grand cultural narratives—and especially the religious—are simply false, in the sense of foundationless, though they may serve necessary psychological functions, particularly in keeping the id at bay. The "raison d'être" of "crank" religions, according to Crake, is "based on misery, indefinitely deferred gratification, and sexual frustration." (295). He then goes on to argue that "the tide of human desire" would overwhelm these restrictions if given a chance, "as it had done in every large change throughout history" (296). Within a Freudian universe, the best one can hope for, therefore, is to refuse to be taken in by these repressive mythologies, and to negotiate with their demands less neurotically, while expressing the instinctual urges less destructively.

But Crake is a Freudian with the technological resources to change radically what Freud took to be the permanent features of our psychological landscape. Thus, within the confines of his high-security, high-tech complex, he attempts to eliminate the problematic, embattled human ego once and for all, by completely destroying *homo sapiens sapiens*, and by

genetically altering a small remnant—the Crakers—to live in complete instinctual harmony with their environment. The elimination of the human race also solves the environmental crisis at one stroke.

While Atwood obviously shares many of Crake's concerns and treats him with a certain grudging respect, she effectively undercuts, and at times even mocks, the blindly overweening reach of his science. Some of that mockery can be found in the unobliging behavior of his corporation's products, such as the towels that swell up and crawl across the bathroom floor, or the humidity-regulating rocks that occasionally explode, injuring people. Other products are simply abominations, most memorably the brainless "chickens" (more like a cross between a bird and a sea-anemone) that produce a multiple harvest of breasts or legs, allowing the associated fast-food franchise, ChickieNob Nubbins, to undercut the competition. The Crakers themselves, despite their childlike charm, are also extraordinarily comic in some respects. It is hard to take these purring, multi-colored, blue-bottomed, blue-penised, excrement-eating, perimeter-pissing, citrous-scented creatures seriously.

The Crakers' behaviour proves even more problematic for Crake's project. Again, Atwood ensures that we do not miss the telling irony. Crake believes that he has successfully removed their capacity for any form of metaphysical speculation, though he admits that their prototypes consistently frustrated his attempts to eliminate their dreaming and singing. Yet we learn that Snowman has been required to satisfy their relentless curiosity about their origins by telling them sacred stories, religious cosmologies in which Crake and Oryx figure as creative and sustaining deities.

But Atwood's pointed irony goes further. The relationship between Crake, Snowman, and Oryx unmistakably suggests the Christian Trinity whose authority science has effectively displaced. Crake assumes the role of Father, creator of all, triumphant over chaos; Snowman, that of sacrificial Son and immanent Logos (and perhaps also of Gnostic Logos marooned in matter); and Oryx, that of Spirit, omnipresent, "feminine" Paraclete. Though Snowman begins narrating the novel simply as interceding priest, he is eventually promoted into heaven, a development conceived by the Crakers alone, and affirmed during a ceremony in which they attempt to commune with and manipulate him through his effigy. Again, it would seem that the religious (magical) perception of correspondence between the seen and the unseen proves hard to excise. Crake's secular Eden has proven decidedly sacred. The familiar religious patterns stubbornly reassert

themselves; how and why we are not told. But we may be sure that Crake would not know either.

Crake's premeditated murder of Oryx and subsequent "suicide," as well as his decision to leave Snowman as the sole custodian of his precious Crakers, also further undercut his credibility. Why entrust them to the care of someone who embodies precisely those qualities that Crake rejects? His explanation that Jimmy is better with them than he does not convince, for he must recognize that if the Crakers require the guidance of qualitative discourse, so does he. Does he not realize that to secure Snowman's position in his new world is also to guarantee a place for all those things he seeks to eliminate? Killing Oryx also works against his declared interests, for she is arguably more vital to the well-being of the Crakers than Jimmy. Furthermore, in itself, the murder suggests that he is driven by qualitative forces undreamt of in his quantitative philosophy, even though these remain clouded for both him and the reader. We know that Crake loves Oryx, and that he is aware of her relationship with Jimmy. Jealousy and revenge may suggest themselves. Thus we might initially read the murder as his attempt to possess exclusively in death what he cannot in life, and to bind Jimmy to lifelong misery. But we have seen no previous evidence of sexual possessiveness, which Crake, in any case, would likely disdain as atavistic egoism; moreover, he appears genuinely fond of his friend. In the end, Crake simply cannot explain himself, which is inevitable given those vital human qualities that slip through his net of numbers.

Oryx proves even more elusive, both about her relationship with Crake, and indeed about her own life. She refuses (and has effectively been denied the opportunity) to speak of (or for) herself, preferring to deflect her interrogators by addressing the inarticulate urges of their bodies; thus, she both secures herself against penetrating intellectual curiosity and becomes the site of perpetual mystery, a space within which the narrator (and likely Crake himself) "writes" his own sense of the Other. Though she—in herself—escapes his vain attempts to articulate her, we nevertheless learn a great deal about Snowman (and again possibly about Crake).

The provenance of their first decisive encounter with Oryx on HottTotts, "a global sex-trotting site" (89), establishes her (at least in Jimmy's outraged estimation) as the exploited third-world "Other," victim of an imperialistic, commercialized "phallic" gaze. Jimmy's rage is undoubtedly directed against *himself* and his general complicity in the privileged world that has forced Oryx's parents to sell her into sexual slavery. Worse, he knows his

inveterate voyeurism has perpetuated this system in which people are bought and sold like commodities.

The photograph of the seven-year old Oryx (which Jimmy keeps secreted away) clearly haunts him, representing an ethical possibility he both fears and desires.[15] He refers to himself as having been "caught" by her glance that "went right into him and saw him as he truly was" (308), that said, "*I see you watching. I know you. I know what you want*" (91). For the first time, he knows genuine guilt, though complicated by the realization that he is also hopelessly "hooked" by his desire for her (91). The strength of this ambivalent desire suggests associations with the previous losses of both his mother and pet "rakunk," Killer, which his mother "liberated" into the wild upon leaving him and his father for the pleeblands. Significantly, Killer had provided his only comfort, for she always licked and "forgave" him, no matter how "vile" his behavior (60). Jimmy's sin usually involved turning the private trials of his parents' marriage into public entertainment to ingratiate himself with his classmates. But his crimes against his mother were also ideological, given her deep-seated objections to the corporate world, which eventually drove her away from life in the compounds. Oryx, whose gaze combines both the articulate accusations of his mother and the inarticulate bodily forgiveness of Killer (clearly a substitute for his estranged mother), thus offers Jimmy the chance to "choose" himself courageously, to be both known and forgiven. In this sense, she represents the possibility of transformative penance.

While she likely arouses a similar ambivalence in Crake, unlike Jimmy, he refuses to surrender control, maintaining his analytic mastery to the end. In short, he refuses to love, and thereby asserts what Rieff refers to as his Freudian "psychological manhood":

> The analytic capacity demands a rare skill: to entertain multiple perspectives upon oneself, and even upon beloved others. . . . Such conscious fluidity of commitment is not easily acquired. . . . The best one can say for oneself in life is that one has not been taken in, even by that "normal psychosis," love. (51)

Crake's own analysis of "love" resonates closely with Freud's. As Snowman suggests, it is a matter of mastery: "Falling in love, although it resulted in altered body chemistry and was therefore real, was a hormonally induced delusional state, according to him [Crake]. In addition it was humiliating, because it put you at a disadvantage, it gave the love object too much power" (192–93).[16] Finding himself in an embarrassing delusional state with Oryx, Crake systematically asserts his independence by manipulating his

beloved, lying to her, and using her to pass judgement on the planet. He asserts his ultimate mastery by killing her, in a symbolic act "something like" suttee (for it is involuntary on her part), a tribute, as Jimmy correctly notes, to Crake's "truly colossal ego" (321). He refuses the beloved's call to move beyond his objectified scientific self, preferring death—even global death—to the possibility of life shaped in communion with another.

Thus, while *Oryx and Crake* may not offer much by way of substantial hope, it stands as a clear warning of what we must hope to avoid. Science, freed in the novel from all restraints, threatens human survival, even without Crake's radical intervention. But Crake's solution itself captures the ethos of modernity's therapeutic project, an ethos that excludes all former qualitative distinctions or recasts them in quantitative terms. And this numbers world knows only the accountant's bottom line, which leaves everyone at the mercy of the unarticulated (and in any case, quantitatively irrelevant) pathologies driving the "accountant" wielding the most convincing numbers, in this case Crake.

Although the novel is understandably coy about the status of Snowman's sacred stories, it clearly suggests that we cannot do without such tales, not at least, if we wish to remain even marginally human. Thus, whatever solutions we may hope for must come at least partially by way of recovery, recovery of some form of great narrative that reestablishes culture firmly in the *cultus* from which science has torn it. Indeed, taken together, Atwood's two dystopian novels demonstrate that even oppressive metanarratives are preferable to modernity's anti-narrative. Love at least proves possible within the nightmare world of *The Handmaid's Tale* (as it does in *1984*), perhaps even more possible than in the permissive society preceding Gilead (or in the similarly hedonistic technopoly of *Brave New World)*—and certainly more possible than in any world conceived by Crake. It would seem that meaningful suffering remains preferable to mindless pleasure, with the true communion of love (at whatever cost) being most desirable of all, or so we may gather from Atwood's grieving narrators, who have been violently stripped of the possibility of such communion.

In its treatment of the Other, science's discourse proves most destructive, for it acknowledges nothing that escapes its quantification and manipulation. What it cannot possess, it destroys. Snowman's abiding virtue is that he recognizes that his beloved remains forever elusive, beyond his capacity to know or hold in any net of words, let alone in any accountant's ledger. Thus she appears as a seductive trace, long gone in one sense, but at least

testifying to the possibility of communion outside the ego's bound hermeneutical circle. Whether this model points to a less destructive human engagement with our world remains to be seen. If so, it will necessarily involve humility in the face of the Other, a humility, as Rothenberg insists, stemming from our recognition that "Nature, as it surrounds us, eludes the categories by which we judge it" (227). Given such humility we might carve out a home without destroying what we touch—a home, one might add, that is peopled not numbered. We have Atwood to thank for reminding us of our proper place.

NOTES

1 Jean-François Lyotard describes the primary characteristic of the postmodern (in my estimation, "late-modern") mind as "incredulity towards metanarrative" (xxiv). By metanarrative, he means any totalizing "story" that legitimizes the political, economic and social structure from which it emerges (and which in turn depends on it). A metanarrative, in this strict sense, either absorbs elements (differences) that initially resist it or forcefully excludes them. Some, of course, would refuse the distinction between Lyotard's metanarrative and Postman's "great narrative," arguing that all comprehensive narrative equally oppresses difference. Atwood's two dystopias, however, suggest that the distinction has legitimacy.

2 Modernity, an early seventeen-century philosophical development, should not be confused with literary modernism, a late nineteenth- or early twentieth-century movement.

3 Significantly, Descartes regarded the mechanical watch as the ideal metaphor for biological life, a fact Atwood may allude to in her association of watches with both Crake and the man who initially purchases Oryx. See Lewis Mumford 85.

4 Karl Stern's *The Flight from Woman* contains a very instructive chapter on Descartes, toward the end of which he writes: "[We] encounter in Cartesian rationalism a pure *masculinization of thought.* There is nothing childlike left in man's gaze. The hand of Wisdom, *Sophia*, the maternal, is rejected, and a proud intellect lays claim to omnipotence" (104–05). Crake's murder of his beloved Oryx amounts to precisely such a rejection.

5 Snowman's name before the catastrophe is Jimmy. I will use "Snowman" either to identify him in his capacity as narrator or to help establish the temporal context.

6 The novel alludes to the vital connection between technology and capitalism, but does not explore the relationship in detail, its principal interests lying elsewhere. Numbers, of course, provide the common language; and base self-interest, divorced from qualitative restraints, the driving force. Georg Simmel's comment that "money by its very nature becomes the most perfect representative of a cognitive tendency of modern science as a whole—the reduction of qualitative determinations to quantitative ones" (267) provides a useful point of entry. But to treat the relationship properly would require a separate study.

7 Speaking of his former self, the narrator observes: "He'd grown up in walled spaces, and then he had become one. He had shut things out" (184).

8 See Cary Nelson and Stephen Watt for a disturbing account of the degree to which

higher education in the United States has already become an adjunct to corporate interests (5–10; 84–98). Indeed, their entire work testifies to a systematic privileging of numbers people that makes Atwood's cautionary tale all too relevant.

9 The use of the word "unit" here is telling. Both Jacques Ellul and Lewis Mumford, among many others, relentlessly detail the ways in which our mechanized technological society forces us to conform to the shape of the machine, thereby robbing us of human individuality. In a sense, we become just another interchangeable part within the system. Although this, too, is a relatively commonplace observation, Ellul in particular deserves attention given his claim that *all* transactions within the technological society inevitably conform to the dictates of technical efficiency *as an end in itself*. In his grim assessment, there is no possibility of remaining human within the current system.

10 Ken Hillis provides a very useful history of virtual reality (including its philosophical pedigree and assumptions), as well as a sobering analysis of the social and psychological consequences of our flight from embodiment.

11 Snowman's antecedents, in this sense, are Huxley's Shakespearean Savage and Orwell's Winston.

12 See Drew Leder's analysis of the link between vision and "the absent body" (117–119), which draws heavily on Hans Jonas (135–56).

13 Walker Percy, in *Lost in the Cosmos*, is particularly lucid on the plight of the transcendent artist/scientist vis à vis the appeal of pornography and the danger of suicide. Significantly, he traces the alienation to a feature of "triadic" linguistic consciousness whereby namers cannot name themselves.

14 The summary of Freud's position that follows owes a great deal to Philip Rieff's *The Triumph of the Therapeutic*. See 1–107.

15 Kierkegaard defines the anxiety generated by the possibility of ethical freedom (and thus true selfhood) as "a *sympathetic antipathy* and an *antipathetic sympathy*" (42). In Kierkegaard's estimation, to attain selfhood, one must choose oneself in the full knowledge of one's failings, an act requiring great faith in the mercy of the Other. Jimmy's ambivalent fascination with Oryx suggests that he struggles with a similar possibility.

16 Compare Rieff's comment: "Indeed, the therapy of all therapies, the secret of all secrets, the interpretation of all interpretations, in Freud, is not to attach oneself exclusively or too passionately to any one particular meaning, or object" (59).

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K.V. Skene

Blow, winds, and crack your cheeks! rage! blow!
William Shakespeare

Out of the north wind,

a voice you almost remember—
spit-soft vowels, introverted
consonants curl the tongue.
You taste the strawberry ices
of childhood, bite through
the city-wired synapses in your brain
that blur the murmurs of the multitude
and listen closer and closer
to the whole human zoo—singing
while white skulls rattle
and roll around their last days,
while bellies ache
with unfulfilled potential
they drone dank lullabies
and lie awake
humming the animal that furs their bones
and you're blown
back. Before your throat was cut. Back
to the first time
you opened your mouth,
howled
at the crumbling moon.

Complicated Lives

Caroline Adderson
Sitting Practice. Thomas Allen $32.95

Pauline Holdstock
Beyond Measure. Cormorant $22.95

Miriam Toews
A Complicated Kindness. Alfred A. Knopf $29.95

Reviewed by Barbara Pell

In *Sitting Practice*, Caroline Adderson has employed every West Coast love story cliché and attached them to a double gimmick: spinal cord injury and buddhism. Consequently, despite her competent prose, careful research, and clever symbolism, we don't ultimately believe in her characters or care about their problems and solutions.

Iliana (a repressed, rebellious victim of Fraser Valley religion) marries Ross, a fat, feckless Vancouver movie caterer, who is more interested in the wedding dinner (sacrificial lamb) and his twelve former girlfriends than in his bride. Three weeks later, he causes a fluke car accident in which she becomes a paraplegic. Desperately contrite, he sells his business, moves to Duncan, and becomes a Vancouver Island stereotype: slim, vegetarian bicyclist, organic-café-owner (he moves from Reel Food to Real Food), and Buddhist convert. In discovering that "pleasure and pain were the same," he is doing "sitting practice" like Iliana, who learns to bake bread and cope courageously with life in a wheelchair. However, Ross' guilt-induced celibacy drives Iliana into an affair with the local (juvenile) handyman. After Ross finds out, she confesses that sex with Stevie was "good, but it wasn't fun." So they make love and, presumably, a baby and live happily ever after. Meanwhile, Ross' twin, Bonnie—incestuously obsessed with her brother and suicidally depressed with her love life—joins them with her precocious four-year-old (Ross' surrogate son). After much self-centred angst, she survives yet another infatuation-with-a-man-who-turns-out-to-be-gay and finds meaning and purpose in fashion counselling for frumpy female Islanders.

In *Beyond Measure*, Pauline Holdstock explores the relationship between human creativity and human cruelty in a time and place where they were most pronounced: Renaissance Italy. The relentless pursuit of artistic knowledge and pleasure is justified by the artist's imitation of God's creation: "Only in the experience can Nature be known. Only in Art can she be revealed. . . . For the duty of man is to know God. And to know God, man has only to look to his Creation." But these ambitions "to dissect or to enhance" Nature in Art beyond human measure and moral responsibility cause the terrible destruction of innocent lives.

Mid-sixteenth-century Florence is the setting for a group of artists including Paolo Pallavincino, who secretly dissects hanged corpses and live animals to research their anatomy; Matteo Tassi, a brilliant sculptor and drunken lecher; and Sofonisba Fabroni, a female artist whose skill rivals her father's but is subjugated to the patriarchy. They and the buffoon Allesandro,

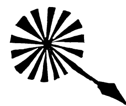
whose superstitious devices to win Sofonisba from Matteo drive much of the plot, are connected by the mysterious, tragic slave-girl Chiara (from chiaroscuro, because of her mottled skin pigmentation). Shunned as a scapegoat for everyone's misfortunes, she is passed from one character to another until Sofonisba betrays her in a jealous practical joke against Matteo. The result for various characters is humiliation, rape, trial, torture, threatened hanging, and final exile. Meanwhile, two of the extravagant festival creations of these artists, in celebration of the corrupt, dissolute powers of Church and State, result in the deaths of innocent servants. The "happy ending" finds the artists chastened for their *hubris*, having learned that "beauty" is "nothing more—or less—than love."

Holdstock's novel, which deals with important, complex aesthetic and moral themes, unfortunately often reads like a Renaissance art manual cum historical "bodice-ripper." There is too much technical detail and too many characters (all unsympathetic except for Chiara, a mute and passive victim) whose frenetic plot permutations are motivated purely by greed and power. The "love" that redeems the brief Epilogue seems very much an afterthought in Holdstock's universe.

You don't have to be Mennonite to find *A Complicated Kindness* hilarious, but I am assured that it helps so much that my Mennonite friends couldn't put the book down, except when laughing so hard that they dropped it. My initial reaction was to resist yet another "rebellious-adolescent-dysfunctional-family-blame-it-all-on-religion novel" (see Adderson, above), but Miriam Toews has transcended all the clichés to create a wise, brave, decent, and tremendously funny protagonist who recognizes the "complicated kindness" of a faith that preaches and often practises love within a sometimes rigid, repressive, and destructive church: "We're Mennonites. As far as I know, we are the most embarrassing sub-sect of people to belong to if you're a teenager. . . . Imagine the least well-adjusted kid in school starting a breakaway clique of people whose manifesto includes a ban on the media, dancing, smoking, temperate climates, movies, drinking, rock'n'roll, having sex for fun, swimming, make-up, jewellery, playing pool, going to cities, or staying up past nine' o'clock. . . . Thanks a lot, Menno."

Nomi Nickel lives with her father, Ray, in East Village, Manitoba, a small Mennonite town ruled by the pastor, her narrow-minded, judgemental Uncle Hans (a.k.a. The Mouth). "Half of [her] family, the better-looking half, is missing"—her vivacious mother Trudie, and older sister, Natasha. Her gentle, bewildered father teaches grade six, goes to church, communicates with Nomi through notes, and begins to sell all of the household furniture to exorcise his past. Nomi rebels against grade 12 (and its graduation reward: a career in the local chicken abattoir), smokes pot, has sex with Travis (who dumps her), and tries to discover why her mother left. In the bittersweet ending Ray does for Nomi what Trudie did for him: a sacrifice of love to overcome a religion of guilt and condemnation expressed in "shunning."

Many readers will know that Toews, who grew up in Steinbach, Manitoba, wrote a memoir of her father's manic depressive life and tragic suicide, *Swing Low: A Life.* While she says that she created Nomi to help her deal with his loss, partly caused by "the damage that fundamentalism can do," she also respects the complicated kindness of a "faith that stopped him from being afraid" at the end of his life. With narrative brilliance and deep compassion, she has written a wise and wonderful novel.



D'un monde à l'autre

Anne-Marie Alonzo
...et la nuit. Trois $18.00

Jovette Marchessault
La Pérégrin chérubinique. Leméac $10.95

R.J. Berg
D'en haut. Triptyque $17.00

Comptes rendus par Mélanie Collado

Long récit poétique plutôt que recueil de poèmes, *...et la nuit* d'Anne-Marie Alonzo dit la douleur de perdre sa mère. Entre prose et poésie, les phrases s'enchaînent en de courts fragments. Les mots et les sons donnent au texte des rythmes éphémères qu'aucune ponctuation ne fige. À chaque page, un paragraphe composé de phrases sans fin dit la fin d'une existence, la fin d'un monde. L'écriture d'Anne-Marie Alonzo semble s'extirper des conventions linguistiques pour libérer les mots et dire l'indicible: le manque, le désespoir et le deuil de l'être contraint de poursuivre sa vie. Par la création poétique, la fille amputée de sa mère tente de survivre; elle crie son désarroi, célèbre la vie de celle qui n'est plus, évoque ses derniers jours et la fait revivre autrement: "écrire pour graver tout lieu comme toute pierre garder l'image vivante de cette vie où enfant comme adulte je peux dire ravie *j'ai vu.*" Hommage à la mère, le poème est aussi pour la fille une façon de réapprendre à vivre et de sortir de la nuit dans laquelle elle s'est trouvée plongée. Une autre vie l'attend, d'autres feront auprès d'elle les gestes de sa mère, ils prendront la relève sans combler le vide.

En intégrant à plusieurs reprises des paroles de Barbara à son propre discours, Alonzo évoque, sans la nommer, la complainte d'une autre femme "orpheline au-delà de quarante ans"; deux voix se mêlent ainsi dans le poème pour affronter la douleur de la perte. Les trois parties de *...et la nuit* retracent le parcours d'un être en deuil: la détresse, la mémoire et la vie qui continue en dépit du vide. Avec *...et la nuit,* Anne-Marie Alonzo nous livre de très beaux textes où s'expriment aussi bien la souffrance individuelle que la fragilité d'une existence ne menant qu'à la mort.

Dans *La Pérégrin chérubinique* de Jovette Marchessault on retrouve à nouveau l'individu face à la destinée humaine et à l'inconnu. Ce récit riche en références aux écritures saintes se déroule en quatre temps, quatre chapitres pour révéler l'annonciation, l'espoir, la révélation et l'élévation. L'ensemble est une sorte de vision-invocation où la narratrice proclame avec exaltation sa découverte de l'invisible et du divin. Ses pérégrinations entraînent les lecteurs dans un univers mystico-cosmique où la Pérégrin raconte le réveil de son âme et chante sa délivrance du monde matérialiste. Un monde dans lequel les êtres humains s'enlisent jusqu'à en oublier de penser à la possibilité du mystère et de la grâce. Célébrant "la Mère de tous les vivants," la Pérégrin fustige les dieux et les déesses de la modernité ainsi que les faux prophètes, tel ce prêtre qui ne croit pas aux vrais miracles et prône la résignation. Bien qu'elle cite de nombreux textes de tradition judéo-chrétienne, la Pérégrin ne prêche pas un retour aux institutions religieuses traditionnelles. Le divin qu'elle évoque est, au contraire, beaucoup plus universel, le féminin y a sa place, et le monopole de l'"homme-dieu" est dénoncé: "je suis celle qui marche devant vous et vous ouvre toutes les hypocrisies une à une: je suis l'indignation."

Pour la Pérégrin la révélation se fait par le biais de la maladie et de la découverte de l'humilité. Malade, elle voit la futilité de ses préoccupations antérieures, l'espoir de la régénération et la joie de s'élever au-dessus d'elle-même pour se fondre dans une lumière céleste. L'esprit d'analyse caractéristique du monde moderne et la lutte du "je" pour résister à l'anonymat lui apparaissent soudain comme des entraves à l'avènement

d'un monde nouveau. Son voyage mystique est une insurrection. Fantasme? Hallucination? Harangue prophétique pour que l'amour l'emporte dans l'histoire humaine? Avec *La Pérégrin chérubinique*, Jovette Marchessault procède à l'exploration d'une nouvelle dimension, poursuivant ainsi la reconquête féminine de l'imaginaire.

Comme le suggère le titre, *D'en haut* parle de cimes. L'ouvrage est un mince recueil de trente-quatre textes de longueur très variable, le plus court se limitant à une ligne. Ces textes portent sur des sujets différents et sont réunis sans ordre apparent; l'opposition du haut et du bas, sous ses diverses formes, est le fil conducteur qui les relie entre eux. L'ensemble peut être décrit comme un recueil d'opinions personnelles où le narrateur, un universitaire américain, juge sans obligeance ses contemporains. Des commentaires philosophiques et littéraires côtoient des comptes rendus de propos entendus dans des lieux publics ou au cours de conversations privées, ainsi que des réflexions sur des champions du cyclisme et de la politique. Il y a des essais, des dialogues et des extraits de journal intime qui, bien que datés, ne semblent être que le projet d'une écriture. L'un des textes est un petit lexique où l'auteur fait l'inventaire de la petitesse humaine au moyen de "traductions". Citons à titre d'exemple: "je le trouve un peu hautain" qui signifie dans la version corrigée: "il m'est supérieur." Soucieux de révéler les intentions qu'il perçoit derrière les mots prononcés, le narrateur paraît régler des comptes avec une société qui le déçoit. Dans son discours où l'aigreur l'emporte parfois sur l'ironie, il affiche sans pudeur sa conviction d'être au-dessus de la médiocrité dénoncée; à ceux qui l'accuseraient de se vanter d'être supérieur, il répond: "La drôle d'idée. Me vanter? Me comparer! Je suis bien trop arrogant pour y songer."

Dès la préface signée "Airy Delavigne", l'auteur de *D'en haut* est présenté comme un être quelque peu mystérieux, un intellectuel exigeant fuyant le monde après avoir laissé à un collègue le soin de publier des pages que de rares initiés seraient aptes à comprendre. Du haut plateau où il se retranche, il fait penser à un misanthrope que son propre dégoût lie à la société qu'il rejette, et il semble encore loin du détachement auquel il aspire. En dépit de l'amertume et de l'arrogance qui le caractérisent, cet ouvrage a le mérite de provoquer une réflexion sur la nature humaine à partir de multiples situations; paradoxalement, il peut ainsi toucher des lecteurs très divers.

The Art of Subtitling

Denys Arcand
Les Invasions barbares. Boréal. $17.95

Reviewed by Mark Harris

Offhand, this is the only book I can think of where the very quality of its manufacture could conceivably be held against it. This is because the screenplay for Denys Arcand's long-awaited follow up to *Le Déclin de l'empire américain* appeared in a handsome trade paperback format immediately before the film was screened at Cannes and entered commercial distribution in Quebec. Since the text in question won the top screenwriting prize at the aforesaid French film festival, skeptics might wonder if proofread, printed volumes with colour photographs should be permitted to compete on equal terms with computer printouts and the other forms of rough and ready publishing that are favoured by such events.

In other words, could clever packaging have had more to do with Arcand's success than genuine merit? Might not there have been a more deserving Bulgarian manuscript that got lost under the smudges of its tattered manuscript pages?

Well, anything is possible, I suppose, but a close reading of *Les Invasions barbares* will

make such an eventuality seem extremely unlikely. Even better than its predecessor, this is unquestionably the best-written script in Canadian history. Indeed, the level of readerly pleasure that Arcand provides is equal to the virtual joy furnished by Marcel Pagnol in *Fanny* and *La Femme du boulanger*. It is that rarest of rare things, a screenplay that also works as literature.

Invasions marks the third peak in Arcand's career as a director. The first occurred in 1986 with *Le Déclin*, to be followed three years later by *Jésus de Montréal. La Maudite galette,* the filmmaker's first fiction feature, made on the rebound from his documentary *On est au coton* débâcle, had the bad luck to go up against Martin Scorsese's *Mean Streets* at Cannes so, despite uniformly excellent reviews, that gritty polar was not fated to make the NFB veteran's auteurish "bones." Two other politically-charged mid-1970s crime stories, *Gina* and *Réjeanne Padovani*, pleased few beyond the cognoscenti, and for many years Arcand was fated to flounder between acerbic documentaries (*Le Confort et l'indifférence*) and fictional *films à commandes* (*Le Crime d'Ovide Plouffe*).

In his early films, Arcand rarely took more than co-writing credit, usually assigning dialogue responsibilities to Jacques Benoît, a novelist who, like most writers of his generation, believed in *joual* as a political tool. There's nothing Parisian about the language in *La Maudite galette*, even if the plot wouldn't have seemed out of place in a Jules Dassin or Jean-Pierre Melville thriller. Pierre Vallières and Franz Fanon were the tutelary deities looking down on these political passion plays draped in bitterly self-mocking melodramatic drag.

Of course, as a trained historian, Arcand was never quite as caught up in the *Zeitgeist* as were artists with less awareness of the past. "There's nothing new under the sun" and "history always repeats itself, first as tragedy, then as farce" are adages that have haunted the director for the past 40 years.

In a 1971 interview, Arcand stated, *"J'étudie la décadence et la chute de l'Empire romain. C'est une période de l'histoire qui semble bien près de la nôtre. . . . Si l'occasion m'en est donnée, ce qui est loin d'être sûr, je voudrais bientôt faire un film, dans le style de Suétone, sur la corruption inouie, la bêtise et la dépravation de ceux qui nous dominent."*

In essence, this desire would result 15 years later in *Le Déclin de l'empire américain*, a philosophical farce in which a group of well-fed academics talk about sex and, to a much lesser degree, history in a comfortable country house on Lac Memphrémagog (once an Anglo hangout, but no longer; *plus ça change. . .*). Affluence has drawn the teeth of outrage, just as great teaching benefits have obviated the desire to march in protest against any form of imperial excess.

Les Invasions barbares unfolds in a very different Quebec, a place where academic comfort has been replaced by the threadbare realities of a financially-starved medicare system. Fifty-two year old Rémy is dying of an unnamed disease, probably brain cancer. Friends old and new try to cheer him up, but the emotional energy is heavily freighted along the father/son axis. As a monogamous market trader living in London, the former citadel of *les têtes carrées*, Sébastien is the very opposite of his left wing, libidinous old man, but personal differences tend to evaporate in the presence of death. As always, the Grim Reaper does a great job of standing ducks in a row.

Rémy's final relationships with women are very different from his formerly physical exchanges. His connection to Nathalie, the daughter of a colleague/lover, is initially predicated on their joint need for smack (she's a junkie—as well as a proofreader for Boréal!—and he needs painkillers stronger than the ones the hospital is prepared to supply). Increasingly, though, her unflinching

observations help Rémy come to terms with his present, as in the following passage:

> NATHALIE: *En fait, c'est pas votre vie actuelle que vous voulez pas quitter, c'est votre vie d'autrefois.*
> RÉMY: *Peut-être.*
> NATHALIE: *Elle est déjà morte, cette vie-là.*

In some ways his relationship with Sister Constance Lazure is even more touching. He never tires of taking the piss out of what she holds sacred, exclaiming *"Que votre Pie XII soit resté assis sur son cul dans son Vatican doré pendant qu'on emmenait Primo Levi à Auschwitz, c'est pas dommage, c'est pas regrettable, c'est abject! C'est immonde."* But this rant cannot disguise his growing affection for a good-hearted, occasionally sly nun who wants to spare him the pains of the hell in which she knows he does not believe.

As a matter of fact, *Les Invasions barbares* shows as much sympathy for religious people as it does disdain for official dogmas. This is perhaps most apparent in the poignant scene when the Archbishop's representative unsuccessfully tries to sell stockpiled religious art to Gaëlle, Sébastien's London-based French fiancée. In the midst of all these useless mementos, the priest sighs, *"Vous savez, ici, autrefois, tout le monde était catholique, comme en Espagne ou en Irlande . . . Et à un moment très précis, en fait pendant l'année 1966, les églises se sont brusquement vidées, en quelques mois. Un phénomène très étrange que personne n'a jamais pu expliquer."*

The Church might have been the giant that Rémy—and by extension, Arcand—battled all his life, but in defeat, on the edge of oblivion, it becomes as vulnerably human as everything else.

Explanations: that's something everyone wants in *Les Invasions barbares.* How can Rémy die without having written anything that will bear the weight of passing years? What kind of world is it where his apolitical son and his Gallic fiancée can both find wealth and happiness *parmi les vrais Anglais*, and where private wealth must be used to break through bankrupt bureaucratic inertia? Why didn't Louise re-marry after divorcing Rémy? Why can't Diane get Nathalie off smack, but Sébastien can? And so on.

There are dozens of characters in this script, and all are drawn with Balzacian exactitude. This is not only the best Canadian *script* of this or any year; it's also the best Canadian book to appear in either official language since Marie-Claire Blais' *Soifs.*

It deserves to be read, in other words, even if you've already seen the film.

Bloodlines, Stories, and Invented Identities

Jeannette C. Armstrong and Lally Grauer, eds.
Native Poetry in Canada: A Contemporary Anthology. Broadview $26.95

Kateri Akiwenzie-Damm and Josie Douglas, eds.
Skins: Contemporary Indigenous Writing. Kegedonce n.p.

Reviewed by Cheryl Suzack

In *Skins*, a selection of short stories and chapter excerpts by Indigenous writers from Canada, the United States, Australia and New Zealand, Kateri Akiwenzie-Damm and Josie Douglas have compiled writings of intense sophistication and exquisite beauty that illuminate the diverse range of cultural, linguistic, and artistic traditions emerging under the "pan-indigenous." Such a retreat from the normative category of the nation-state to pose questions of identity and narration marks a significant turning point in the development of writing by First Nations' communities, a departure that attends to shared characteristics that focus on "homelands," "histories of

colonization," "genocide," "displacement," and "survival," and still recognizes the politics of representation and self-expression attendant upon differently-constituted First Nations' territories. What connects these writers is not only an attention to the properties of cultural location that emerge through colonial policies of removal and assimilation (King's "Borders," Frankland's "Who Took the Children Away," Ihimaera's "Life As It Really Is"), but also an awareness of the literary strategies deployed by indigenous authors to transcend national boundaries. In this regard, Maria Campbell's depiction of the errant thief who disrupts the entrenched moral conventions of his village to facilitate the "shotgun wedding" of aged protagonists ("Dah Teef") shares much in common with Alootook Ipellie's emasculating shaman who restores social harmony by avenging himself on his wife's lover ("Love Triangle"). The metaphysical qualities of these stories foreground their didactic function, yet they also suggest grounds for continuity and comparison that eschew the national designations that organize individual sections. Akiwenzie-Damm and Douglas have thus anticipated, even as they have remained dependent upon, alternative categories of reading for situating thematic similarities through metaphysical (Campbell, Ipellie, Bruchac, Laughton, Wright, Komene), communal (Van Camp, Blaeser, Hogan, Grace, Grace-Smith), historical/political (Alexie, Pascoe, Frankland), and kinship associations (King, Erdrich, Morgan, Lucashenko). These categories are especially welcome for teachers of indigenous literature seeking alternative conceptual arrangements that do not necessarily default to national identity or settler-colony comparative frameworks. An especially noteworthy contribution by Australian writer Alexis Wright extends even further the accomplishments of this work by describing with breathtaking sophistication the multilayeredness of the colonial worlding of the "water people" according to personal, cultural, historical, and spiritual remakings. *Skins* thus contributes an exceptional array of contemporary indigenous writing that, as the editors claim, "destroy[s] any limitations, stereoptypes or preconceived ideas others might place on what Indigenous writing ought to be."

By comparison with the pan-indigenous approach to contemporary Native writing favoured by Akiwenzie-Damm and Douglas, Jeannette Armstrong and Lally Grauer's anthology *Native Poetry in Canada* focuses on the development of Native poetry in Canada from the centennial celebrations of the 1960s to the establishment of Native publishing houses in the early 1980s, to the critical acclaim and award-winning recognition of this poetry through 2000. Beginning with the important early work of Chief Dan George, whose "poetic, oratorical performance-based style" has been much overlooked in literary criticism, the anthology tracks the evolving poetic vision offered by 29 of Canada's best known and newly anthologized literary voices. Included are selections from established writers such as Rita Joe, Marie Annharte Baker, Emma LaRocque, Duke Redbird, Jeannette Armstrong, Lee Maracle, and Armand Garnett Ruffo, whose poetry illuminates the proximity of land, spirit, and historical associations discernible through oral and written modes of expression. Reclaimed voices such as Wayne Keon, Gordon Williams, Lenore Keeshig-Tobias, and Skyros Bruce/Mahara Allbrett, whose writings appeared initially in literary review and little magazines, articulate powerful political engagements and aesthetic acts of cultural revivalism inspired by the "Indian movement" of the 1970s and 1980s. Selections from Joanne Arnott, Gregory Scofield, Connie Fife, Kateri Akiwenzie-Damm, and Randy Lundy affirm the sense of continuity and

indebtedness in a later generation of writers speaking back to their literary predecessors. This sense of obligation and respect emerges most notably in Gregory Scofield's "Not All Halfbreed Mothers," a poem dedicated to "Mom, Maria," which playfully abandons expectations of cultural sameness by articulating alternative forms of generational inheritance. Inevitably, however, the writing collected here eludes such confining categorizations as it discloses each poet's desire to subvert, expose, and empower through artistic expression. As Marilyn Dumont notes in the preface to her poetry selections, speaking of writing as a dialectical relationship between figurative language and poetic invention: "It must be a dance of the intellect and passion, both emotional and spiritual, and it must be uncompromising in its manifestation."

Armstrong and Grauer have arranged a collection of works of extraordinary breadth in their thematic treatment of cultural, political, and spiritual subjects. The brief selection of writing by Sarain Stump is especially moving given the symbolic beauty of his work and the poignancy of his untimely death. Instructors will value the accompanying biographical information, the substantial selections from each poet's work, and the authors' prefatory comments, all of which situate this collection as an ideal text for the university classroom.

W/here Are We Now

Jackie Assayag and Veronique Benei, eds.
At Home in Diaspora: South Asian Scholars and the West. Indiana UP $27.62

Reviewed by Ranjini Mendis

"How does one make language associated with elitist and Western domination speak in other tongues? How do we critique positions that we also inhabit?" "Can we recollect without celebrating, recall without avenging? Why are national histories invariably encrusted in the lapidary mode?" These are some of the questions discussed in this collection of personal narratives which admit to an "unsettling of the ground we stand upon" (Prakash) and ambivalence regarding "home." Straddling the traditional and the global, and at times cloaking a longing for "homeland" in denial and justification, these experiential and self-reflexive essays are guarded in their revelations of psychic displacement and geopolitical ambiguity.

Arjun Appadurai and Partha Chatterjee, early émigrés, occupy a primary place in this volume, and provide a historical overview of area studies and personal location, while Dipesh Chakrabarty reminds us of the history of colonial education in India. Presenjit Duara seems to argue against subjectivity and biographical placing, while Gyan Prakash examines the implications of an Indian-born academic living in the West writing about the East, realizing "how ineluctably Indian was my westernization," and Sanjay Subrahmanyam mutters sardonically, "the question facing the 'post-colonial studies' field today is to a large extent simply: how to Americanise Ashis Nandy?" Somewhat moderate in comparison with Ramachandran Guha, who valorizes the white scholars and criticizes the eastern academics as elitist, is Subrahmanyam who admits considerable ambiguity in his feelings about emigrant scholars. Like Guha, he sees a "subaltern aristocracy" ruling over academic discourse, but reflects on lack of resources, accessibility, and dissemination of knowledge from centres such as Colombo, Kottayam, or Calcutta.

In contrast, Sudipta Kaviraj posits the view that curiosity-based research is Western in origin and he advises European academics to point out the weaknesses of Indian academics "without the pleasant and defensive dishonesty produced by politeness," viz."that [we] should step out

of 'the nationalist history of nationalism.'" An interesting contrast is an essay by Urvashi Butalia, founder of the publishing house Kali for Women, who, in examining the problems of access to and acceptance by Western distributors, highlights the biases not only of race and nationality but of gender even within the Indian publishing industry. Purnima Mankekar's excellent essay on feminism and South Asian studies balances the collection somewhat, but overall this collection is a selective disclosure in its silence on the emotional toll of living in the diaspora and experiences in the academy. Moreover, the considerable technological advances that influence research and publishing in recent years would have added an essential dimension of connectivity.

Canadians Abroad

Jennifer Barclay and Amy Logan, eds.
AWOL: Tales for Travel-Inspired Minds. Vintage Canada $27.00

Reviewed by Alexandra Peat

AWOL: Tales for Travel-Inspired Minds, a collection of non-fiction travel stories is both impressively diverse and consistently entertaining. The 34 stories travel to various locations across Australia, Africa, Europe, Asia, and the Americas, and place such established Canadian authors as Camilla Gibb and Mark Jarman among an eclectic group of Canadian artists, poets, writers and journalists. Each account remains, for the most part, highly individualistic, and the best stories exploit the deeply personal nature of travel in order to offer self-conscious insight into the author's experiences and the politics of the journey. In "Close Encounters of the Euro-Trash Kind," Deirdre Kelly despairs of her fellow expatriate who walks around Paris with a "canon camera [held] protectively against one eye," but it soon becomes clear that Kelly, who has come to Paris in search of adventure and hedonism, is just as much of a tourist as her prim roommate, even if she sightsees people rather than monuments. As Jonathan Culler has pointed out, "getting off the beaten track is the most beaten track of all," and the story "How I learned to Love Scotch" provides an ironic account of the traveller's desire to "avoid the places tourists go." Aryun Basu travels around India trying to find isolated spots, but is, nonetheless, steadfastly attached to his guidebook and dismayed to be stranded in a town that merits less than a page in the *Lonely Planet*.

The stories are consistently well-written, but frequently the authors do not stray far enough away from easy clichés in their descriptions of the foreign locations that they encounter. Laurie Gough's Thailand is, for example, a land of "rich, brown, beautiful faces," "glorious smiles," and a disturbingly seamy underworld. David Manicom bravely declares that "the only thing more dangerous than indulging in ethnocultural generalizations is ignoring them." Nonetheless, his own story provides a narrow conception of culture, as he juxtaposes the young "Canadian brain" with the ancient brain of the Chinese. Manicorn presents China as a rather static place that is either "full of history or empty of time," and, moreover, consistently positions the West and western history as a reference point for Chinese history.

The title phrase "Absent Without Leave" suggests how travel can be a form of illicit escape that responds as much to the constraints of home as to the lure of abroad. This admittedly catchy and, no doubt, flippantly intended phrase has an added irony when used to define a collection of Canadian travel stories: Canadians often have the leisure and the means to travel freely throughout our increasingly globalized world, and these lightweight stories depict travel as a luxury or a lifestyle choice

rather than a political necessity. The editors rightly note that "Canadian travel writing remains under-promoted," and yet, despite the opening declaration that "Canadians are always looking beyond their borders," only a few of the stories offer any insight into what it means to be a Canadian travelling abroad. The stories do, however, provide a strong sense of the very diversity of Canadians and the inherently expansive nature of Canadian national identity. Rabindranath Maharaj's trip to Trinidad is also a return home, while in Jonathan Bennett's Australian journey childhood memories intermingle with present day experience, and Nikki Barrett's trip to South Africa forces her to acknowledge that she is "no longer an African who moved to Canada [but] a Canadian transient in Africa." AWOL claims to "bring home stories that nourish the soul," but in its best moments, this collection suggests how writing can offer more than a literary snapshot of a foreign place and can, in fact, make us question how and why a sense of national identity can transform or be transformed by the experience of travel.

Deconstructing the Jesuits

Carole Blackburn
Harvest of Souls: The Jesuit Missions and Colonialism in North America, 1632-1650. McGill-Queen's UP $27.95

Reviewed by Constance Cartmill

Carole Blackburn's study of the Jesuit *Relations* provides a lively and insightful analysis of an important chapter in Canadian history in which the French missionaries helped to lay the groundwork for the most intense period of colonization in New France. The year 1632 marks the arrival of the Jesuits and the beginning of a series of reports sent to their superiors back home, recounting their efforts to convert the Native peoples they encountered. Although the *Relations* are infused with a kind of heroic optimism—indeed, as Marie-Christine Pioffet demonstrated in her book *La Tentation de l'épopée dans les Relations des jésuites*, they may be studied as epic literature—Blackburn argues sensibly that they should not be taken at face value. Her deconstructionist reading of the texts is apparent, as she attempts to "dismantle and decentre" that which is presented as self-evident. That is not to say, however, that Blackburn intends to "perpetuate a dichotomous image of the colonizers and the colonized." Rather, through her careful reading of the texts, Blackburn highlights the dialogical aspects of these early encounters of Europeans and Aboriginals, in order to show how each side appropriated form and meaning from the other. A case in point: the Huron who participated in the torture and killing of two French priests in 1649 were avenging their people who had been weakened by the Jesuit mission, and the pouring of boiling water over the priests' heads was intended as a parody of baptism. The Jesuits, on the other hand, interpreted such events as victories for the Church, all part of "the unfolding of a Christian drama between good and evil."

The "Blood of the Martyrs" belongs to a chain of agrarian metaphors employed by the authors of the *Relations* to represent their mission. By "sowing" their blood, the Jesuits were planting the seeds of Christianity in North America, which they described as a dark wilderness controlled by Satan. Just as the landscape was uncultivated, so too were the Aboriginal peoples "spiritually untended"; their souls would be lost unless the Jesuits succeeded in bringing them the "domesticating power" of the Word of God—hence the title of this study, "harvest of souls".

That the Aboriginal peoples did not view the presence of the Jesuits in quite the same way is hardly surprising, yet the numerous

examples of what Blackburn characterizes as the "competition for control over the interpretation of events" make for fascinating reading. The diseases brought to North America, which decimated large segments of the Native population, were quite simply interpreted by the Jesuits as divine punishment for resistance to their mission. Aboriginals, however, saw the spread of disease as proof of the Jesuits' sorcery: according to one popular rumour, the cause was transubstantiation (whereby bread changes into the body of Christ), since the mysterious diseases were thought to emanate from a corpse which the Jesuits had brought from France (small wonder that the priests were seen as such strange, antisocial creatures).

As Catholics, the Jesuits promoted a universalistic view of the world—there is only one truth and it applies to everyone, regardless of cultural and geographic differences. Yet the Jesuits were known for making compromises and for accommodating those they were trying to convert, a trait that led to the accusation of moral laxity. Aboriginals were appalled by the corporal punishment and public humiliation then in practice in much of Europe, a reaction viewed by the Jesuits as proof of the Aboriginals' lawlessness. However, the Jesuits, part of whose mission was to be "all things to all people," quickly adapted to Native customs when they agreed to participate in the practice of gift giving as reparation, for crimes such as murder, in lieu of individual punishment.

Blackburn's contribution to colonial discourse studies is the careful distinction between the Jesuit missions and later forms of colonialism largely inspired by the enlightenment thinkers of the eighteenth century. For the French missionaries, the Aboriginals' "savagery" was emblematic of the universal fate of humankind, which was the result of sin—this was a more "inclusive" form of colonialism than later forms, in which secular notions of underdevelopment, evolution, and race tended to exclude Aboriginals as participants in the official version of History. Blackburn makes the case, as others have, that racism has been one of the ugly by products of "progress."

Stop Making Sense

Marilyn Bowering
The Alchemy of Happiness. Porcepic $13.95

Sue MacLeod
That Singing You Hear At The Edges. Signature $14.95

Alison Pick
Question And Answer. Polestar $18.95

Jacqueline Turner
Careful. ECW Press $16.95

Reviewed by Sonnet L'Abbé

Taking its logic from the world of dream, Marilyn Bowering's *Alchemy of Happiness* offers us fragmented visions and random leaps of imagination; her poems "listen fully" to the strange associations of our subconscious. In verse with the darkness of a children's fable and a stubborn, cheerful refusal to explain, Bowering asks *"Is the Divine Presence inside or outside the world?"*

Rather than following the usual poetic urge to elevate the mundane by way of conscious metaphor, Bowering makes an interesting formal choice by using a plain language to nail the ethereality of dream to the page:

> he saw a green roadster, and his two
> friends;
> the car slid past the window, dressed in
> clouds;
>
> It began with a cat in the desert
> bringing the sun in its mouth

Her section entitled "Glen Lochay Diary" exposes memory as made of the same fragmented, extralogical stuff as dream. At the end of the series the reader is left with only an accumulation of images and recollections to conjure the breakdown of relationships

that inhabited that time and Irish landscape. Yet an uncanny lucidity is given to the voice of "The Pink City," in which the speaker enters a psychiatric facility. The reader discovers that the realist vision of the "insane" voice is more lucid than the dreams of the sane.

Bowering questions the elevated language and interpretive stance we use to put distance between ourselves and our gods. Here gods show up to wash sweaters and a pair socks, a woman gives her coat to a ghost, the dead buy groceries and live in cities of flesh-coloured coffins. Sometimes the voice itself sounds conspicuously like God. And as the border between the real and the surreal is blurry, so Bowering's poems seem to fall across the boundary between secular inspiration and spiritual channeling. To appreciate this work, readers must be willing to let go of meanings, let the words wash through their minds perhaps more than once, then see if they leave, like our most compelling dreams do, a tingling residue in their consciousness.

Alison Pick's voice reminds me of binding twine: stong and practical, yet flexible and spun out. This voice knows loss, yet urges moving onward from the spur of painful memory. Pick shares with Bowering the sense that God is everywhere, in the banal and everyday, particularly inhabiting our domestic spaces, or "in her slippers" in the "mossy log cabin of heart." In a monastery, Pick notices how

> ...For every monk praying
> another one fixes the wiring, the fuse,
> kneels at the sink reverently coaxing a torrent
> of worship from pipes.

In this debut, Pick deliberately situates herself as an inheritor of a Canadian and international poetic tradition, showing mentors and peers that she has done her homework. Her grandmotherly calmness, and almost oracular tone, show reverence for the quiet cadences of contemporary Canadian lyricists like Jan Zwicky and Janice Kulyk-Keefer. However, some editorial choices, like the deliberate juxtaposition of poems on a grandmother's death with still lives of fruit, feel awkward and inorganic.

The poems in the first section of the book are Pick's own poetic "answers" to questions posed elsewhere by writers she admires. These are not unequivocal, and often the relation of the question to the answer is deliciously oblique. Pick exposes the fallacy of the closed, one-word, or yes-or-no answer. By forcing a binary relation between strange elements, she shows our own desires for reliable knowledge and predictable cause and effect cannot be finally satisfied, and this theme resonates throughout this fine first collection:

> The time we cross
> out of innocence becomes
> our meaning of *before* and *after*
> or maybe there are
> many events, blind spots
> to be checked.

In *That Singing You Hear at the Edges*, Sue MacLeod's motherly voice embraces humans' shared vulnerabilities, especially our hidden desires to be loved. Often using the second person in an account of a personal anecdote, MacLeod makes her moments of melancholy ours:

> It doesn't matter which roof
> you light on. All points
> lead back to your home
> once removed,
> your mother's, not quite yours.

Love in this book is not a salve, not a spark or peak, but the overriding condition in which we dwell, always holding within it the tang of separation, the not-quite meeting, the sense of gap for which love is the bridge. Part of this vision is manifest in the many poems invoking images of lost loved ones, whether that be an ex-husband, a mother in her girlhood, a deceased

grandmother, or a cousin who wandered off a cliff.

These poems are humble in a spiritual sense. Not concerned with a dazzling show of intellect or formal innovation, this collection may strike some as in need of editing, or dismissed as too domestic by others hoping for literary allusion. MacLeod's style is a little cherishing for my taste, her cadences a little sing-songy for me to completely trust her version of reality:

> They dropped
> in the last lump
> of sugar, they dropped in the last puff
> of woodsmoke & their dirty
> bins of coal. They dropped in their world
> war one medals, & felt
> the turning over
> of their fathers, far
> across the sea

The tone of the poems hovers between a desire to mark themselves as capital-P Poetry and an urge to use the vernacular to capture women's vivid domestic life. Only when MacLeod makes obvious attempts to work with form do I feel her voice loosens into its natural resonance. Still, MacLeod has won national prizes, so there is clearly a large appetite for her approach. I think of prize quilts and bumbleberry pies.

Jacqueline Turner works at the other end of the formal spectrum in her second book, *Careful.* She offers blocks, columns, or smatterings of text that resist easy comprehension, lining up words and phrase fragments on the page and daring the reader to make sense of them. Moods and themes are established by tenuous associations between words; concrete images and syntactically correct sentences are conspicuously absent. Here is an entire poem called "Home" that is a good example of Turner's style:

> standard and full bursts
> even energy crazy
> camera of laughter
> raft a disaster clutter
> careful reactions
> beyond garlic and
> here faithful or less

While just as cryptic as Bowering's, the tone of Turner's work is harsher, more taunting. One imagines Turner's rat-a-tat litanies recited in just one breath, spit out in an unrelenting machine gun fire of words. In "Edge," though poems are "identified" by one-word titles that precede a body of text, only that layout suggests where one poem ends and another begins. In "Junk," familiar and unfamiliar quotes are woven into the poems without referring back to any original sources, in a mockery of the authority we bestow on the quotation mark. For me, these staccato pieces are more satisfying when Turner riffs on something concrete, like hockey, or traction, or a distinct personality, rather than attempting to "revere abstraction to a fine rapine."

Only in the section "Heart," an affecting meditation on grief, does Turner really let the reader in. Here her web-like distribution of phrases on the page is a welcome respite from the mind-numbing blocks of text, and she holds images long enough for us to register them, and feel.

An Unlikely Hero

Albert Braz
The False Traitor: Louis Riel in Canadian Culture. U of Toronto P $27.95

Reviewed by Clint Evans

As Albert Braz argues in *The False Traitor,* it is difficult to fathom how Louis Riel has emerged as an "Anglo-Canadian hero." Riel was, after all, first and foremost a Métis nationalist. His sense of nationalism was broad enough to accommodate an association with Quebec, the "Mother Colony," and he was enough of a political realist to see the need for protective alliances with countries such as the United States and France. Canada, however, was basically an anathema to Riel and he consistently

rejected the notion of forging an alliance with a British-dominated country that seemed to threaten all that he held dear.

The delicious irony of Riel the anti-Canadian Métis patriot and condemned "traitor" being transformed into the ultimate Canadian hero provides the main theme of Braz's study. He skilfully develops the theme through an analysis of Canadian literary texts, beginning with the writings of Riel himself. Most of these texts can be described as "historical fiction," and as Braz observes in his introduction, they often have less to say about Riel "than about their authors and their specific social reality." Braz explores this thesis through the use of discourse analysis. His approach is distinctly postmodern, but apart from some opening references to Michel Foucault and Edward Said, he eschews theory in favour of application and his focus never deviates from the story of Riel's century-long literary transformation from traitor to hero.

Braz sets the stage for his analysis of literary trends with a chapter on Riel, his writings, and the historical context. He then moves on to discuss the predominantly Anglo Canadian view of Riel as a traitor—a view that was popular in the decades immediately following Riel's 1885 execution. Chapter Three explores Riel's contemporaneous face in Quebec: Riel the French-Canadian martyr. Reflections of the heated ethnic and religious rivalries that dominated Canadian politics at the time, both views gradually lost favour as social conditions changed and Riel's actions lost their immediacy. By the early 1900s, Riel had been all but forgotten by Canadian writers, and he languished in obscurity until being resurrected as a cultural mediator in the aftermath of World War II.

In Chapter Four, Braz credits John Coulter's 1950 play, *Riel*, with having rekindled interest in the Métis nationalist and initiating what has since become the "Riel industry." Primarily an Anglo Canadian phenomenon, the Riel industry began by transforming Riel into a transitional character or a "go-between" who successfully bridged the gap between indigenous and Euro Canadian culture. This positive construction of Riel and his activities remained popular until the 1970s, by which time writers were finding it increasingly difficult to celebrate Canadian history through a person that was "either the country's sworn enemy or a constant reminder of its racism toward the First Nations." As Braz explains in his final two chapters, Canadian poets, playwrights, and novelists have since chosen to focus more on Riel as a sociopolitical victim of Confederation or, as exemplified by the work of Rudy Wiebe, as a western Canadian "protest leader" and visionary who exhibited characteristics of both the mystic and the madman.

After exploring the many faces of Louis Riel, Braz concludes that "Euro-Canadians" have embraced Riel in an effort to "indiginize themselves"; to forge a connection between themselves, the land, and its original inhabitants. In doing so, however, they have been forced to downplay Riel's essential "Métisness" and spirited opposition to the Confederation exercise. Braz closes his study by restating his thesis that the "most significant aspects of representations of Riel. . . . are important not so much because of what they tell us about Riel but because of what they reveal about Euro-Canada, the dominant sector of Canadian society that for over a century has been able to create essentially the Riel it wishes—or needs—to see."

While Braz's thesis is compelling, his rigid adherence to discourse analysis means that he does little to connect the changing literary faces of Riel to specific changes in the authors' "social reality." Readers, in other words, are largely left in the dark as to the nature of external social factors that prompted reappraisals of Riel. Braz also could have done more to alert readers to

the fact that his thesis is neither new nor particularly original. Historians, for example, have long been conscious of the way in which a writer's social reality shapes their representation of historical characters and events. This is true for historians in general as well as for Riel specialists such as George Stanley. Nearly 20 years ago, Stanley described Riel as "the patriotic myth of Canada" and asked: "In our efforts to reconcile the past with the present, do we reveal the truth or create more illusions?" Stanley also anticipated most of Riel's "faces" as identified by Braz.

These criticisms aside, Braz's book is a first-rate piece of work that explores literary representations of Riel in far greater depth than any previous study. His book is clearly and carefully crafted, and a "must read" for anyone interested in the almost bizarre process by which Euro Canadians obtained a most unlikely hero.

Poet on Point

Robert Bringhurst

Ursa Major. Gaspereau $21.95

Reviewed by Brian Henderson

For the world itself can be called a myth in that bodies and things appear in it, while souls and spirits are hidden in it. —Sallustius

What would we be if the gods weren't always meddling with us? Wouldn't things be plainer, simpler? As it is, even animals can be gods if you know how to look. Robert Bringhurst is one who looks with language and with type. *Ursa Major* is a handsome book in a conservative way—it won the 2003 Alcuin Design award for poetry—but it is poetry in a rather special context. The work was commissioned by New Dance Horizons and first performed on March 11, 2002, but in this form is the trace, a kind of Labanotation, for the voices of its performance. But it's lonely without the music and the movement that would have accompanied it. There should really be a DVD to bring it to life.

The work is a masque for dancing in five scenes with an excellent contextualizing and perceptive Afterword (as Part III of the book) by Peter Sanger. It retells two myths of the bear constellations using a Cree story, as told by Kâ-kîsikâw-pîhtokêw to Leonard Bloomfield in 1925, and Ovid's metamorphosis. Both stories are spoken in various polyphonic ways by the children of the original tellers, so *Ursa* is partly about ownership and inheritance. It's also about the transformations of desire—betrayal, bitterness, loss, passion, yearning—so central to myths (transformations of gods and humans to animals and vice versa and living creatures to shiny bits of firmament).

Bringhurst uses both translations and original languages to lend a radical hybridity to the text: Latin, Greek, Cree in both romanized and syllabic forms and English. Part I displays the voices consecutively as a form of playscript for ease of reading, while Part II is a voice map (mapping is a favourite Bringhurst device) which braids the voices as they would intertwine with each other in the polyphony of performance. This is the core of the book and the most visually appealing: four languages, three alphabets, three typefaces (plus italic), two colours of ink (plus two screens of them) pattern the page. Interesting musical devices are also used such as retrograde recitation where words are spoken in reverse order from their first appearance. However, none of the sonic or visual effects owes anything to the wild and heady experiments in these areas by Dada or Concrete poets; everything feels quite calculated, linear, almost constrained.

Not that there are not beautiful places and passages, but affect is too dependent on the performance that has vanished, only leaving its trace (albeit re-imagined), its appearance, behind. Only the type appears on point; the dance has vanished; the

performance space has been transformed. But so must a book of the performance be.

What, for instance, is poetry doing anyway, and Bringhurst's poetry at its best, as it scatters ash and spark onto the page of sky, if not appearance catching as it vanishes, and these vanishing stories of the bear and of transformation remind us that

> Humans can eat and sleep with the gods,
> and bear their children, Still, they can be
> just a breath away
> from being rocks and trees and wolves
> and deer
> and bears and stars and darkness. Just a
> breath away
> from deathlessness, and just a breath away
> from all that darkness in between the stars.

Some Americas

Barbara Buchenau and Annette Paatz, eds.
Do the Americas Have a Common Literary History? Peter Lang $104.89

Reviewed by Albert Braz

At least since Herbert Bolton gave his Presidential Address at the 1932 annual meeting of the American Historical Association, held that year in Toronto, there has been an awareness that national studies in the Western Hemisphere are limiting and that scholars must concern themselves with what Bolton termed "The Epic of Greater America." This trend seems to be growing recently, illustrated by the appearance of journals such as *Comparative American Studies* and Gustavo Pérez Firmat's edited collection of essays, *Do the Americas Have a Common Literature?* However, in practice, much ambiguity remains about what really constitutes the Americas, as is evident in the tendency to ignore significant portions of the continent. This is as true of Pérez Firmat's book as of Buchenau and Paatz's, especially when it comes to two of the larger countries, Canada and Brazil.

Do the Americas Have a Common Literary History? is the work of the University of Göttingen Project, with most papers presented originally at a September 1999 conference on inter-American studies at the German university. It contains over 30 essays dealing with such topics as creolization and national identity, gaucho literature, Whitman and Hegel, Borges' translations of US writers, Faulkner and Latin America, Gérard Bessette and Claude Simon, and Quebec literary history and internationalism. The collection's central focus, though, is on how the American literatures written in European languages are shaped by the fact that they are all produced in a language developed elsewhere with an older literature of its own. As Armin Paul Frank writes in the opening essay, "Towards a Model of an International History of American Literatures," every single one of these literatures lacks a crucial component: "a language of one's own." Most contributions examine intercultural or intertextual links, underlining Frank's contention that "[a]ll national literatures are international," and "interliterary." This internationalism is certainly reflected in the eight essays on Quebec literature, including Maurice Lemire's "Le conflit des codes littéraires entre Montréal et Paris." Lemire, who ponders if there could be "autres centres émetteurs de codes" in the Francophone world besides Paris, identifies three main phases in the literary relations between France and Quebec. First, in the 1840s, Quebec writers essayed to give their "pays" a "littérature distincte." Then, early in the twentieth century, there was a further attempt at the "canadianisation de la littérature," a regionalist movement countered by the "parisianistes (ou exotistes)." Finally, in the 1960s, the proponents of joual effected a "rupture radicale avec la language française." Interestingly, Lemire concludes that this 20-year long "crise d'adolescence" is over and that today's

Quebec writers "respectent pour la plupart le français normé, moins pour répondre aux codes parisiens, que par souci d'universalisme. Avec la mondialisation, ils sentent le besoin d'être lus par tous les francophones."

Do the Americas Have a Common Literary History? is simultaneously encyclopaedic and limited in its range. Despite its title, and its 700 pages, it deals basically only with the United States, Spanish America, and Quebec. Moreover, while it has space for essays on New Zealand poetry and Algerian literature in French, it does not devote a single piece to English Canadian literature. Brazilian literature does not fare much better, meriting a lone essay—in Spanish! Still, notwithstanding my reservations about aspects of this collection, I cannot help but notice that it is the product of the Göttingen Project in Inter-American Literary Historiography. How many Canadian universities, especially in the English-speaking parts of the country, have such an institute?

Hardheaded Women

Anne Cameron
Hardscratch Row. Harbour P $24.95
Sarah's Children. Harbour P $21.95

Reviewed by Tanis MacDonald

British Columbia author Anne Cameron published *Sarah's Children* and *Hardscratch Row* in 2001 and 2002 respectively, so it is no surprise that the books display a striking similarity of style. Though strong on character, both novels resist a typical narrative arc in favour of an episodic structure. It is tempting to read the books as regional picaresques, but Cameron's tough-talking women demonstrate a stubborn honesty that makes them more pragmatic than roguish. The plot movement of *Hardscratch Row* and *Sarah's Children* is as familiar as the structure of television drama, in which action is employed to reveal a character's foibles rather than to drive a plot. Cameron's emphasis on the work of productive living rather than messy human dynamics has a certain feminist vigour, and the characters' impatience with philosophy and bad behaviour yields some whip-smart dialogue. In these books, every female character speaks her mind with aplomb and wit.

Both books focus on the family as refuge in a harsh world, but Cameron's romantic familial ideal is sharpened by her no-nonsense concept of a matriarchy. Her hardworking, hard-loving female characters are often paralleled by more vulnerable male characters, in an interesting but problematic reversal that proposes more questions than answers about men's place in the matriarchy. In *Sarah's Children*, two male characters are all but defined by their gratitude for their female lovers, while female family members mock a boorish ex-husband into submission. In *Hardscratch Row*, the supernatural figure of the Squeyanx acts as a pain monitor for two male characters who are traumatized by addiction and violence. Though the cover blurb calls Cameron's Squeyanx "part ghost, part trickster, part Greek chorus," the creature has neither the mischievous fatalism of the trickster nor the social sanction of the Greek chorus. The Squeyanx is the literal "spirit of the family" that only the disaffected but sensitized men can perceive as their sisters and mothers remake the world around them.

Cameron's rural British Columbia communities feature families that make a function out of what might have been dysfunction, but she sidesteps some of the issues into which she purports to delve. In *Hardscratch Row*, a boy's rescue from ritual abuse is mentioned but never addressed. In *Sarah's Children*, references to an older man's European war crimes are oddly oblique. The weight of these issues drags

on Cameron's matriarchal paradise, as the boy's fear and the man's guilt become just two of the problems that Cameron's women solve through inclusion in the extended family, implying that whether one is a victim or a perpetrator, no crime is so heinous that it cannot be wiped out of memory by familial acceptance. Cameron's gift for unpretentious dialogue would be welcome in discussing difficult topics within the context of a family dynamic; a practical matriarchal paradise must include a contemplation of the intractable legacy of the patriarchy, as well as an amelioration of its pain.

Restoring Carr

Emily Carr

Klee Wyck. Douglas & McIntyre $27.95

Reviewed by Gabriele Helms

Given the many publications on Emily Carr and her status as one of Canada's "cultural icons," another edition of Carr's best-known book, *Klee Wyck*, may at first glance seem unnecessary. However, Douglas & McIntyre's handsome new edition proves the exact opposite; in fact, it is hard to believe that it has taken over 50 years for the commonly known, but abridged version of *Klee Wyck* to be replaced by an edition that returns to the text of the original 1941 publication. As archivist Kathryn Bridge points out in the indispensable and informative introduction, over 2,300 words were removed when Clarke, Irwin & Company published an "educational edition" of *Klee Wyck* as part of their "Canadian Classics" series in 1951. This version became the basis for all subsequent editions.

Carr's stories in *Klee Wyck* focus on people she met in the many Native villages she visited in British Columbia during the first three decades of the twentieth century when she was painting. The significance of restoring the text of *Klee Wyck* to its full length lies in the ways the omissions may have shaped our views not just of Carr, but also of the relations between First Nations people and non-Natives on the West Coast. The cuts in the 1951 edition included any openly critical views that missionaries held of First Nations people as well as any unflattering comments about the missionaries themselves. Even descriptions of their physical appearance and personal habits were omitted; presumably they were considered inappropriate for young school children. Moreover, detailed information about First Nations burial customs were cut in a 500-word passage at the end of "Ucluelet," and "Martha's Joey," a story about a Native woman selflessly raising a white boy, who is eventually taken away from her by the authorities, was omitted altogether.

Bridge's introduction invites readers to think about the socio-historical circumstances that may have led to the censored edition of 1951; it also raises questions about the ethics of editing a writer's work after her death. More than that, however, this new edition encourages a reassessment of Carr's relations with First Nations people. While such reconsideration may not simply invalidate the charge that Carr appropriated First Nations images and stories for her own benefit, the complete text of *Klee Wyck* shows that Carr took a passionate stance on topics such as the role of missionaries and the residential school system.

Douglas & McIntyre is to be applauded for this republication of the original version of *Klee Wyck*, which also includes Carr's dedication to Sophie Frank, colour reproductions of the four paintings that appeared in the first edition, and the two restored forewords that Ira Dilworth, Carr's mentor, friend, and literary executor after her death in 1945, contributed to the 1941 and 1951 editions. When we read *Klee Wyck* alongside Susan Crean's recently published

Opposite Contraries, a collection of previously unpublished writings from Carr's correspondence, journals, and notebooks, we may be surprised by how much there still is to learn about Emily Carr.

Feminists and Methods

Louise Chappell
Gendering Government: Feminist Engagement with the State in Australia and Canada. UBC Press $80.00

Deborah Keahey and Deborah Schnitzer
The Madwoman in the Academy: 43 Women Boldly Take on the Ivory Tower. U of Calgary P $24.95

Reviewed by Catherine Dauvergne

For an Australian and a Canadian, and a feminist academic with a brief history as a bureaucrat, reading these two books side by side has been intensely personal. All the more so because what the two have in common is immense breadth and depth—with each subsequent chapter or excerpt revealing more than I had imagined would be there.

In *Gendering Government*, Louise Chappell examines how feminist engagement with the state has differed in Australia and Canada. Her explanation for why this is so challenges the stock story of strategic choice, adding the ingredients of institutional form and political opportunity structures.

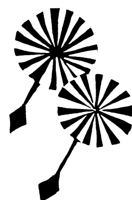
Chappell is a political scientist and I suspect that some of the more nuanced theoretical distinctions she delivers are most resonant for others in that discipline. I appreciated her broad approach to the state—considering it a multi-layered and multi-faceted entity, even when framing the analysis through neo-institutionalism. She offers analysis of the formation of late twentieth century feminist politics, of electoral politics, bureaucracies, courts, federal institutions, and NGOs. Her claim that this is the first work to offer this level of analysis is a strong one: she considers a range of institutions and time frames for both countries. It is a rich and full picture.

I am not well positioned to say whether her presentation gives enough detail for those who do not know some of this narrative already but I suspect it is. For me, this work filled in parts of the story which had taken place while I was living the opposite half of it, and the result was deeply satisfying.

Madwoman in the Academy is a collection that no woman working in a university should be without. Although it is Canadian in focus, the experiences it presents are replicated everywhere. The contributions are arranged in five "movements" and I confess to reading the book randomly, dipping in and out of it over the space of a month. I will keep going back to it for solace and affirmation, as an antidote to hubris.

Contributions to *Madwoman in the Academy* come from women in all corners of the institution—staff, students, junior and senior scholars all have a voice. Short segments lend themselves well to reading while waiting for the cello lesson to end, soccer practice to begin, or during a lecture or department meeting, as the need arises.

The only thing that troubles me about this collection is the "madness" of its title, disturbing when what it contains is a record of rational reflection and careful choice, what Louise Chappell might call strategic response to the opportunity structure of an institution. These books differ most in their methodology. But each method is vital to a feminist rationality.



Vigour and Voice

Sally Chivers
From Old Woman to Older Women: Contemporary Culture and Women's Narratives. Ohio State UP $48.00

Lynn C. Miller, Jacqueline Taylor and M. Heather Carver, editors
Voices Made Flesh: Performing Women's Autobiography. U of Wisconsin P $35.50

Reviewed by Tanis MacDonald

These two volumes, an academic study of literary narratives of women's aging and a collection of solo scripts and essays on the intersections of autobiography with performance, are united in their concern for social and cultural constructions of female selfhood. Both texts explore the constitution of female identity as it is formed by conceptions of the body and placement or displacement within a community.

In *Voices Made Flesh*, the editors have made every effort to include a variety of theoretical and dramatic perspectives, and the collection stands out for its thoughtful pursuit of the issues that surround performative auto/biography in theatre and feminist studies. On occasion, the difficulties of taking the performative self as text are made manifest in the awkward movement of some of these scripts, but the task of distinguishing the cultural expectations of a performative self from a "real" self is constantly under debate throughout the collection. Miller's "Gertrude Stein Never Enough" explores the expectations inherent in performing Stein's highly mythologized personality and the possibilities for presenting a version of Stein that history has not honoured. The value of creative anachronism is considered in Carolyn Gage's compelling "The Last Reading of Charlotte Cushman" when the nineteenth-century actress discusses her lesbian relationships with her audience. Eileen C. Cherry's "Mule of the World: The Embodiment of Mary Church Terrell" offers a courageous discussion of passing narratives in the story of a black American woman's European travels.

A number of these works, Miller's and Cherry's among them, make conscious attempts to discuss the performer's autobiographical contribution to these historical figures. Stacey Wolf's "Desire in Evidence," about the attempt to find a lesbian trace in Mary Martin's career, problematizes the tension between performer and historical woman; can one female performer's autobiographical desire enhance the history of another female performer? This question remains pertinent to the collection's second half, which explores autobiographical performance as a self-conscious construction. Jacqueline Taylor's "On Being an Exemplary Lesbian: My Life as a Role Model" is a deft mix of autobiography, performance and queer theory that demonstrates her panache as a "performative lesbian" and as a scholar. Linda Park-Fuller's autopathography, "A Clean Breast of It," answers tough questions about cancer while transcending the standard "survivor story" and Joni L. Jones' "sista docta" is a smart and incisive performance that works to include audience reaction to issues of racism and sexism in the academy. Two excellent essays by Carol Hanbery MacKay and Elizabeth Bell bracket these sections and provide perspective on the metadramatics and mentorship of performance. *Voices Made Flesh* is an erudite discussion of gender, sexuality, and female performativity in and out of the academy.

Chivers' *From Old Woman to Older Women* presents a treatise on women's literary narratives of aging, with an emphasis on reframing cultural understanding and misconceptions about aging as debilitation. Working with fiction by Margaret Laurence, Hiromi Goto, Joan Barfoot, Edna Alford, and Simone de Beauvoir, Chivers focuses upon the elision of aging in current

"body criticism" and medical discourses. Her determination of "constructive aging" narrows the distinction between positive and negative aspects of aging, and challenges the stereotype of aging women as always vulnerable and needy. An analysis of the CBC's coverage of the Quebec ice storm is particularly revealing as an example of the social construction of old women as powerless. Chivers' use of fictional narrative to challenge the notion of old age as a time of physical and mental decline is the strength of this book. Within her emphasis upon Canadian work, the absence of texts by Anne Cameron and Alice Munro seems glaring, but Chivers has more than enough material to support her assertion that old age reforms social values through new friendships and community ties. Her final chapter glosses Cynthia Scott's film *The Company of Strangers*, in which discussions about strategies of representation and the performance of self echo the concerns of *Voices Made Flesh*. Despite their differing genres, the two books support each other in the end, as Chivers' argument for literary and cultural attention to the final "forbidden" body, that of the aging woman, is writ large in *Voices Made Flesh* through the impassioned historical voices of vital older women: Cushman, Stein, Georgia O'Keefe, Anaïs Nin—still mentors, still performative.

Savouring Jazz

George Elliott Clarke
Québécité. Gaspereau P $18.95

Reviewed by Katherine McLeod

Québécité premiered at The Guelph Jazz Festival in 2003 with the libretto by Governor General's Award-winning poet George Elliott Clarke and music by Juno Award-winning jazz pianist-composer D.D. Jackson. Divided into three cantos, the libretto reads as a melodic poem, rich with cultural allusions and hyphenated poetics, or what Clarke refers to as a "gumbo concoction." The plot involves two mixed-race couples—Colette Chan and Malcolm States, Laxmi Bharati and Ovide Rimbaud—whose love is tested by volatile racial politics among themselves, their families, and Québécois society. With music that thoughtfully foregrounds a hearing of cultural difference—which raises an interesting question of how reading the libretto differs from hearing Jackson's music—this jazz opera boldly ends with a rainbow-coloured Quebec flag descending to the sound of "*Vive notre québécité*," an inclusive vision of both Quebec and Canada that inspires the libretto's postlude, "'You know you break no laws by dreaming': George Elliott Clarke's *Québécité*," written by Artistic Director of The Guelph Jazz Festival, Ajay Heble.

Prefacing the libretto, Clarke writes: "*Québécité* is an Absinthe-Amarula-Brandy-Champagne-Chartreuse-Chicouti-Cognac-Grappa-Palm-Port-Pastis-Rum-Saki-Sangria-Scotch-Tequila-Vodka opera, one coloured spicily with notes of ebony, dark-cherry, India indigo ink, and bronze-beige the shade of papyrus or bamboo." Inspired by this synesthetic metaphor, I find myself reading the libretto itself as a performance. It performs through self-reflexion upon its own medium, as seen from the frontispiece: "*Québécité*: A Jazz

Fantasia in Three Cantos," juxtaposing the aural with the constraints of written poetic form. A seemingly un-singable word, "polyhexamethyleneudiapide" (which Haydain Neale as Ovide proved to be indeed singable) explores the possibilities and limitations of performance; moreover, characters sing what has been politically unspeakable, such as in Colette's 'talking back' to Canada's history of Chinese railroad workers: "Africa is far from China, yes / but their histories harmonize: On its 'yellow niggers,' Canada a head tax incised, / but bid my slaving ancestors / lay down its rail ties." But what are the implications of poeticizing politics? The opening scene of *Québécité* foregrounds this very question in Laxmi's skepticism regarding Ovide's language: "You've invited me to savour jazz," says Laxmi to Ovide, but then she asks, "Why taint it with saccharine hints, / such sick cadence of decadence?" Although Clarke's luxurious word-jazz takes the risk of containing "saccharine hints," through this risk he invites readers to engage with language itself as a performative medium, one that desires to be meaningful while singing, lushly.

Fred Cogswell

Fred Cogswell
Ghosts. Borealis P $15.95
Dried Flowers. Borealis P $15.95
Ellipse 68 Special Fred Cogswell Issue (Autumn, 2002)

Reviewed by Christopher Levenson

Along with A.J.M. Smith, Robert Weaver, Louis Dudek, Robert Fulford, George Woodcock, Robin Skelton, John Robert Colombo, Ralph Gustafson, and Gary Geddes, Fred Cogswell belongs to that select band of twentieth-century Canadian writers who practised in several areas of literature and became "men of letters." (It is interesting and sad that, outside publishing, with the likes of Louise Dennys, Ellen Seligman, and Sandra Martin, one cannot compile a comparable list of Canadian *women* of letters.) So, simply as acknowledgement of his prominence as editor, publisher, translator and all-round poetry activist, this tribute volume, timed for his 85th birthday, was well-merited, even overdue. That it was produced by *Ellipse*, to my knowledge still the only literary journal that mediates between our two founding literatures, is again totally fitting.

That said, the resulting issue seems in large part haphazard and over-hastily assembled, as evidenced by at least 20 typos. Thus, despite the contributions of, say, Hermengilde Chiasson, whose French-language essay, "Fred Cogswell, Poète, Traducteur, Éditeur, Ami des Poètes" is by far the most substantial, one comes away disappointed at a missed opportunity. This is not to deny that there remains here much to interest the student of the Maritime and of the wider Canadian literary scene.

It is valuable, for instance, to have the editor Joanne Elder's essay, with the same title as Chiasson's, commenting on Cogswell's techniques as a translator. The act of translating is in itself usually a good exercise for any poet, but only if it forces him or her into new arrangements of cadence and imagery. So, after noting his characteristic use of such hyphenated constructions as "sea-wind's howl" or "fear-memory," Elder comments that what is interesting for translators is that "some of his choices stand out as being against normal or natural usage in favour of 'pure' poetry, the sound, the rhythm, and rhyme. In other words, denotation and even semantics play a much less crucial role in the development of his poetry than does the music of the language." The results are debateable. On the one hand, it takes no very advanced knowledge of French to appreciate the dexterity, even at times the genius, of Cogswell's and Elder's versions

of, say, Chiasson's "Achille devant Shediac assiegé" (Achilles at the siege of Shediac): in other poems, however, such as "Medusa at the Kacho" I suspect that the effect of close, full rhymes in English differs markedly from its French original. Not surprisingly, Cogswell is at his most persuasive in poems such as Leonard Forest's "Saisons antérieures," where rhyme and regular cadence is not an issue. Conversely, the unpredictable cadences of Leblanc's "Hiver" (Winter) sometimes work and at others read like doggerel, especially when they result in such inversions as "the island will a packaged tombstone be," while even his rendering of Emile Nelligan can lead to a line like "with all my soul long thoughts I fain would have Music?" Then, too, roughly half of the two volumes of his own poetry under review also consists of translations, though, unlike those in *Ellipse*, the originals here, mostly drawn from the dusty plush of French romanticism (De Musset, Lamartine, Leconte de Lisle) are not given on the facing page so that comparative evaluation is more difficult.

As for the original poetry in *Ghosts* and *Dried Flowers* (were these titles deliberately self-ironic?) there is, alas, little that is striking or memorable. Like many of the leading Canadian poets of previous generations—F.R. Scott, Souster, Purdy or Layton for example—Cogswell wrote, or at least published, far too much: it is as if Canadian poetry had to establish itself overnight by sheer bulk as well as quality, and those new to Cogswell's work would be better advised to read the 1982 Guernica edition of his *Selected Poems*. For there is no sense of necessity in these poems. Whatever the reality of the poet's actual life, in the poems themselves nothing comes across as hard-won, but relapses into homely wisdom presented in a variety of traditional lyric forms. No one would dispute Cogswell's facility, and at times felicity, in the ballad, the sestina, the sonnet or the villanelle, but they fail to convey any contemporary awareness, at least in the last two forms, as if Berryman and Lowell, Empson and Dylan Thomas had never existed. And for every success, such as the first poem in *Dried Flowers*, "To tongue's surprise" (a sonnet), two are marred by a strained quality in the rhyme or by frequent inversions. The same holds true for the villanelle, "The life I lived" with its sense of fill-in syllables. Likewise in *Ghosts*—these two volumes are interchangeable—we find in "Air"

> Its life is nearly massless in its flight
> And squanders in its own and unwilled way
> Colours which worldly artists draw delight
> From as they fashion weeds along the way.

Here the clumsily unidiomatic displacement of stress onto "from" clearly exists only to reinforce regularity of rhyme and scansion. All too often poems innocent of pastiche such as "Poem" could have been written in the late nineteenth century, for as language they rarely if ever transcend adequacy into the exciting or the mysterious and remain curiously devoid of rhythmic or semantic urgency.

Arguments can be made for a return to greater formality in Canadian poetry but by his example Cogswell has not made them. Thus despite Chiasson's talk of "deceptive simplicity" and Tony Tremblay's valiant efforts to reinstate Cogswell as a poet on the basis of his—indeed admirable—"ethic of confraternity" and his focus on the "interconnectedness and interdependency of all living things," there is ultimately no way that his actual poetry, as distinct from the ideas that motivate it, can stand comparison with Don McKay or Dennis Lee, Miriam Waddington, or Patricia Young or, restricting the field to Maritime writers, Harry Thurston or Anne Simpson.

To make such explicit judgements must seem like maligning a favourite uncle, but fortunately Cogswell has several other

strings to his lyre. Even if the testimony to Cogswell's personal generosity, especially to other, younger writers and what Raymond Guy Leblanc terms his concern with Beauty, assumes a rather incestuous air, one can hardly dispute his seminal role as editor, publisher, and all-round poetry activist. One need only list the New Brunswick poets reproduced here whose work first appeared in the Fiddlehead Poetry Series—though its range covered the whole country—Alden Nowlan, Robert Gibbs, M. Travis Lane, Robert Hawkes, and Sharee Fitch (whose prose piece verges on hagiography, but her poetic debt comes out clearly in her poems "Advice" and " Hero") to realize the extent of his influence. Granted both for teachers and their students artistic influence is notoriously difficult to quantify, but the reader does cumulatively derive a very clear and positive impression of Fred Cogswell the teacher.

As for publishing, his achievement as recorded by Laurel Boone speaks for itself; from 1957 to 1981, 307 poetry titles, including early works by Alden Nowlan and Al Purdy, were published before Fiddlehead Books morphed into Goose Lane Editions and branched out to include fiction and non-fiction. True, one may wonder whether the "generous spirit" Boone invokes brought into the world more poets than were strictly necessary, but it remains an impressive achievement nonetheless.

Cogswell's legacy, then, is a mixed one: as a teacher and a friend to poets, as a publisher, editor, and translator, he has exerted enormous influence; but while no one will want to argue with his basic assumptions about the natural decency of human beings and the "goodness and beauty of nature," whether these translate easily into lasting and memorable poetry is another matter.

Ultimately his major claim to fame may be to have made Fredericton into an important cultural centre, and to have been the first to give the Maritimes a strong voice on the national literary scene. As an introduction to someone unfamiliar with Canadian poetry and to Cogswell's place in it, this special issue of *Ellipse* does an excellent job. As an evaluation of the poetry, it must "abide our question."

Mythologizing History

Marc Colavincenzo
"Trading Magic for Fact," Fact for Magic: Myth and Mythologizing in Postmodern Canadian Historical Fiction. Rodopi US $36.00

Reviewed by Judith Leggatt

Marc Colavincenzo provides a useful framework with which to examine the constructions and deconstructions of myth and history in postmodern Canadian literature. His work relies heavily on the theories developed by Roland Barthes in *Mythologies* and by Linda Hutcheon in *The Poetics of Postmodernism.* Using Barthes' conception of myth as a second-order semiological system, Colavincenzo first identifies the four main components of what he calls "the myth of historical discourse": the objectivity of the historian; the idea that history portrays "what really happened"; the insistence that the historian selects the most significant subjects for inquiry; and the resulting naturalization of the historical process. He then uses Hutcheon's theories to investigate the techniques that writers of postmodern historical fiction use to deconstruct that myth. Such fiction emphasizes the subjectivity of historians, the indeterminacy of historical fact, the importance of the stories left out of official history, and the constructed nature of historical discourse.

Shifting from a Barthesian to a more traditional definition of "myth," Colavincenzo then goes on to discuss the mythologizing impulse in postmodern historical fiction. He demonstrates the ways in which specific postmodern Canadian fictions mytholo-

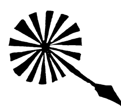
gize histories by relating them to existing myths, by raising historical figures to mythic status, by including fantastical elements within the historically realist framework, and by recognizing the extraordinary aspects of apparently ordinary people and events.

Colavincenzo's main contribution to the study of historiographic metafiction (a term he himself rejects as creating an artificial divide between postmodern historical fiction and the long tradition of historical fiction that precedes it) is his assertion that "postmodern historical fiction represents the logical extension of Barthes' theory of myth." By using the myth of history's "own tactics in order to undermine it from within," postmodern fiction sets up a new myth of historiography, one which opposes, but which is structurally identical to and also as constructed as, the myth of history that it replaces. Colavincenzo attempts to tread a middle ground between naturalizing history and claiming that everything is constructed. He suggests that postmodern fiction's extreme attack on historical discourse counters the "extreme positivism" of the myth of history, and so results in a balanced, "moderate and less naïve" view of history in its readers.

What is missing from Colavincenzo's investigation is a coherent consideration of the role nationality plays in the construction of myth and history in postmodern historical fiction. Although he limits his study to Canadian literature, he gives little indication of the reason for this limitation, or for the effects of his chosen national literature on his topic. Does the specific nature of Canadian history and myth open itself to postmodern investigation? Do Canadian examples of postmodern historical fiction differ from those developed by writers of other nationalities? Colavincenzo does address specific questions of Canadian myth, history, and identity in his readings of individual texts, especially of *Noman* and *Noman's Land* by Gwendolyn MacEwan, but he ignores these issues as he develops his theoretical framework. Perhaps the problem is one of structure. The separation of the theoretical framework into the first half of the book, followed by textual analysis in the second, gives the impression of two separate studies: one shows how postmodernism deconstructs history, and another discusses how postmodern Canadian texts transform history into myth. Better integration of the two halves would strengthen Colavincenzo's argument.

The book is part of Rodopi's "Cross/Cultures" series, and Colavincenzo pays close attention to the representation of traditionally marginalized peoples. He argues that postmodern Canadian historical fiction makes a place for the people who have been left out of traditional historical discourse: women, workers, non-British immigrants, and people of the First Nations. Many of the texts he studies bring a feminist, Marxist, or postcolonial approach to their historical material. Occasionally, however, Colavincenzo's diction contradicts his message. His use of the term "Native Indian," with its echoes of "Red Indian," and his constant references to the reader as "he" reinforce the misrepresentations and exclusions of the more traditional historical discourses that he critiques.

Despite these problems, Colavincenzo's suggestion that postmodern historical fiction "is essentially doomed" to replicate the mythological structures that it resists provides a welcome addition to postmodern literary scholarship. In addition, his detailed and accessible approach to the intersections of postmodernism, history, myth, and fiction makes *"Trading Magic for Fact," Fact for Magic* a useful introduction to these intersecting fields.



Performances

Trevor Cole
Norman Bray in the Performance of his Life. McClelland and Stewart, $34.99

Kenneth Burke
On Human Nature: A Gathering Where Everything Flows, 1967-1984. U of California P, $60.00

Reviewed by Charles Barbour

Trevor Cole's comic novel *Norman Bray* is an extended, involved, magnificent character sketch—like a portrait of a prig as an old man. Bray, a waning dinner theatre actor and trifling thespian, is also an unabashedly arrogant, hyperbolically conceited, impossibly smug blowhard with a psychological life of self-interested rationalization and a social life of ham-fisted manipulation. And yet, when met through the merciful screen of fiction, Bray is entirely compelling—the proverbial train wreck for the passing reader. In fact, Bray's character explodes out of what, without him, would be a lacklustre book. The plot of *Norman Bray* is singularly conventional, with conflict and ordeal (largely financial in nature) resulting in a modicum (a very small modicum) of self-realization. The book as a whole, and Bray's character in particular, are structured around a slightly forced parallel with *Don Quixote*—or rather *The Man From La Mancha*, an amateur staging of which Bray prides himself on having "saved." In actuality, as the reader and Bray's stepdaughter Amy discover in tandem, Bray did not save the show, but was the direct cause of a minor tragedy, and the indirect cause of a major one. The moral of Bray's story whizzes on the novel's second to last page. Having witnessed the authentic existence of his mysterious "Mediterranean" neighbours Karina and Diego, our previously quixotic and indolent antihero finally recognizes the honest virtue of honourable work, acknowledges the difference between "imagining" and "practicing" one's life, and pensively concedes that "sometimes the truth really is just as good." With the possible exception of Amy, every other individual in the novel exists to elucidate the superciliousness of its titular character. Bray insults one person after another, haughtily justifying his destructive actions as expressions of his necessarily misunderstood artistry, and accusing his victims of what is in fact his own gaucherie and dilettantism. But if Bray is a ludicrously insufferable human being, his opponents are no less loathsome, consisting largely of suburban flotsam and imagination-amputees—members of what some clever, trend-spotting social critic might have dubbed "the cubical generation." For Cole, it seems, the current struggle is between these two demographics—the few remaining stragglers of a declining culture industry, who eke out a marginal living under the rubric of Art, and the burgeoning class of young neo-liberals, for whom art, like everything else on the planet, is an investment. And if the choice is between people who throw their creative energies into summer-stock reiterations of Gilbert and Sullivan and those who squander theirs on telemarketing schemes, then our decision, indeed our responsibility is obvious. All hail the Norman Brays of the world. They may, as they themselves would readily decree, be our last hope.

Reading Cole's methodical pillorying of Norman Bray has me thinking about the limits of the novel form, and whether or not the novel is generically designed to endorse an ethic of economic practicality and bourgeois common-sense. Without question, the critic who taught us the most about literary form was Kenneth Burke. *On Human Nature* is a collection of essays, interviews, and poems written by Burke after his penultimate and still most fruitful book *Language as Symbolic Action*, first published in 1966. Given today's obsession

with history (rather than theory), and our pluralistic evisceration of all comprehensive portraits of something as trite as "human nature," it would be difficult to imagine a less fashionable figure than Kenneth Burke. And that, of course, is exactly why he needs to be read, and why this collection is so important. Burke takes us to the outer limits of literary eclecticism, haphazardly gobbling up canonical references like a guest at a banquet, relentlessly talking with his mouth full, spraying bits of Augustine or Aristotle, Vico or Blake, Freud or Homer, Marx or Spinoza, not to mention himself. The collection is centred in an effort to define the neologism "Logology," which basically entails a fascination with highly formal, self-reflexive language, but which Burke wants to elevate to mythological heights, seeing literature, in typically modernist style, as secular salvation—perhaps the only real alternative to the alienating "counter-nature" of modern technology. Literary form is for Burke a privileged expression of "entelechy"—an eternal striving after perfection that, in the Aristotelian cosmology Burke adopts, propels humans through time, or what Burke calls "the temporizing of essence." After three decades of poststructuralist repudiations of "binaries," Burke's essays provide a welcome reminder of just how effective a simple distinction can be—nature and culture, permanence and change, archetype and entelechy, symbolic and non-symbolic, motion and action. Still, I will be careful not to praise him too ornately. Very often in these texts Burke is simply raving, as though lost in a cloud of alcohol and sentiment. But as often he is erudite and forceful, especially, perhaps, when explaining and amplifying his own earlier work. In Burke, we are reminded of a disappearing, perhaps already gone variety of literary critic—a democrat but also a curmudgeon, a traditionalist who is also completely out of control, someone for whom literature is not a career, but a life.

In Search of . . .

Wade Davis
Light at the Edge of the World: A Journey Through the Realm of Vanishing Cultures. Douglas & McIntyre $29.95 (pbk.)

Sylvia Fraser
The Green Labyrinth: Exploring the Mysteries of the Amazon. Thomas Allen $34.95

Alex M. Hall
Discovering Eden: A Lifetime of Paddling Arctic Rivers. Key Porter $27.95

Reviewed by Charles Dawson

Is lyricism a required quality in nature and travel writing? Reading these books has made me query my penchant for seductive prose, my fondness for authorial transcendence *in situ.* These books are accounts of hard-fought ecological and cultural endurance.

At the time of publication of *Light at the Edge of the World*, his first book of photography, Wade Davis was Explorer-in-Residence for *National Geographic.* In an age where those who read about neo-imperial power are perhaps overwhelmed by investigative variations on how we're stuffing things up, it is noteworthy that Davis now turns to the visual to remind the fatigued and despondent of the cultural depth and stature that survives. But as importantly, this beautifully produced account of much loyal work with indigenous peoples seeks to draw a new readership in through the image.

Davis' photographs form the promotional and physical core of the book. Many, such as the image of a Haitian man sustained by trance emerging from a waterfall, his clothes torn from him by the force of the torrent, are potent companions to the excellent text. These (never urban) shots are backed up accounts of how the peoples have "allowed [Davis] to see" as well as how diversity is under threat from "power, the crude face of domination." Davis recounts

his work with, for example, Haitian voudoun practitioners, the Ariaal (Kenya), Tibetans in Tibet, Penan peoples (Malaysia), and numerous tribes in the Amazon basin. Each chapter reminds the reader of how people have learnt to live with the wilderness, rather than making those spaces a place of either recreational human abstraction or industrialization. I hope *National Geographic* allows Davis to continue to work in his own way: this is a humbling, awe-inspiring and daunting work, just what the tired, conscientious armchair traveller needs.

Sylvia Fraser packed a lot into three months in Peru and she provides some rather vivid descriptions of the emetic symptoms of ayahuasca consumption. But such details are only incidental to her quest for personal insight via shamans-for-hire and ayahuasca; the plant has fuelled visions in South America for millennia. Fraser writes in an accessible journalistic style, always ready to relay her personal insights in great detail. Cultural survival is not her focus, though it acts as a quiet challenge to her quest(ion)ing. One of the book's strengths is its general openness to those challenges.

Fraser has a lot of courage. As the book unfolds, questions arise as to the nature of her role as spiritual consumer. The commercialization of ritual makes that ritual vulnerable but it also demonstrates its power to others. But whether the consumers take the shamans away from the locals who really need them is unclear. Though occasionally hampered by its need to account for and relay so much detail in near-real time, Fraser's account will appeal to those ready to ask questions and reflect on the practice of questing.

Alex Hall's *Discovering Eden* recounts three decades of close inhabitation and work in the Northwest Territories' Barren Lands and the Thelon River area. This is a meticulous account of highlights during 30 years as an experienced canoeist and guide who fought to save the Thelon River area from previous Mulronian incursions.

After reading Fraser (who focuses on personal detail and feeling), I was boggled that Hall skipped over the separation from his wife in one short sentence. In my dodgy thirst for the lyrical, I often wanted Hall to make more of the remarkable experiences he sketched. Yet the effect of his pared-back style is beguiling: it generates a faith in the abundance he describes. So when the book closes with a series of essays on the (potential) effects of mining we need to question whether "money and greed will prevail as they nearly always do." Hall, like Davis and Fraser, has found industrial imperatives too limited:

> ... when our last great wilderness is carved up by roads to mines and its rivers dammed to provide power for those mines, I ask you: will we be richer or will we be poorer? And what will it tell us about what kind of a country Canada is? What will it tell us about what kind of a people we are? Some of us, I know, are going to be a lot less proud to call ourselves Canadians.

The call to arms need not be lyrical. Davis, Hall, and Fraser have worked in favour of diversity and respect: the reader is the richer (if no less worried) for their work.

Ontario Traditionalism

John Degen
Killing Things. Pedlar P $19.95

Steven Heighton
The Address Book. Anansi $16.95

A.F. Moritz
Night Street Repairs. Anansi $16.95

Reviewed by Douglas Barbour

I'm not sure what it is about Ontario, but it seems lyric traditionalism is alive and well there. Certainly, the three poets under review here, including Governor General's

Award winner, A.F. Moritz, work the conventions of lyric narrative, and what conservative theorists call "the new formalism," with some verve, for they clearly owe that tradition their allegiance. Although their work is not formally innovative, they do offer solid, and often moving, examples of conventional late modern poetics. There's an elegiac tone, a sense of (personal or historic) memory and inevitable loss that grounds their imaginations.

A.F. Moritz praises *Killing Things*, John Degen's second book, for contributing to "the current renewal of urban poetry," and that is one way of responding to the sharp, ironic poems here. But although the first poem is clearly set in Toronto, and there is a short sequence, "Sibelius Park," that seems to launch its bitter ironies at earlier "hippy poets wrestling with their gods" (one thinks of Dennis Lee's poem of that title), many of the poems engage with memory, often in the cottage country north of Toronto. *Killing Things* is as much country as it is urban, but Degen's keen eye sees both contexts unflinchingly.

So many of these poems remember, although whose pasts they engage is not always clear, despite the many names of friends and acquaintances that populate them. The remembering goes back through teenage years to childhood, with grandparents and their friends making important appearances. Degen knows how to develop lyrically intense narratives; getting the story right, no matter who it might hurt, is important. His verses move forward in fairly conventional syntax, but he has a fine sense of the line, and his line breaks generally push hard on a turn of tone. *Killing Things* works well as a collection of sharply evocative traditional short narratives.

In *The Address Book*, Steven Heighton chooses to be an outright traditionalist: he puts his wide-ranging vocabulary, his fine sense of drama, and his keen feeling for image and metaphor to ancient and honoured uses. Lyric narrative and elegy are central to *The Address Book*. Heighton works with various traditional forms in this volume, sonnets, rhyming quatrains, terza rima, utilizing half-and off-rhyme in order to maintain easy idiomatic phrasing. This seemingly conservative choice of form mixes intriguingly with contemporary subject matter, except in the 15 "Approximations," loose translations of poets from Sappho and Catullus, through Baudelaire and Rimbaud, to some twentieth-century poets.

The tone of *The Address Book* is generally elegiac, and there are a number of elegies, for Tom Marshall and Al Purdy, and for relatives and friends who remain private even as he places them in poetic urns. Other poems feel like elegies for our era. There's a lovely Ondaatjean lyric for a daughter who 'peeled phosphorescent stars off the sloped / gable-wall,' put them on her body, and called her father upstairs to see 'her pose, / mapped onto the star chart of the darkness.' Generally, his "approximations" tend to add to the originals, at least with the Sappho and Baudelaire ones I checked. The results are interesting poems, but they are as much Heighton's as they are the original writers': a collaboration, one might say.

Also a narrative lyricist, Al Moritz writes in many voices in *Night Street Repairs*. The fire of invention in these poems burns "bitterly / brilliant," a light held above the human circus full of woe the poet observes with such scholarly and sardonic insight. The poems process history, legend, and the present only to discover more "shoddy / torment" in a world where a dead exile remembers "when everyone was a slave," and suspects the living still are, even if he doesn't know to what exactly. Or a torturer uses all his power to destroy a singer's wealth of happy memories.

A loose blank verse line serves Moritz well, as he constructs long, looping compound/complex sentences that reflect a love

of the poetry of the Romantics and such modern symbolists as Stevens. There is a dire pleasure in making one's way through these darkly labyrinthine poems to the possibly transcendent and hopeful hymns to sun, moon, and world that conclude *Night Street Repairs*. Moritz demonstrates the power a traditional approach can still attain. He is certainly one of the contemporary masters of philosophical lyric narrative.

How to Bury the Dead

Kristen den Hartog
The Perpetual Ending. Knopf $34.95

Susannah M. Smith
How the Blessed Live. Coach House $18.95

Alissa York
Mercy. Random House $32.95

Reviewed by Michelle Hartley

These novels address the subject of mourning, a process Sam Durrant describes as "learning to bury the dead." Grieving characters in each of these works turn mourning into an alarmingly narcissistic act of self-reflection and self-indulgence. One novel is ultimately successful in its work of mourning. Of the other two, one preaches and the other allows the corpses to be eaten by wolves.

How the Blessed Live recalls Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* in its linking of insurmountable grief, twins, and incest. Why, when grief strikes fraternal twins in these novels, does incest ensue? Smith's novel engages not only with incest as a narcissistic coupling between twins, but also the narcissistic grief of their father, Daniel, for his wife Wren, who dies giving birth to the twins. Smith structures the novel around Daniel's continuing letters to his wife, from her death in 1971 to his in 1989. His loss remains fresh; his letters are a dirge to the adage that true love never dies, even when its object is deceased. His son Levi's art mirrors this preoccupation. He creates papier mâché sarcophagi, "his collection of queens," to evoke the Ancient Egyptian rituals of burying the dead, with their fragmenting of the body, to help reassemble the living: "A phrase jangles through his mind, something from his notebook: *In order to assemble, one must first disassemble; one must go to pieces*." The novel reflects this fragmentation, giving fragments from letters, notebooks, and lists from all three protagonists: father, daughter, son. Lucy, object of her brother's obsessive regard, who, pregnant, literally bears the consequences of her and her twin's shared grief, does not so much go to pieces as whittle away at herself, abandoning family ties and physical needs by moving away and succumbing to anorexia in an attempt to become invisible and "pure." However, "the last thing the world needs is more invisible women," as we learn from one of the novel's many minor characters. While Levi continues in his idolatry, fossilizing women by fetishizing their parts in his art, by novel's end Lucy buries her dead. She miscarries, and simultaneously loses the burden of her grief for mother, brother, and father. She embraces living—evidenced by the novel's last lines: "Through the open window, she thinks she can smell a berry pie baking, the sugary filling bubbling, spilling over in the oven. She rubs her stomach. She could use some food"—and turns away from the ghosts that have haunted both her and Levi, unhealthily welding the twins into one being where there should have been two. Smith's novel consistently evokes poetry, myth, and fairy tale without falling into many of their clichés and allows her heroine (and her readers) a satisfying ending in the process.

Kristen den Hartog's *The Perpetual Ending* tells the tale of Jane Ingrams, the remainder of a set of twin sisters. The novel's cover photograph of a girl standing alone, juxtaposed with its negative image over the spine, illustrates the novel's central

preoccupation: "twinness," its particular joys and guilts, its central paradox. Are twins really one person? Or is this a fallacy leading to self-indulgence, immaturity, and an inability to form adult relationships? Jane, haunted by the loss of sister Eugenie, also remembers wishing "I was the only child of a man and a woman who were normal." She goes on "I would not have chosen a name that began with *J,* which was not even formally accepted into the alphabet until the nineteenth century. For hundreds of years it was simply the consonant form of *I,* a ghostly twin struggling for its own place." Jane only struggles for her own place at novel's end. By contrast, the "ghostly twin" surfaces throughout the text, lending itself, like the use of the weird and wonderful children's stories embedded within the text, to a reading of the novel too overtly orchestrated by the author.

Mercy is far less delicate in both language and plot than the other two novels. Alissa York builds on the gothic tendencies of Prairie predecessors such as Martha Ostenso's *Wild Geese*, focusing on the fierceness with which desire can strike the most unlikely candidates. Of the three novels, it is this one that comes closest to and falls farthest from brilliance. The portrayal of characters like Vera, the housekeeper for the town of Mercy's Catholic church, with her intense, life-long devotion to Father Rock, and her wooing of the tumour with words—"I egged it on . . . Come on, you little bastard, grow"—that eventually kill her after his death, is beautifully wrought. Love and passion appear to have no remedy except for bizarre deaths, however, and at times the gothic becomes excessive and even ludicrous (think Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale*'s "exit pursued by a bear," with multiple bears) with hangings, wolves, and feral dog attacks: "Lavinia was part of the crowd when they carried [the butcher] out. There was nothing to see, really, just a lump covered over with a sheet. It was the din that made it awful, the relentless baying that arose from inside the shop. . . . Can she really be crying for a pack of feral dogs, for the sad old man who invited them in?" This novel escapes the work of mourning by allowing many of its characters to wallow in guilt and then die horribly, never facing the consequences of their actions. The second priest, August Day, has a love-child, Mary, who is found by Castor, the town drunk, and raised in the bog that surrounds the town. She is the voice of reason and environmental appreciation, "twin" and opposite to the town's Mayor, Lavinia, a paragon of small-town hypocrisy. Born on the same night, a night of birth, death, and wolves (who threaten August and presumably consume Mathilda, his lover), Lavinia is blinded by her vision of bureaucratic progress and Mary causes the blind to see by revealing the sins of philandering fundamentalist preacher Carl Mann to him. Mary links the novel's two disparate stories and its double time frame—1948 and 1998—suggesting the novel is "about" the eponymous town, Mercy, and its need to practise that virtue. The novel has power and moments of its own shining vision, but its excesses too often bring it down to the level of melodrama, if not farce.

For Young Readers

Sarah Ellis, ed.

Girls' Own: An Anthology of Canadian Fiction for Young Readers. Viking/Penguin. $26.00

Tim Wynne-Jones, ed.

Boys' Own: An Anthology of Canadian Fiction for Young Readers. Viking/Penguin. $26.00

Reviewed by Elizabeth Hodgson

These two new anthologies of short fiction aim to take up the torch for the old children's magazines which gave younger readers lively stories to dip into at odd moments. The nostalgia value of those magazines is clearly great, and it's also clear

that these collections have the same feeling of a box of treasures for their readers.

The marvels of each collection are of course the short stories themselves. Tom King's "A Coyote Columbus Story" in *Girls' Own*, and "Looking Down, I Can Just See" by Richard Scrimger in *Boys' Own* are perhaps the best, beautifully crafted narratives with a judicious balance of weirdness, humours, and psychological insight. But many of the entries in each collection are equally interesting and engaging. Some of the stories ("Clever-Lazy" and "Roses Sing on New Snow," for instance) are told like folk tales or legends; some are science-fiction or gothic ghost stories; some are absurdist and some absurdly typical. The authors include Sarah Ellis and Tim Wynne-Jones themselves, as well as Joy Kogawa, R.P. MacIntyre, Bill Richardson, and Kit Pearson, an illustrious collection of writers for children and adults. And the collection is thoroughly Canadian in every sense, with settings from a Saskatchewan prairie winter to Newfoundland coastal waters, from Montreal to the Gulf Islands, and characters who root for the Blue Jays, fish for pickerel, try to learn Quebec French as well as Polish, and survive on hockey fantasies. The protagonists of these stories, European, aboriginal, immigrant, alien, suburbanites, are particularly poignant, with immigrant anxieties, desires for social status, fear and love of aggression, consciousness of their own and their parents' fallibility and weakness. There is lots to admire and re-read in each anthology.

It's true that the two collections do both have the same difficulty of negotiating with audience. It's not entirely clear who Sarah Ellis and Tim Wynne-Jones imagine "young readers" to be, but they clearly mean someone older than my eight-year-old, as several of the stories deal with issues (nascent sexuality, adult violence, adolescent-parent conflict) which would probably make more sense to a 10 to 14-year-old. The brief introductory notes, especially in *Boys' Own*, seem also to be aimed somewhat uneasily at adults, using terms such as "quintessentially," and describing the editor's expectations for a certain story. I'm not sure a young teenager would know what to make of these little introductory discussions, though in some cases (framing the rest of the story) they are crucial. The second difficult hurdle *Boys' Own* and *Girls' Own* present to their readers is the incompleteness of some of the narratives. Several of the short stories in each collection are indeed short stories, but others (four in *Boys' Own* and seven in *Girls' Own*) are excerpts from novels. Sometimes the excerpts work quite well, while in other cases, I think a teenager would simply be frustrated at the abrupt ending of the story. While I would hope that readers would go on to read the whole novel, immediate reading pleasure is sacrificed, which is unfortunate.

But many of the stories themselves, even the incomplete ones, are quite wonderful, and when my eight-year-old grows up a bit (and if he'll still read books his *mother* gives him), I'll pass them along to him with pleasure.

Potting memories

Ann Eriksson
Decomposing Maggie. Turnstone $18.95

Reviewed by K.J. Verwaayen

Lay me out in the wilderness.
And let me return to earth.
—Mary de La Valette, epigraph in *Decomposing Maggie*

A first novel by Saskatchewan-born writer Ann Eriksson, *Decomposing Maggie* is a luxuriously visual rendering of British Columbia's Galiano Island and Sturdies Bay, a textual canvas of island bluffs, waters, and richly-coloured flora, fauna, and marine organisms. The story begins with a narrative austerity (seldom repli-

cated in the thick descriptions that flesh out the bare bones of an unpretentious plot) in this stark fact: "[m]y husband is dead." The title thus functions as both adjective and verb—description and act—as Maggie Cooper's life and self composure deteriorate in her inability to cope with the loss of her husband Peter to cancer.

Weaving between first- and omniscient third-person points of view, the narrative voice performs a semiotic trick recognizable as a classic psychological response to trauma: Maggie's experience of loss dismantles her sense of self after Chapter One and Peter's death, Maggie cannot speak of present events in the first-person voice except in memories of her life with Peter. That her denial is total is evident in the manifold baskets she obsessively and analgesically weaves for his ashes in the ever-deferred quest for the perfect urn to "contain" him, in her burning of condolence letters from friends, in refusing to attend Peter's memorial service, and in the broken bond with her daughter.

Eriksson's writing grows rich as the story develops, shifting away from hard-to-avoid conventional mourning clichés (in the sentimental early fragment, "Hoping the arms of the chair would become his and hold her" for example). By the book's climax, event and place descriptions are quite simply but gorgeously executed:

> I lie suspended in the universe; above me stars, below me stars. At the end of my outstretched arms are my children: Liam to my right, Joy to my left. Peter floats at my feet. We are touching, finger to finger, toe to toe. The sea is cold, but we are oblivious to it, for we are preoccupied with the light. Each time we move—one of us moves—there is an explosion from the inky darkness below us.

Much of Maggie's sentimental language is in fact manufactured as grief response: her idealized fantasy memories of Peter are steeped in denial of his humanness for he is, in both death and life (through memory), perfectly "beyond reproach." But Maggie's movement toward the forest of their original island home initiates recognition of Peter's real frailties—and ultimately her own, an anagnorisis (unstable and incomplete as this consciousness is) and the emotional climax of her story.

Sometimes flawed, *Decomposing Maggie* still startles with moments of gorgeous and powerful depiction.

Nostalgic Tributes

Susan Fisher, ed.

Nostalgic Journeys: Literary Pilgrimages Between Japan and the West. Institute for Asian Research, UBC $24.95

Reviewed by Lily Cho

Near the end of his essay on the scholarly life of Kinya Tsuruta in the collection *Nostalgic Journeys*, Sukehiro Hirakawa gives us a surprisingly erotic glimpse into Tsuruta's psychic life. Hirakawa recalls that Tsuruta "had fond memories of his elementary school teacher, Miss Owaku, even though she often spanked the naughty boy with her beautiful, lithe white hand." This glimpse uncannily suggests the role of fantasy and fetish in nostalgia and pilgrimage. As Susan Fisher, the editor of the collection, notes, "[j]ust as the West of the Japanese imagination was largely a phantasm, so too for Westerners, Japan was an idea, not a place." More than just a fond memory, the white hand of punishment and pleasure also suggests the complexities of desire and place.

A collection of 15 essays published in honour of Kinya Tsuruta who died before the book could be completed, the essays in this collection attend to the relation between the occidental and the oriental. In his discussion of Mishima Yukio, Roy Starrs notes that Mishima's pilgrimage to Greece was a carefully planned and choreographed

affair where the itinerary was sanctioned by a cultural tradition which included Goethe, Byron, Nietzsche, and Thomas Mann. Mishima, Starrs writes, "was happy to entertain the idea that the Greek classicism would cure him of his decadent romanticism, that the Greek sun would dispel the shadows from his Japanese soul." Greece was a fantasy of the West which Mishima was determined to experience.

In her exploration of the etymological roots of nostalgia, the Greek critic Nadia Seremetakis suggests that nostalgia is not so much a sentimental condition as a deeply embodied and painful yearning for home. The essays in this collection demonstrate the truth of this reading. Cody Poulton's reading of the drama of Tanizaki Juni'chiro suggests the way in which nostalgia can be understood as a mode of emplacement, a "mother-longing," which emerges in the dramatic texts as coded Freudian family romances re-written into conventional love stories. In her discussion of the fiction of Shiga Naoya, Janet Walker proposes that a nostalgia is not necessarily for an exotic "other" place such as the West, but that it can also be a way of relating to a Japan of the past. In Shiga's case, his travels to Onomichi and the Seto Naikai and then Kyoto involve a careful process of editing out the signs of Western modernity in order to fulfill a yearning for a fantasized rural Japan of the past.

While the subtitle of this book suggests that these essays deal largely with relations between Japan and the West, a number of the essays in the collection also unfold Japan's relation with the East. The collection begins with Hirakawa's comparison between the development of Japan's and China's openness to Western modernity. (It is disappointing that Hirakawa does not interrogate further the stereotype that older Chinese civilizations were mired in close-minded anachronism.) Continuing with essays by Starrs, Walker, and Shigemi, the book also gives us a portrait of the complicated relation between Japanese intellectuals and the notion of the East. While Starrs refers to Mishima's travels to India, Walker writes of the Tang Dynasty Chinese ideals of feminine beauty in Shiga's work. Shigemi persuasively suggests that Okakura Kakuzo's "invention of Asia" can be traced to his travels in India.

Moving between East and West, the essays reflect Tsuruta's preference for close reading and biographical criticism. They are a fitting tribute to a lifetime of fine readings and dedicated teaching.

Mapping Native Lives

Grant Keddie
Songhees Pictorial: A History of the Songhees People as seen by Outsiders, 1790–1912. Royal British Columbia Museum $39.95

Chris Friday
Lelooska: The Life of a Northwest Coast Artist. U of Washington P $38.95

Reviewed by Jennifer Kramer

Both of these texts are social biographies that map the marginalizations and reclamations that delineate native lives. They palpably depict how native people have fought for social and cultural space while living under colonially imposed stereotypes which denigrate and exclude.

In *Songhees Pictorial*, Grant Keddie has compiled an impressive collection of photographs, artistic renderings, maps and archival written records relating to the Songhees people. By reconnecting this visual evidence to original locations, dates and subject matters, he reconstructs the story of an all-but-forgotten reserve in the Inner Harbour of Victoria, and the Coast Salish people who lived there between 1843 and 1911. Keddie offers a chronological account of cultural intersections from the perspective of the Victorian government and its Euro Canadian inhabitants. He

highlights settlement patterns, treaty-making, wage labour, warfare, depopulation through violence and disease, and ceremonial life. The Songhees actively negotiated their relocation from the old reserve to their new reserve, refusing to move without proper compensation. This book is a testimony to the Songhees' ability to adapt to new lifestyles while maintaining their difference.

Keddie astutely observes: "In this time of economic depression, some Victorians complained about the idleness of aboriginal people, yet became more angry when they took jobs in colonial enterprises." Captured in this pithy sentence are the ambivalences and contradictions of Euro Canadian/Songhees relations, which Keddie should have analyzed further. Ironically, in a book of maps, the reader can easily get disoriented and lose the larger context amid the prevalence of shifting group names and changing place appellations. While rich in factual detail, the complexity of this story is often hard to follow without a contemporary map of the environs of Victoria and the southern tip of Vancouver Island.

Although Keddie openly acknowledges in his title the "Outsider" viewpoint, he misses the chance to include contemporary Songhees' perspectives to restore the imbalance. This work can be seen as an act of repossession, where the Songhees are visually reconnected to their traditional territories. Yet the appendix on Songhees' traditional worldview, that mixes the past tense with the ethnographic present, seems a double erasure. It suggests loss of, rather than continuity with, cultural heritage. The text has the potential to serve as a dual recovery project, reminding the reader of the existence and agency of the Songhees, and providing the contemporary Songhees, who now live in Esquimalt Harbour, with further means to strengthen their identity.

Lelooska tells the life history of Don "Lelooska" Smith, a controversial artist and storyteller of Cherokee and European ancestry who lived in the Pacific Northwest from 1933–96. As a non-federally-recognized, off reserve Indian, Lelooska became (in)famous for carving and selling First Nations Northwest Coast art and performing dances, songs, and stories for a paying audience at his compound in Ariel, Washington. Historian and friend, Chris Friday collaborated with Lelooska at the end of his life to record his memories. The book chronologically details Lelooska's artistic and cultural inspirations, and usefully situates them within historical and theoretical contexts. By editing and organizing Lelooska's compelling narrative into well-shaped themes, Friday charts the rise of pan-Indianism and indigenous political activism. He also dissects the western art market's newfound appreciation of native northwest coast material culture as art in the 1960s and 70s. With entertaining and incongruous anecdotes, Lelooska recounts supporting his family by selling "Cowboy and Indian" curios, dancing, and wearing native dress for tourists at the Pendleton Round-up in Oregon, and being hired by the Bureau of Indian Affairs to teach carving and button-blanket design to the Makah of the Olympic Peninsula.

Informative and engaging for a general audience, one of the strengths of this text is its introduction to the elaborate protocols and permissions of the First Nations of the Northwest Coast. Lelooska relates the significance of befriending the Sewid family as they sought political recognition and repatriation of potlatch regalia confiscated under the repressive Anti-Potlatch clause of the 1884 Canadian Indian Act. This relationship led to Lelooska's adoption into the Sewid family and official permission to carve in Kwakw*a*k*a*'wakw style. Notably, the text does not avoid detailing the responsibilities as well as the honours that come with receiving a name.

Friday makes the larger point that identities are complex, rarely remaining within

essentialist boundaries. Lelooska's life demonstrates how one may be simultaneously pan-Indian, Cherokee and Kwakw*a*k*a*'wakw, defying those that would claim these are mutually exclusive identities. Surprisingly, this text manages to be celebratory without being overly so, balancing Lelooska's successes with his life's challenges and difficulties. Both of these books speak to native agency, an issue often overlooked in dominant legal, social, and cultural narratives, and can be recommended for this corrective.

Frye and Sedgewick Detached

Northrop Frye
Northrop Frye Unbuttoned: Wit and Wisdom from the Notebooks and Diaries. Anansi $39.95

Garnett Gladwin Sedgewick
Of Irony: Especially in Drama. Ronsdale $19.95

Reviewed by Graham N. Forst

When he died, Northrop Frye left behind, along with his more than 30 published books, 76 handwritten notebooks containing more than a million and a half words. And it is from this latter holograph material that Robert Denham has drawn the 700 or so aphorisms that make up this new abecedarian collection of Frygiana from Anansi. These selections are designed to highlight the saltiness and irreverence of Frye rather than elaborate his critical philosophy or religious beliefs, and reading Frye unbuttoned in this way is very enjoyable (although few would be willing to agree, one hopes, that Heidegger and Wagner are "kraut cluckheads as dumb as the beer barrel in Munich" or that traditional Christian principles are "so much excretion" and that Jehovah is "a shitsack").

Few of the entries are personal, but there are revealing passages reflecting Frye's concern for his physical weaknesses, his paranoia about erectile dysfunction, his dislike for crowds, and his love for his wife Helen. Other less attractive entries reveal his strong conservativeness with respect to the "anarchy" of abstract art, and the perceived failure of feminist criticism ("mostly heifer-shit," Frye says, and mere "pedantic nagging" born of frustration, and unaccompanied "by any vision of transcending it").

Frye's life overlapped Garnett Sedgewick's by almost 40 years, and the two great thinker/teachers had this in common: when they wrote about literature, they did so on its own terms, never importing criteria or judgements from the social sciences. They certainly, in this respect, agreed on the centrality of irony in literary exegesis: look under "irony" in *Frye Unbuttoned* and you'll find the comment that "all literature is literally ironic"–which is a central point of Sedgewick's classic *Of Irony.*

Of Irony was first published in 1935: Ronsdale's is its third incarnation and students will be glad to have this new paperback to replace all the wornout and dogeared copies in their universities' libraries. Even at 70 years old, it still is cited in most modern literary handbooks and encyclopaedias as containing the definitive statement on the role of irony in drama.

For many modern students, though, Sedgewick will seem very old fashioned as (like Frye) he sees irony as a product of "the philosopher's free play of mind" leading to a kind of Nirvana of "detachment," rather than as a reflection of incoherence between the parts of a work of art as Paul de Man and other more recent thinkers have seen it. Frye saw this same achievement of "detachment" as the ultimate goal of all education, a condition of course denied by the politicians of deconstruction. But Frye's and Sedgewick's wit and erudition ensure that these eminent Canadians will be read long after the European avatars of *ressentiment* have disappeared.

Noticing Small Things

Marie-Louise Gay
Good Night Sam. Groundwood $14.95

Bill Richardson, illustrations by Céline Malépart
Sally Dog Little: Undercover Agent. Annick $7.95

Donn Kushner, illustrations by Sylvie Daigneault
Peter's Pixie. Tundra $22.99

Barbara Reid
The Subway Mouse. North Winds $21.99

Reviewed by Margaret Steffler

Marie-Louise Gay, writer and illustrator of *Good Night Sam,* which follows her recently published *Good Morning Sam* in the Stella and Sam series, seamlessly integrates her text and watercolour illustrations. This story begins with Sam unable to sleep without his dog, Fred. He appeals to Stella for help, and together they roam the downstairs, searching for Fred. Sam apparently knows his dog so intimately that he has answers for all of Stella's suggestions as to where Fred might be; for example, Fred will not go into the closet because "a monster lives in that closet" and will not go near the chair because "he thinks it looks like a giant toad." Fred's fears are obviously and delightfully the fears of Sam, who is dependent on both Fred and Stella for comfort but at the same time displays a stubborn determination. This needy and forceful personality is confirmed by the illustrations of an anxious Sam restlessly, tentatively but relentlessly positioning himself to look for Fred. *Good Night Sam* evokes both humour and an eerie beauty in its range of tones, and captures the ambiguous nature of Fred's real or imaginary existence. This book's audience of very young readers will recognize and find familiarity in the brother-sister relationship, in the search for comfort and security before sleep, and in the small, detailed objects scattered throughout Sam and Stella's nighttime house.

Bill Richardson's *Sally Dog Little: Undercover Agent,* a sequel to *Sally Dog Little,* is zany in both its storyline and Céline Malépart's watercolour illustrations. Unfortunately the undercover agent business does not begin until eight pages into the story, well after the expectations created by the title have been forgotten. A chain of events involving a cat, robin, worm, and petunias develops, but is disappointing, despite the three large-font "woofs" announcing and forcing its climax. The consensus in my household was that this rather cluttered book will not be pulled from the shelf after it has been read once.

Donn Kushner's *Peter's Pixie* and Barbara Reid's *The Subway Mouse,* however, are definitely candidates for those repeated readings that reveal layers of meaning and enjoyment. Sylvie Daigneault's illustrations combine the somewhat idealized domestic home of our world with the pixie world, offering colourful and detailed suggestions that are in tune with the psychological complexities of Kushner's story, while Reid's remarkable illustrations are effortlessly led and contained by her own prose. Words and pictures are equally intriguing and complex in these two outstanding and attractive books.

In Kushner's introduction to *Peter's Pixie* he says that his late uncle's work "contains a quiet imperative: pay attention to small things." It is not surprising that a microbiologist would have the gift and the habit of looking at small things. In this story Peter has a run-in with a mischievous pixie during the days immediately before his brother's birth. Both resentful of the pixie and attached to it, Peter offers it gifts of milk, water, and coins in an attempt to attract it to his home and his life. The pixie becomes scarce and seems to disappear, but when the new baby, "a real little elf," "a regular pixie," is introduced to Peter, the feelings of sibling rivalry are not completely new. Although young readers will likely not have the psychological concept of

sibling rivalry to draw on, the association of the pixie with the new baby is enough to surprise and intrigue all readers into making some connections. *Peter's Pixie* is of the high quality we have come to expect of the storyteller and illustrator of this volume. It is fortunate that their work comes together in this 2003 publication, for both Kushner and Daigneault obviously enjoy intimate relationships with pixies and all "small things," leading us to notice and savour the details.

In a 1988 interview, when Barbara Reid was asked if she would ever consider writing her own book, she replied that she didn't think so because writing and illustrating involve different talents. Reid, a proclaimed lover of words, did go on to write her own books, using words in the form of verse in *The Party* (1997), for example. Here in *The Subway Mouse* the story is told in prose, and although I was prepared to be carried away by the plasticine art, the prose narrative did its part, shaping the story from under the subway platforms to "Tunnel's End," an open and roofless world of beauty and danger. The setting of the subway station provides ample opportunities for stray objects to be incorporated into the art. Although readers might spend hours identifying the Sunmaid Raisin box, Coffee Crisp wrapper and crumpled newspaper story, they will also be moved to follow the white feather and the narrative to the end of the tunnel where they, with Nib and his new friend Lola, discover the immense and colourful space of the open world. Flavoured by "the town mouse and the country mouse," *The Subway Mouse* is a contemporary Canadian and specifically Toronto text. A Crayola crayon, pieces of a city map, and crumpled newspaper ads for apartments on Yonge Street are embedded in Nib's nest and in Reid's volume. Seeing the subway and city worlds from Nib's perspective reminds us of the "small things" we need to notice.

Melting the Snow

Terry Goldie
Pink Snow: Homotextual Possibilities in Canadian Fiction. Broadview $29.95

Reviewed by Jes Battis

Terry Goldie prefaces *Pink Snow* by explaining that what follows will not necessarily be a deconstruction of gay texts and/or authors, but a "gay studies reading" of canonical Canadian works. He situates this que(e)ry of Canadian literature as one that must depend upon experimentation, play, and "an attempt at *creating* [emphasis mine] a Canadian homotextual tradition." Like his previous survey of queer/Canadian identity, *In a Queer Country*, this investigation makes no promises of establishing its own canonicity as a queer-theory manual.

Goldie's survey of fiction stretches from John Richardson's *Wacousta*, a text most commonly read for its identity-forming practices rather than its traces of queerness, to Tomson Highway's *Kiss of the Fur Queen*, a text whose narrative is structured explicitly around a system of queer acts, and whose author—Highway himself—identifies as queer. The book's last chapter, *L'envoi*, deliberately echoes Stephen Leacock's *Sunshine Sketches of a Little Town*—not just, as Goldie suggests, to "send off" the reader, but to implicate yet another traditional Canadian text within this clever-yet-precise deconstruction of queerness and the Canadian canon.

Goldie sees *Wacousta*, for example, as a text full of homoerotic and homosocial suggestion—especially with the garrison representing "the male bonding which enabled the invasion of the Americas"—and he carries this notion into his following discussion of Sinclair Ross's *As For Me And My House*, a text aptly (if not unwittingly) described by Robertson Davies as being "not precisely gay in tone." This strategy of teasing out intonations and suggestions is

then used to frame W.O. Mitchell's *Who Has Seen The Wind*, perhaps the least queerable text within Goldie's survey.

Goldie continues with *The Mountain and the Valley*, which he treats as a text of sexual and spiritual absence rather than an enunciation of queer desire. *Beautiful Losers* carries over this theme of absence, but amplifies it to the point of obliteration through meaningless erotic practice. Similarly, Scott Symons' *Place d'Armes* concerns itself with masculine hegemonies within queer sexuality, eschewing the construction of a gay tradition in favour of the enunciation of power through phallic right. Davies' *Fifth Business* appears to close this theme of queerness-as-negation; but then we are given Findley's *The Wars*, with its explicit queer rape scene—juxtaposed against its ambivalent treatments of S/M sexuality and reversals of power—which adds a curious question mark to the discussion that has preceded it.

Watmough's *Thy Mother's Glass*, and Selvadurai's *Funny Boy* are treated as narratives that foreground unavoidably othered characters who resist normalization. This idea of nonconformity situates Tomson Highway's *Kiss of the Fur Queen,* whose characters attempt to resist the contamination and self-erasure of their residential school experiences. Goldie is careful to expose the limits of his own white reading of Highway's text, which serves as a reminder that Native texts—and especially those dealing with queerness, be it within two-spirited traditions or not—need to be theorized through different glasses.

Goldie's final assertion that, regardless of the evolutions and reversals of gay identity to come, "we shall continue to need studies such as this," is both apt and unfailingly optimistic. Yes, there are times when *Pink Snow* enacts its own essentialism, perhaps reading queer themes where they can (or should) not be. But, as a whole, it represents an important movement within the field of queer theory towards the inclusion of straight canonical works, and the de-territorialization (to borrow a Deleuzian sensibility) of queerness as a lens by which to read traditional and nation-forming literatures.

Dealing With It

Andrew Gray
Small Accidents. Rainforest Books $19.95

Sean Johnston
A Day Does Not Go By. Nightwood Editions $16.95

Reviewed by Sheryl Halpern

Since 9/11, there seems to be a lot more disaster fiction around. Two first short story collections by promising new writers fit this genre, or rather the sub-genre of minor-disaster fiction, looking backward at events that split pasts into ordinary Befores and bleak Afters. But the emphasis is on the aftermath, on the coping or collapsing.

In the dozen stories of Andrew Gray's *Small Accidents* (set in urban Canada, Fiji, and Australia), mishaps unravel the fabric of normalcy. A car crash could crush a marriage; a pickup line misconstrued as a drug deal could lead to a little girl's poisoning. A spider bite and some wanderlust could lead to dreamy death in the Outback.

Gray, a 2000 Journey Prize finalist, lets his plots develop from great opening lines. (The first story, "Outside," begins, "For more than a week now my wife has been sleeping in a tent in the backyard.") His characters are unconventional, guilt-ridden, somehow sympathetic survivors and escapees—like the surgeon who makes a dying, comatose patient into his earth goddess, the bored bureaucrat who flings herself into risky drug trials, the tourist who stays in Fiji until his inheritance and his timid male lover run out, the journalist who crafts happy endings for wartime massacres.

Fates and some too-obvious ironies teeter, but nothing really dreadful happens. People manage; there is (tentative) hope. Even in futuristic "Safe," set in a Toronto blighted by a nuclear-plant leak (think cannibalism and radiation sickness), a wife can take a short trip to the seemingly idyllic "dead zone" and return, unharmed, unseduced, wiser.

Sean Johnston's *A Day Does Not Go By*, is less hopeful and more confusing—but then, it's meant to be. The epigraph by John Newlove ("We've never been sure of ourselves") could be the motto of all the characters in his 28 stories, a slightly uneven mix of microfiction and longer pieces. There's disaster here—joined to uncertainty and a watch-melting surrealism. (A few stories, such as "Some Words, She Said," seem overloaded with dream logic.)

Johnston's manuscript, which won the 2001 David Adams Richards Award for fiction, is set in the vague urban everywhere, and plays with perception and the reader's assumptions. The first stories are deliberately ambiguous: in "This House," there is a funeral, but it is unclear until the end whether the narrator-son or his mother has died, and in "Nothing Like This," a couple agree that their quiet, ordinary eight-year-old son may not exist.

Nothing is quite what it seems, even death. A newlywed mourns a wife who may be dying or recovering in her hospital room (a Kafkaesque touch: he isn't permitted to see her); a dead man found on the prairie revives. And vital relationships and roles show cracks.

Still, these are not loss lieder, not just glimpses of millennial fears. The focus in both collections is on understanding what's left behind in the rubble. Or, as the protagonist of "Safe" puts it, "They would never really be safe . . . but maybe that wasn't the only thing that mattered."

Different but Equal

Patrice E.M. Hollrah

"The Old Lady Trill, the Victory Yell": The Power of Women in Native American Literature. Routledge $124.95

Review by Jo-Ann Episkenew

Earlier this year, my university ran head on into the righteous indignation of two white, middle-class academics who identified themselves as feminists. As part of a larger group invited to attend our institution's pipe ceremony, these women received an orientation from our Oskâpêwis (Elders' helper) on the pertinent protocols of the ceremony. One protocol requests that menstruating women not attend, a protocol common to the Indigenous peoples of the northern Plains. This request enraged the feminists. After many heated e-mail debates with members of our senior administration, the majority of whom are Indigenous women, the two refused to attend. Because of the protocol, they felt unwelcome. Equating different treatment with inequitable treatment, these women interpreted this protocol as evidence that we, as Indigenous people, situate men in a position of power over women *even when Indigenous women tried to explain that this is not the case.* Patrice E.M. Hollrah addresses the flaws inherent in such interpretations of Native American thought in *"The Old Lady Trill, the Victory Yell": The Power of Women in Native American Literature.*

Hollrah contends that gender complementarity rather than gender hierarchy was the foundational principle of Native American cultures in that they understood that both genders are of equal importance to the survival of the collective. She goes on to argue that, even though the colonizer culture has had some limited success in imposing its patriarchal ideology and hierarchical thinking on contemporary Native

America, the principle of gender complementarity is still accepted more often than not. To most Indigenous women, it is not our men but colonialism that is the enemy. To support her argument, Hollrah examines the work of four major Native American writers—Zitkala-Ša (Yankton Sioux), Leslie Marmon Silko (Laguna Pueblo), Louise Erdrich (Anishinaabe), and Sherman Alexie (Spokane/Coeur d'Alene)—along with their personal and cultural contexts. Although they write at different points in history and belong to different cultures, all acknowledge and respect the power of Native American women and provide numerous examples of their convictions in both their writings and their lives. In her first two chapters, Hollrah provides readers with a thorough discussion of the historical and cultural context of the importance of women in contemporary Native American literature. This is followed by a review of scholarship. In each subsequent chapter, she considers the writers, their individual and cultural contexts, and their works. Hollrah concludes her book with a discussion of Native American women as warriors based on an inherent intellectual sovereignty that makes feminist theory either redundant or irrelevant.

Hollrah makes a valuable contribution to the scholarship of Native American literature; however, her study would be even stronger if her review of scholarship did not stop at the 49th parallel. Although she does include an article by Bill Asikinack in her bibliography, she omits any other Indigenous Canadians whose scholarship would be germane, most notably Emma LaRocque (Cree/Métis), Janice Acoose (Anishinaabe/Métis), and Kim Anderson (Cree/Métis). Hollrah also has some difficulty with her analysis of Erdrich and Alexie's personal and cultural contexts. Her discussion of Erdrich's context as Anishinaabekwe is comparatively brief, probably because Turtle Mountain, with its large Métis population, is not representative of Anishinaabe culture. And, she has difficulty with the concept that Alexie's Spokane people are neither, or both, matrilineal and/or patrilineal.

Nevertheless, "*The Old Lady Trill, the Victory Yell*" is an important addition to the scholarship about Native American, and Canadian, literature in that Hollrah succeeds in explaining why feminist theory does not apply to Native literature.

Escaping the Speed Trap

Carl Honoré

In Praise of Slow: How a Worldwide Movement is Challenging the Cult of Speed. Knopf $36.00

Reviewed by Susie O'Brien

In 1899, Frederick Taylor revolutionized the workplace by breaking jobs down into specialized tasks calculated to the nearest fraction of a second. His system also helped fuel an instrumentalist, time-centred culture that still holds sway today. Carl Honoré's new book, *In Praise of Slow: How a Worldwide Movement is Challenging the Cult of Speed*, offers a prescription for escape.

In areas as diverse as work, medicine and cities, Honoré documents a "powerful backlash" against Taylor's legacy. It is not primarily a political movement—at least not in the traditional sense. Rather it follows the philosophy of Slow Food, which promotes the joys of slow eating along with small-scale agriculture and artisanal production, in the belief that opposition to the speed ethic rests on "a firm defence of quiet material pleasure."

That perspective—broad social change via the cultivation of individual pleasure—sums up much of the slow philosophy Honoré explores. While some of us might smirk—as Honoré admits he was inclined to at first—at the idea of practices like Tantric sex, which celebrates a "realization of the blissful nature of the Self" as a route

to universal enlightenment, the connection between speed and the impoverishment of human relationships is hard to dispute. One of the book's most poignant moments is Honoré's admission of the realization that inspired him to write it: he couldn't wait to finish reading bedtime stories to his children so he could get them off to bed and resume working. The book offers an alarming tally of the effects of chronic hurry on the young: insomnia, depression, and eating disorders in children as young as five. Proposed solutions, which range from less TV to Slow Schooling, offer hope that the next generation need not inherit their parents' addiction to speed.

This is a hopeful book that offers a plethora of ways to join the Slow revolution. And it's perhaps this tone of relentless optimism that is one of its few irritating aspects, embodied in a parade of examples like the "thirty-something married couple who work together in a Manhattan marketing firm" and who, after a holiday in southern Europe, enjoy a huge (and suspiciously fast!) improvement in their dining habits/sex lives/golf swings/overall health. In spite of Honoré's valid point that Slow need not be expensive (fresh produce is cheaper than processed food, for example), most of the people he interviews seem to be, like him, urban professionals deeply committed to lifestyle enhancement. The whole concept of "lifestyle" is a product of late capitalism with which, Honoré suggests, the Slow movement is entirely compatible. His frequent reassurances that "being slow does not mean being torpid, backward or technophobic" or that movement adherents are not "macrobiotic vegans or aromatherapists" but "people like you and me," raise questions about its potential to produce genuine change. Who ultimately decides—and how—what constitutes the *tempo giusto*, or natural rhythm of social and economic life? The relation between slowness and democracy is one I wish Honoré had explored more deeply. In general, this is an extensively researched and well-presented book whose optimism might not be misplaced. As Honoré reminds us, Taylor's time-management scheme was not wholly successful. Though one employee learned to haul more pig iron in a day, many others got tired and just quit. It is of such simple acts of resistance that revolutions are made.

Not After All!

Hugh Hood

After All! The Collected Stories: V. Porcupine's Quill $16.95

Reviewed by Barbara Pell

This fifth and final volume in the Porcupine Quill series *Hugh Hood: The Collected Stories* contains 17 stories (15 previously unpublished) written by Hood between September 1991 and December 1996 (according to the "Checklist" at the end). The "Foreword," by W.J. Keith (who prepared this text, as well as Hood's last novel, *Near Water,* for the press), explains that Hood usually interspersed publication of his stories between his novels in *The New Age/Le nouveau siecle* series (1975–2000), but his failing health before his death in 2000 kept him from publishing this complete and organized collection as planned.

Keith is right that Hood (despite the critics' scepticism concerning *The New Age* series) has always been acknowledged and anthologized as "one of the most skilful and probing Canadian practitioners of the short story." But these final stories are not up to his usual standards. These sketches (most of them fewer than eight pages) display Hood's trademark stylistic grace, intelligence, humour, encyclopaedic knowledge, and loving detail of the world and the arts. They include fantasies ("Bit Parts" and "Assault of the Killer Volleyballs"), travel anecdotes ("Swedes in the Night" and

"Deconstruction"), urban satires ("Too Much Mozart" and "The Messages Are the Message"), moral exempla ("A Subject for Thomas Hardy" and "A Catastrophic Situation"), aesthetic allegories ("There Are More Peasants Than Critics" and "Finishing Together"), and uncomfortably politically-incorrect parables ("A Gay Time" and "After All!"). They arise, as Hood's stories always have, out of everyday events. But these brief pieces do not develop into his usual fully-realised narratives and spiritual epiphanies. They make interesting anecdotes out of cocktail party chit-chat, but their plots, characters, and themes never seem to transcend triviality and attain significance as the best Hood stories always have. The exception might be "Life in Venice": a charming tale of two frugal vacationers on a quest for a carrot-scraper, who get "lost" in contemplation of the three churches that surround a Venetian hardware store and discover both "a miracle of the principles of engineering . . . as applied to ordinary human need" along with a lasting memory of spiritual beauty.

Hugh Hood was one of the greatest short-story writers Canada has ever known. Read "Flying a Red Kite" (1962), "Light Shining Out of Darkness" (1967), "The Fruit Man, the Meat Man, and the Manager" (1971), "Going Out as a Ghost" (1976), "God Has Manifested Himself Unto Us as Canadian Tire" (1980), and "The Small Birds" (1985) and marvel at his mastery of the genre. Go on to read all of his ten collections of short fiction (1962 to 1992). Don't judge Hood on *After All!*

Flamingos, Dinosaurs, and a Sense of Place

Gail Hughes
Flamingos. Parthian Books £4.99

Reviewed by John Carroll

Gail Hughes' collection of short stories surveys the life of Ellie beginning with her earliest experiences in Nancy, Alberta. The discrete narratives are also linked largely by the landscapes of southern Alberta, painted with a pristine clarity: "A meadowlark warbles joy and from the overhanging willows a bird with a voice like a rusty gatespring answers back."

These stories are laments of displacement and lost opportunity. The quest of most characters is to find their proper place, but not all are successful, and in the end Ellie's success seems based on self-exile.

In the first and title story of the collection, the five-year-old Ellie comes upon three flamingos standing at the edge of a creek, "dipping their beautiful crescent beaks to the water, arching their long pink necks into S shapes that ripple in the bronze mirror." This moment of magic, so out of place in the dilapidated Alberta town, a depository of failed ambitions, cannot be shared with anyone. "Flamingos live in Africa," her father says. "There's no way any flamingo could ever come to feed in the Nancy creek." This example of discovering the border where the ordinary and the miraculous meet sets the tone for the rest of the collection.

When Ellie and her father lead a university paleontologist to the site of a triceratops skeleton buried in the hills, they are hopefully leading him to a discovery that will allow their lives to gather meaning and counteract their sense of displacement in the rude and unsympathetic town. Ellie's mother has even put on a special dress for the occasion and made a lemon pie. But the bones have been obliterated by heavy rains.

Another opportunity to cross over into the miraculous is lost.

A pervading bleakness is somewhat counterbalanced by the final outcome of "Snow," whose premise seems to be an underlining of the entire collection's theme: there is something inescapably profound about blood ties. In the final line of the story Ellie refers to herself, her ill father, and her young son, thinking, "How like a family they are after all."

In the end, all Ellie can do is turn her back on the new world (which has become the old world for her), bid one last farewell to her estranged husband, and "head for home." Home is the "ordinary" world of a small town in Wales where she knows the neighbours and where she belongs.

Flamingos begins with the quotation of a Persian proverb: "In the dark night, everyone finds their own kind." Ellie's is a dark journey. Hughes manages to portray this quest in a vivid and haunting way.

Secondary Readers

Peter Hunt
Children's Literature. Blackwell Guides to Literature. Blackwell, $30.95

Alison Lurie
Boys and Girls Forever: Children's Classics from Cinderella to Harry Potter. Penguin, $22.50

Deborah O'Keefe
Readers in Wonderland: The Liberating Worlds of Fantasy Fiction from Dorothy to Harry Potter. Continuum, US $29.95

Reviewed by Adrienne Kertzer

The Blackwell Guides to Literature are designed to offer students unfamiliar with an author or genre "all they need to know." According to Peter Hunt, author of Blackwell's *Children's Literature*, what students primarily need to know regarding the "children's literature business" is the problematic role of adults in assessing books intended for children. Outlining the "distinctive virtues and difficulties, genres and modes" of children's literature and posing numerous insightful questions about his subject, Hunt never forgets that while adults run the business, they are always secondary readers.

Hunt readily acknowledges the possibility of bias: "every entry in this guide . . . [could] be challenged." Disarmed by this admission and a style highly parenthetical (Hunt loves to qualify his statements with a parenthetical aside), what's a reviewer to say? Even the chronologies that he offers come with the proviso that the stories such classifications imply are often misleading. Stressing the difficulty of defining both his subject and the concept of "the child," Hunt warns us that his guide will not contain "any of those phrases of shining untruth so beloved of reviewers and students." Before turning to his discussion of 38 Writers, 32 Key Texts, and 13 Topics, he traces theoretical issues, not just the problem of literary history's construction, but vexed matters of tone and address, content, gender, politics, ideology, and internationalism. In the course of so doing, he dismisses many clichés regarding children and their reading: "This nostalgic and protective view is not even generally true."

Believing that "children's literature (and public perception of it) is in a state of near-terminal confusion," Hunt has produced a volume as helpful as it is provocative. It is not the absence of Canadian authors that provokes. Explaining that nearly "all the books and authors have been selected not only for their individual importance, but also because they are exemplars of genres, modes, types, and so on," Hunt is free to conclude that no Canadian author satisfies this requirement. Predictably, *Anne of Green Gables* is the only Canadian work discussed as a key text (and the only twentieth-century Canadian work to appear in any of the chronologies). Catherine Parr Traill's *Canadian Crusoes*, Marshall

Saunders' *Beautiful Joe*, and Ernest Thompson Seton's *Wild Animals I Have Known* are included in a list of Early Australian, Canadian, and New Zealand Landmarks. What does prove tiresome, however, is Hunt's penchant for summarizing and then ridiculing many other critics' work. His impatience with children's literature critics is not directed solely at North American critics; ridiculing the accepted view of *The Wind in the Willows* as a children's classic, he concludes "the fact that it is accepted as such . . . is very instructive as to the condition of criticism of children's books." That the typos in the book are nearly always misspellings of American authors' or scholars' names and books may be coincidental, but the mocking tone is not. Certainly the essays that do not focus on a strategy of quoting critics only to mock them are likely to prove more helpful.

One of the questions Hunt asks is whether children's books can be "genuinely subversive." Another is whether adults, who often claim to do so, really can write as children. In *Boys and Girls Forever: Children's Classics from Cinderella to Harry Potter*, Alison Lurie explores both views in a collection of 14 essays, many of which originally appeared as biographical reviews in *The New York Review of Books.* Lurie's focus on "classics" is directed at a readership that does not view the term as problematic. They are not likely to challenge (as Hunt might) her opening sentence: "the most gifted authors of books for children are not like other writers: instead, in some essential way, they are children themselves." Lurie writes appreciations for an educated public rather than scholarship for professionals; nevertheless, her intelligent and perceptive essays will make even a jaded children's literature professor want to read more. Sometimes her comments prove more useful and insightful than Hunt's. For example, Hunt alludes to Walter de la Mare's poetry as support for his view that children's poetry "lost its way at the beginning of the twentieth century," but for reasons of space, he cannot give any evidence of de la Mare's "oblique, doom-laden eccentricities." In contrast, Lurie, not burdened by the restrictions of Hunt's format, explains why she prefers de la Mare's prose to his poetry, and makes us want to read the prose. We enjoy her for what she tells us about the authors and books that particularly interest her and what she reveals about herself, both as an adult critic (telling us which novels should be better known) and as a child (fond of E. Nesbit, disturbed by Andersen's *Little Mermaid*).

Boys and Girls Forever exemplifies literary appreciation at its best; in contrast, Deborah O'Keefe's *Readers in Wonderland: The Liberating Worlds of Fantasy Fiction from Dorothy to Harry Potter* is far less satisfactory. Hunt asserts "the study of children's literature has moved . . . from prescription, to description, to criticism." He distinguishes between the response of secondary, critical readers (adults) and that of children, for whom "the experience of children's literature . . . [ideally] is . . . revelation, expansion and exploration." Neither statement applies to *Readers in Wonderland.* Claiming that her book is "an appreciation of the power and delight that lie in children's fantasy fiction," O'Keefe offers her readers little more than plot summary, extensive quotation of the fantasy novels she has enjoyed, and an organization heavily indebted to Northrop Frye. She is incapable of explaining why she likes one book more than another beyond saying that stories that work produce a "brilliant explosion of meaning." She ignores contemporary children's literature scholarship; in the brief list of secondary sources, the only children's literature scholarship cited are a few essays in Sheila Egoff's 1969 collection, *Only Connect*, the work of Michelle Landsberg (1987), and Bruno Bettelheim (1977). Using full caps in order to "suggest something of

the distinct flavor of childhood reading," O'Keefe includes a range of fantasies far beyond those indicated by the title. Not only do some predate *The Wizard of Oz*, but at one point, she declares that her focus is post-1950 fantasies. Reluctant to distinguish children's fantasy from adult fantasy and apparently unfamiliar with Hunt's observation—"definitions and classifications of fantasy have amused academics and enthusiasts endlessly, but they can, on occasion, actually illuminate the texts"—she announces that her book "will examine only books with young characters at the center," and then justifies the inclusion of *The Hobbit* because hobbits are short.

Believing that fantasy offers readers a way of making sense of the world, and insistent that modern fantasy differs from earlier fantasy precisely because the world has become more "unmanageable" and therefore readers need to learn that "the world can be more coherent than they thought," O'Keefe writes as though her readers are totally unfamiliar with critical discourse and the works that she describes. Perhaps they are, but it is unlikely that this book will serve its purpose, that is convince other readers to share her love of fantasy and to understand why she loves the books that she does.

Doing Justice

Bohdan S. Kordan and Craig Mahovsky
A Bare and Impolitic Right: Internment and Ukrainian-Canadian Redress. McGill-Queen's UP $19.95

Monika Fludernik, ed.
Diaspora and Multiculturalism: Common Traditions and New Developments. Rodopi US $63.00

Reviewed by Lisa Grekul

In *A Bare and Impolitic Right: Internment and Ukrainian-Canadian Redress*, Bohdan Kordan and Craig Mahovsky examine the internment of Ukrainian Canadians during the First World War, a dark chapter of Canadian history that set precedent for, but is often overshadowed by, the internment of Japanese Canadians during the Second World War. The authors' intention is not to present a complete history of the internment (Kordan offers a full account in *Enemy Aliens, Prisoners of War: Internment in Canada During the Great War*, 2002); they set out, rather, to "assess and analyse a past government's policy and actions" and, in doing so, appeal for "symbolic redress" (which asks politicians in power today to acknowledge historical wrongs while assuring future generations that such wrongs will never be repeated).

Framed by photos that themselves speak volumes about an injustice that has been couched in silence for too long, the book is split into two parts, "What Went Wrong?" and "Putting Things Right." What Kordan and Mahovsky make clear in the first part of the text—an in-depth legal analysis of how the Borden government conceived of, justified, and implemented its policies on enemy aliens—is that, while many people assume that calls for redress stem from the "application of present-day values retrospectively," the Canadian government, between 1914 and 1917, knowingly and systematically "stretched" the Hague Conventions (established in 1899 to protect the rights of civilian internees) to persecute the "socially and politically marginal" (most Ukrainian Canadian internees were unemployed working class immigrants). The second half of the book focuses on how the Ukrainian Canadian redress movement has played out over the past 20-odd years: how the Mulroney government's formal apology (and offer of financial compensation) to the Japanese Canadian community, in 1988, gave hope to Ukrainian Canadians; and how that hope has waned, given both the Mulroney and Chrétien governments' refusal to engage in dialogue with members

of the Ukrainian Canadian community on the topic of redress.

But while Kordan and Mahovsky allow themselves moments of justifiable outrage toward federal leaders who have likened the Ukrainian Canadian redress movement to a money-grab, and who have dismissed the internment as an issue "not, in and of itself, of national historical significance," the tone of this text, and of the authors' argument itself, strikes me as too hesitant. Even as they lament the fact that "resistance has marked the Canadian government's position on redress," and that dialogue, "a hallmark of government in an open and democratic society," has been "decidedly absent," Kordan and Mahovsky admit that "there may be sound reasons for a cautious approach to redress." Although they insist, moreover, that a "simple statement of regret or apology arguably will not do," their valorization of Mulroney's apology to the Japanese Canadian community (which they interpret as "an unequivocal expression of solidarity with the future," and an "unqualified acceptance" of "political responsibility"), coupled with their insistence that, in the Ukrainian Canadian case, monetary concerns are irrelevant (since the victims are no longer alive), suggest that a simple apology actually would do. In the end, *A Bare and Impolitic Right* lets the Canadian government off the hook too easily.

Divided into two parts ("The Jewish Diaspora" and "American, British, and Other Diasporas: Multiculturalisms at Play"), *Diaspora and Multiculturalism: Common Traditions and New Developments*, edited by Monika Fludernik, comprises 13 essays that deal with a wide variety of diasporic literatures (American Jewish, British Jewish, South Asian, Afro Asian, African, US Mexican, German Turkish). The only point of intersection between Kordan and Mahovsky's book and Fludernik's is an introductory essay in the latter (in which Uma Parameswaran proposes a different approach to addressing past injustices—gesturing toward the Komogata Maru incident and the Air India tragedy, she calls for Indo Canadians to "write about these events, talk about them, cross-reference them at every turn until they become literary and cultural archetypes of the history in Canada"). In sharp contrast to Kordan and Mahovsky, who contain their enterprise within reasonable scholarly parameters, Fludernik is far too ambitious with her collection and the contradictory promises she makes in her introduction will leave readers confused.

According to Fludernik, these essays are meant collectively to "clarify the precise interrelationship between the recent rise in diasporic consciousness and the American concept of multiculturalism" (though only two contributors actually address American literature and/or politics). At the same time, the arrangement of the essays is ostensibly "designed to permit comparative analysis between the prototypical Jewish diaspora in the contemporary situation and the more recent contenders for diasporic existence." To be fair, Fludernik claims that the book is "not exhaustive" but her suggestion that it is "representative" of diasporic literary practices is misleading: seven of the 13 essays are devoted to Jewish or South Asian diasporic literatures; fiction in almost every case is privileged over poetry, drama, and creative non-fiction; and, most troublingly, East Asian diasporic writing is overlooked entirely. While some of the essays engage thoughtfully with compelling texts (Sandra Hestermann's work on German Turkish writers Zafer Şenocak and Feridun Zaimoğlu comes to mind, as well as Ursula Zeller's reading of Philip Roth's *Operation Shylock* and Roy Sommer's discussion of novels by British writers Zadie Smith and Courttia Newland), the book as a whole would have benefitted from a tighter focus. Unlike Kordan and Mahovsky—from whom she could take a

lesson—Fludernik sets goals that are too lofty for one volume and fails, as a result, to do justice to any of them.

Toward Grammars of Cultural Encounters

Paul S. Landau and Deborah D. Kaspin
Images and Empires: Visuality in Colonial and Postcolonial Africa. U of California P $24.95

Roger Luckhurst and Josephine McDonagh
Transactions and Encounters: Science and Culture in the Nineteenth Century. Manchester UP $96.75

Reviewed by Taiwo Adetunji Osinubi

Images and Empires and *Transactions and Encounters* expound on the intricacies of cultural transactions. With the first anthology, Paul Landau and Deborah Kaspin present a collection of inspired essays that examine the ideologies and practices underpinning the construction, dissemination, and reception of visual images in colonial and postcolonial Africa. The second volume investigates encounters between science and diverse spheres of cultural production in Victorian England. Both anthologies are informed by a zeal to contextualize histories and probe behind scenes of cultural encounters.

What is particularly admirable about *Images and Empires* is the persistent attention to the conscription of images into sometimes complementary and sometimes conflictual visual economies. Paul Landau's comprehensive introduction and Deborah Kaspin's concluding overview serve as bookends to the collection. While Landau concentrates on the evolution and confluence of European, American, and African cultures of representation, Kaspin teases out the mythologies that are subsequently deployed in African and Western signifying practices during concrete encounters. Curiously, I almost wish their order had been reversed: Landau's wealth of information makes better sense after reading the essays and Kaspin's exploration of myth systems highlights the underlying connections between the contributions.

The essays by David Bunn, Robert J. Gordon, and Pippa Skotnes are notable parts of the strong presentations on Southern Africa in this collection. In analyses of the cultures of violence that resonate with the iconography of the gravesite in colonial Eastern Cape, David Bunn deploys the terms of Roland Barthes and Charles Pierce to argue that graves function less as 'signs' than as 'indexes' because the relation between signified and signifier is not arbitrary. Gordon and Skotnes examine the politics of producing and representing Bushmen. During an initial phase in which they were subjected to brutal regimes of control and conquest, Bushmen were represented as primitives. The disappearance and near-extinction of Bushmen has, however, generated a nostalgia for precisely that which was so viciously destroyed. Gordon focuses on film and Skotnes works on curatorial practices. Both essays tread the volatile grounds of African identities.

The theme of reciprocal exchange runs through most essays. Timothy Burke's contribution describes the contingencies that attended the introduction of new visual images and technologies in colonial Zimbabwe. Eric Gable's "Bad Copies" focuses on African and European productions of the body of the other in ethnographic photography and sculpture. Gable draws attention to a marker of colonial ambivalence: even as they seek to civilize the savage, colonizers condemn Africans adopting European fashion, technology, or art as poor imitations. The demystification of colonial ambivalence is important. More vital though, is Gable's thrust that the colonialist belief of the "bad copy" is still abroad and "underwrites a Western politics of identity." Nancy Rose Hunt and

Tejumola Olaniyan delve into the circulation of comics and cartoons in colonial Congo and Nigeria respectively. Like Gable, these two contributors are interested in the African adaptation of European (and American) media. Hunt's attention to contexts of spectatorship is especially delightful. In analyses of Tarzan and Tintin comics, she reveals the complexities at work in African reception and recycling of images.

Paul Landau and Hudita Nura Mustafa review the functions of photography in Africa. While Landau's account will strike few as novel, his synoptic assessment of cultures of circulation spawned by European utilization of visuality as a tool in the colonial encounter provides the kind of information some readers might need to contextualize other essays. Mustafa's essay concentrates on the use of photography in self-fashioning by women in Dakar. The emphasis is less on the colonial encounter than on contemporary self-representation in the debris of colonial legacies and under the force of global economics.

This volume presents valuable work for scholars of visual rhetoric and African studies. The essays engage in arresting theorizations of African relationships to new technologies, artefacts, and archives. Lurking in these essays is an appraisal of the relation between Africans and the images of black peoples created during colonial encounters that circulate in various forms today. I am left with a few questions. What powers do Africans ascribe to these images and how do these images circulate outside the West in explicitly African milieus? Also, which Africans have access to such images and does such access, appropriation, and use of these artefacts create any hierarchies in African societies? A few essays attend to these questions. I wish they had been put at the forefront of inquiry.

Compared to *Images and Empires*, the scope of the second book under review is narrower. The steady set of Charles Darwin, Edmund Gosse, Thomas Henry Huxley, John Ruskin, George Lewis, and George Eliot circulate in these essays as they probe nascent divisions between culture and science in Victorian England. Concerns with sight and the impact of new technologies on scopic cultures are the points of departure for the first three essays in *Transactions and Encounters*. Focusing on the phonograph and the telephone, Steven Connor suggests that in spite of the emphasis on the eye, new technologies in the nineteenth century reconfigured the human sensorium and installed hearing as social laboratory for comprehending the character of new scientific developments. Isobel Armstrong analyzes the microscope's transformation of Victorian scopic experience. Rejecting the "complete untethering of seeing from the object," she judges the suppression of mediation, a predominant and determining feature of nineteenth-century epistemology. Lindsay Smith assesses the consequences of early photography's inability to reproduce colour for the representation of reality. She concentrates especially on the resulting relations of dissimilarity between representations and their referents.

The second set of essays document contests between practitioners and proprietors of uncodified knowledges and practices. In his contribution, Paul White charts the contests between professionals and lay commentators from the humanities in Victorian periodicals. As these publications created public and social spheres that were instrumental in shaping the reading public's perception of science, scientists concerned with their claims to truth went to great lengths to invalidate the claims of lay commentators. David Amigoni's essay, too, focuses on encounters between science and literature. In this case, Amigoni demonstrates through a contextual reading of Edmund Gosse's *Father and Son* (1907) and James Mark Baldwin's *Story of the Mind*

(1899) how literary texts employed a volatile concept of "imitation" in analogy with evolutionary frameworks to disseminate specific philosophies of cultural evolution. Roger Luckhurst argues in his essay that turn of the century interest in mind reading produces a site to theorize articulations of modern subjectivity. Luckhurst traces, for instance, the transitions of unaccepted knowledge of mesmerism to legitimated scientific interest in hypnotism. More importantly, a discourse of the unconscious self and hidden memory emerges in tandem with the materialization of hypnotism.

The last three essays share a concern with the crossover of theories of evolution into developing disciplines and the social sphere. Rebecca Stott's examination of Victorian fascination with the microscopic world discloses that marine invertebrates (prior to the ape) functioned as icons for cultural anxieties about human evolution and "animal-man kinship." Lynette Turner studies the production of women as object of scientific inquiry and Carolyn Burdett examines a specific mixture of Darwinism and sociopolitical ideologies imbricated in the emergence of eugenics. These last essays capture myriad investments and, sometimes, conflictual energies of individual figures that either reveal the underpinnings of scientific procedures or in fact go on to inform nascent disciplines.

Expanding Boundaries

John A. Lent, ed.
Animation in Asia and the Pacific. Indiana UP US $44.95

Rajini Srikanth and Esther Y. Iwanaga, eds.
Bold Words: A Century of Asian American Writing. Rutgers UP $25.00

Reviewed by Shih-Wen Sue Chen

Asian animation has long been associated with Japanese *anime* and *manga*, whose worldwide popularity has sparked a great deal of research and publication. However, the animation of other countries in the Asia Pacific region has mainly remained out of the spotlight. Editor John A. Lent attempts to rectify the situation in *Animation in Asia and the Pacific*, a cornucopia of informative essays that introduces readers to the animation of fifteen countries, including China, Malaysia, Vietnam, India, and Australia. Divided into two parts, "National Perspectives" and "Topical Issues," the book is also interspersed with several vignettes that provide vivid portraits of pioneering animators. The revealing personal stories highlight the challenges faced by animators who work in countries where animation is often frowned upon or dismissed as children's entertainment. Whereas most of the animators overcame early difficulties, some, such as Korean animator Shin Dong Hun, who declares that he does not want to "do risky work like animation again," have since turned their efforts elsewhere. The influence of Japanese *anime* in other parts of the world is also addressed in three essays. Abundant illustrations, including photographs of the animators and segments of their works, greatly enhance the book's visual appeal.

As Lent points out in his introduction, "chapters vary in length and differ in emphases because of the relative sizes and stages of development of animation industries." He also attributes this uneven coverage to the different levels of access to information. Given the different backgrounds of the contributors (academics, animators, and enthusiasts), one encounters diverse writing styles in each chapter. From the academic theorizing in Rolando B. Tolentino's "Animating the Nation: Animation and Development in the Philippines" to the historical coverage in Muliyadi Mahamood's "The History of Malaysian Animated Cartoons," these different approaches result in an interesting mixture of essays. Despite the differences in

focus and approach, the extensive notes and bibliographies listed after each chapter clearly indicate that solid research was undertaken for each piece.

Several commonalities can be found in these countries' animation industries. They confront similar difficulties, such as the lack of qualified trainers and limited workspace. Many animators fear that the strong emphasis on overseas animation will cause cartoonists to be reduced to craftsmen because of subcontracting work. Furthermore, competition from American cartoons and Japanese *anime* continues to threaten the development of local cartoons. Historical influences, governments' use of cartoons as propaganda (in countries such as Vietnam), the interference of politics, and censorship against violence and sex in animations are other issues addressed. Of particular interest in the topical issues section is UNICEF's Meena Communication Initiative, which, through a series of educational cartoons, has helped India to raise levels of health awareness among the general population.

Like Lent, the editors of *Bold Words: A Century of Asian American Writing* felt the need to expand the current boundaries of their field. In her introduction to *Bold Words*, Rajini Srikanth asserts that she and co-editor Esther Y. Iwanaga put the anthology together "to reflect the impact of new social, cultural, political, and economic forces on present-day Asian America." While acknowledging the presence of several existing anthologies of Asian American writing, Srikanth claims that unlike most, this one "encompass[es] regional, ethnic, and thematic diversity." In addition to authors of East Asian descent, the collection includes works of writers of South and Southeast Asian background, as well as bi/multiracial authors. Diverse topics such as assimilation, nostalgia, family, and sexuality are addressed in the writings.

Divided into four parts (memoir, poetry, fiction, and drama) each introduced by a practitioner of that genre, the anthology also includes two appendices ("Themes and Topics" and "Ethnicity of Authors") as well as a glossary. In each section, works are presented in chronological order, which, according to Srikanth, "give[s] readers a historical picture of the deployment of the genre among Asian American writers." However, it would have been more helpful had dates of publication been specified next to the titles.

The introductions to the four sections are varied in style and format. An interview that the editors conducted with Meena Alexander serves as the introduction to the memoir section. In it, Alexander reflects on the nature of memoirs and her personal experience with the genre. However, she rarely comments on the selected works. Similarly, Roberta Uno's introduction to the drama section provides a rich history of Asian American theatre but lacks commentary on the featured plays. On the other hand, Gary Pak points out specific works of fiction to ponder. Poet Eileen Tabios encourages readers to read the anthology's poems "*as poems*," "rather than through the clouds of context in which the poetry of their authors has been featured."

Across different genres, authors investigate similar themes. In her memoir, Shirley Geok-lin Lim observes: "[t]here are many ways in which America tells you don't belong. The eyes that slide around to find another face behind you. The smiles that appear only after you have almost passed them, intended for someone else." Similar feelings are expressed in poems such as Alfrredo Navarro Salanga's "They Don't Think Much About Us in America." Both Andrew Lam's short story "Show and Tell" and an excerpt from Alex Luu's play *Three Lives* depict the impact of war on children. Several of the selected plays deal with issues of identity. For example, in an excerpt from Shishir Kurup's *Assimilation*, a five-year-old

girl reacts to the comment that she's "now an American" (having just been sworn in as a citizen) by asking, "'When I get my blue eyes?'" Rick Shiomi mixes elements of the supernatural into *Mask Dance*, a play about the lives of Korean adoptees who try to fit into American society. Gary Pak observes that most of the pieces in the fiction section "transcend your typical 'Asian American' topics." Jana Monji's "Kim" and R. Zamora Linmark's "Rated-L," both addressing issues of gender and sexuality, are just two examples of the bold writing that has emerged. The book's 77 selections reflect the different sets of complicated realities that Asian Americans have experienced in the twentieth century.

All Too Human

Akira Mizuta Lippit
Electric Animal: Towards a Rhetoric of Wildlife.
U of Minnesota P $22.95

Reviewed by Janice Fiamengo

Akira Mizuta Lippit begins *Electric Animal* with a psychoanalytic reading of the relation between human beings and animals, mapping Freud's theory of infant development, whereby the child comes to understand itself as separate from other bodies, onto the process by which early humans separated themselves from animals. While the child "recognizes the traces of a former correspondence with the other" in his acquisition of bodily autonomy, human beings retain traces of a previous correspondence with animals in dreams and the unconscious, mourning the loss of animality that is also the foundation of subjectivity. As Lippit explains, "Seen in this light, one can view the origin of animal sacrifice as a melancholic ritual, replete with sadism and ambivalence, which repeats the origin of humanity. It serves to affirm and renounce humanity's primal identification with animals, and the need to overcome it." *Electric Animal* sets out to "remember" animals by tracing their haunting presence in Western discourses of the human.

As the previous overview may suggest, *Electric Animal* is much more about theory than about animals, and sometimes—as in the lengthy discussion of the Freudian unconscious—not really very much about animals at all. Animals as real beings have little place in this work, which is about the *figure* of the animal in Western metaphysics, and if you are not already familiar with Hegel, Heidegger, Nietzsche, and Freud, then the book is often heavy going. Lippit writes firmly within the idiom of the theorists he examines, and the result is an important discussion that is often inaccessible. Even the repeated statement that animals "cannot die" because not conscious of death—which to many animal observers will seem perverse and wrong-headed—could usefully have been explained rather than taken for granted. Furthermore, Lippit is not interested in recent natural science research that complicates the view of animal consciousness asserted by his philosophers.

However, even for a reader more animal-lover than theory-lover, the book is rewarding. It is instructive to recognize, in Lippit's concise overview of Western philosophy from Descartes to Derrida, how persistently animality shadows definitions of human subjectivity. In a classic deconstructive move, Lippit shows how that which has been repeatedly excluded from the category of humanity has been central—and troubling—to its articulation throughout philosophy. The impact of Darwin and Freud, who made possible the recognition of "multiple and other worlds removed from that of consciousness," exploded the rigid barrier philosophy had erected between the beasts and ourselves. In showing both how traditional philosophy was always already moving toward a recognition of the unconscious, and how decisively Freud's theory reversed the traditional exclusion of animals

from subjectivity, Lippit provides an illuminating recapitulation of Western thought. His discussion of three fantasy writers who depict animality—Lewis Carroll, Franz Kafka, and Akutagawa Ryunosuke—is absorbing if necessarily rather sketchy; and the brilliantly bizarre progression by which photography and cinema are linked with animals as "versions of the unconscious" in technology is compelling indeed, even for a reader (like me) who has not been able to follow every conceptual link.

Although it begins with a reference to the disappearance of animals because of human over-consumption and environmental destruction, this is not a work of ecocriticism, demonstrating remarkably little concern with practical ethics or environmental issues. In another sense, though, its focus on theories of the other is vital to animal rights concerns. Human tyranny over animals needs to be addressed through legislation, but also through analyzing how the disavowal of our animal origins has been fundamental to our most cherished projects of civilization. Lippit's study, seeking "to recover the traces of animality" in the human sciences, is germane to that investigation and a salutary reminder that, when we are looking at non-human animals, we are always looking at ourselves.

Receiving Gifts

Jean Little, illustrations by June Lawrason
The Birthday Girl. Orca $6.95

Jean Little, illustrations by Kady MacDonald Denton
I Gave My Mum a Castle. Orca $9.95

Sylvia Olsen
The Girl With a Baby. Sono Nis $9.95

Reviewed by Margaret Steffler

Jean Little's *The Birthday Girl*, an Orca Echoes chapter book for beginning readers, and *I Gave My Mum a Castle*, a poetry collection, are both concerned with the giving and receiving of gifts. Nell Mellis, the birthday girl on a Saskatchewan farm, gratefully and graciously receives a doll, a box of watercolour paints, and a dress for her eighth birthday. The more important gifts, however, arrive the following day, which is anything but perfect as Nell's family members carry on with their daily activities now that the excitement of the birthday is over. These more valuable and complicated gifts, three kittens, enter the story when Nell finally finds Lady Jane Grey, her lost cat. An elaborate tea party with dressed-up sunflowers manages to convince Nell's mother to keep one kitten for the house, one for the barn, and to give the third one away. *The Birthday Girl* is written in memory of Jean Little's grandmother's cousin, who "really did dress up sunflowers and have a party." The realism of the story is also reinforced by Lawrason's black-and-white illustrations, which convey the warmth of the family and the simple but challenging conditions of "old-fashioned" farm life. The story stresses the love and generosity involved in the giving and receiving of gifts. Young readers in our consumer-driven society will find refreshing relief in the dressed-up sunflowers and new kittens.

In her introduction to *I Gave My Mum a Castle,* Jean Little explains how and why she became "interested in the art of giving." The short narrative poems in this collection, when read aloud, sound like prose; on the page they make use of stanza breaks and lines of verse to shape and divide ideas and events. Ranging in tone from the humorous to the poignant, the collection provokes thoughts about what constitutes a gift, while conveying the emotions of the giver as well as the receiver. The conclusions of the poems tend to tie them up too neatly, taking away the opportunity for the reader to make connections. The poem, "I Gave My Mum a Castle," for example, ends with the mother explaining to Clara that Jim's intangible gifts *are* a castle: "'When

you are my age, Clara,' my mother said / And you long for a castle, / May God give you a son like Jim.'" "The Dish" could have ended with the man behind the counter in the gift shop providing the hurtful and shocking information that "'She traded it in on a nice bit of Royal Doulton / She has a real eye for precious things.'" But the final stanza directs the reader's response instead of simply allowing it to take place: "I am forty-three now and my mother is dead. / Yet it still hurts me / That she wanted a Royal Doulton child, / But I was only bone china." The thematic unity of the collection memorably expands definitions and concepts of gift giving.

Two poems in Little's collection, "The Bulb" and "Names," deal with the concept of naming as a gift. The climax of Sylvia Olsen's *The Girl With a Baby* also involves the bestowal of a name as a gift. Olsen's novel for young adults opens with 14-year-old Jane Williams giving birth to her baby, Destiny. Jane, now an exhausted teenaged mother, continues to attend school and participate in the drama club. Her complicated family, labeled "half Indians" on Terrace Avenue, makes her situation more difficult but also provides the context for Jane to persevere. In a traditional naming ceremony in which sencoten, (spelled secoten in the novel), the language of the Saanich people, is used, Aunt Mary gives Destiny the name, Say woo see wa, a name that is passed down by female members of the family and is associated with "the strength and power of the old women." The atmosphere of the naming ceremony is effectively conveyed through a detailed description of the preparations and the event itself, teaching readers about the culture but avoiding a didactic tone. *The Girl With a Baby* perhaps seems too idealistic in the way Jane manages to continue her "role" in the drama club along with her new role as mother, but the author's note at the end of the book assures the reader that Olsen, whose novel was "wholly inspired by the real-life story of my daughter Heather, who gave birth to Yetsa when she was fourteen years old," has more insight and authority than the reader. The gift of Destiny's name, Say woo see wa, connects the past with the present and affirms the less tangible gifts that are passed down through the female members of the family.

Words from the People

Paul Robert Magocsi, ed.
Aboriginal Peoples of Canada. A Short Introduction. U of Toronto P $63.00

Charles L. Cutler
O Brave New Words! Native American Loanwords in Current English. U of Oklahoma P $23.17

Reviewed by Gundula Wilke

Aboriginal Peoples of Canada is composed of the largest entry, "aboriginals," from the *Encyclopedia of Canada's Peoples* (1999), republished in this format for better accessibility. A detailed introduction by J. R. Miller provides an overview of Canada's aboriginal peoples and their relations with past and present non-aboriginal society. The chapters are arranged by linguistic groupings: Algonquians (subdivided into Eastern Woodlands, Plains, Subarctic), Inuit, Iroquoians, Ktunaxa (Kutenai), Métis, Na-Dene, Salish, Siouans, Tsimshians, Wakashans. The history of individual groups is traced to their present location in Canada, emphasizing both their unity and internal linguistic and cultural diversity. A number of structural categories are detailed in this exploration: "identification and history," "economic life," "family, kinship, and social organization," "culture and religion," "education, language, and communication," "politics," and "inter-group relations and group maintenance"; the encyclopedia offers manifold invitations and reminders for the Canadian reader to continue an exploratory reading process.

Commercial partnership in fishing and fur trade, Christian evangelization, and military alliance in diplomacy and warfare made it necessary to first establish harmonious relations. Later the process of settlement and resource exploitation resulted in dispossession and displacement, in economic marginalization, and attempted assimilation. Native communities, with their dependence upon migratory food sources and thus extensive territoriality, were regarded as obstacles to European economic interests. "[T]he vast majority of the Canadian Inuit still live and work in their original territory;" the Métis, on the other hand, suffer from identification problems as a distinctive group given their racial mixing and their status as a landless minority. Social, economic, and political problems of aboriginals are countered by the recent development of "a spiritual, political, and cultural revival" as a separate identity within Canadian society signified, for example, by treaty negotiations and recent agreements, a rising aboriginal enrolment in post-secondary education, or the major presence of Native artists and performers. Many people today express identification with their native heritage, and the pan-Indian adoption of new customs (e.g. the powwow movement, potlatch, sun dance, and sweat lodge) have become a cross-cultural experience. Within the framework of this volume, the combination of articles conveys a very detailed image of the aboriginal peoples of Canada and may serve as a significant resource tool. The addition of a few maps, and perhaps an index, would make it even more accessible.

O Brave New Words! examines linguistic and socio-cultural contact since Columbus. New circumstances, new locations, and objects needed new words and phrases, such as natural features specific to America, distinctive plants and animals, foods, and technologies; further loanwords reflect cultural entities (e.g. powwow, sagamore, or totem in the seventeenth century). The adoption of loanwords is no one-sided process, yet Cutler's findings are based on a collection of American Indian words or terms found in the English language in current use. His data input refers to entries in the *Webster's Third New International Dictionary* (1971) and its supplements until 1986, and reflects shifting cultural relations. Some expressions were adopted indirectly via Spanish, Portuguese, French, or Russian and Scandinavian sources. *O Brave New Words!* is based on seven broad American language groups (Eskimo-Aleut, Na-Dene, Macro-Algonquian, Macro-Siouan, Hokan, Penutian, Aztec-Tanoan); it refers to all of North America north of Mexico, and is arranged historically, interspersed with background knowledge. The rate of loanword borrowing, visualized in a graph, serves as historical indicator for Native / non-native relations. Geographical and cultural distances explain the low number of loans from some languages.

Linguistically, most loans are nouns, some transformed into verbs; new compound-word constructions are formed; linguistic adaptations to the English phonetic system are performed by truncation and anglicization. Indianisms that translate expressions from Indian languages such as *iron horse*, *whispering spirit*, *great white father* often indicate cultural misunderstandings of basic concepts. These found extensive use in literature, some of them invented for their mythic quality. No further need for new nomenclature and a change from rural to urban society led to an almost complete end of borrowing in the late twentieth century. Yet, recent renaming processes (e.g. of Frobisher Bay) and "[l]iterature by Native American authors may be the most fertile source for new Indian loans"; another possible new source may be films.

Two glossaries, "North American Indian

languages north of Mexico" and "Eskimo and Aleut languages", incorporate the date of first recorded use, etymologies, pronounciations, and definitions for the purpose of identification; they serve as valuable supplements and references for the main text. The appendix "Latin American Indian Languages" reveals the far-reaching influence of ancient American civilizations. Both appendix and glossaries comprise one third of the whole book, which is completed by notes and a bibliography. All material is made accessible to the interested reader as well as the scholar in a narrative style: history becomes story, linguistic processes become communication. Readers expecting page after page of linguistic data will be surprised at the range of topics the author explores.

While Cutler sees the variety of North American Indian languages as an obstacle to communication and cooperation among Native peoples, various authors in *Aboriginal Peoples of Canada* emphasize the use of non-verbal communication such as sign language and graphic symbols (petroglyphs, pictographs, animal hides, birchbark scrolls), highlight the political and socio-economic role of interpreters, and delineate early traditions of native language literacy, syllabaries, and alphabets. Language serves as a carrier of cultural information; thus, as Cutler states, "[d]istinctive customs and traditions often disappear with the languages in which they were conveyed." Education and language policies led to a loss of traditional languages and cultures in North America. Many languages are either endangered because they are only spoken by elders, or they have been totally replaced by English; ironically, they partly survive in English as loanwords and loan terms, and this construction of a cultural memory in language is pivotal in leaving a lasting impact. Both books offer evocative and useful entry points for comparison, reflection, and further reading on the aboriginal peoples of Canada and indicate the potential for Native empowerment.

Three Narrative Strains

Rabindranath Maharaj
The Book of Ifs and Buts. Vintage Canada $24.00

Uma Parameswaran
The Sweet Smell of Mother's Milk-Wet Bodice. Broken Jaw P $13.95

Nalini Warriar
Blues from the Malabar Coast. Tsar Publications $18.95

Reviewed by Kuldip Gill

Rabindranath Maharaj is now widely known for his fiction and short stories. Uma Parameswaran, a short fiction writer and award winner, both teaches literature and writes fiction. Nalini Warriar, whose first novel is under review here, has previously published but is not yet widely read.

Rabindranath Maharaj's collection begins with a novella, followed by several short stories, and ends with a long story that bears the title of the book. The novella, *The Journey of Angels,* is well constructed and smoothly written. Saren, the protaganist, is a slightly self-obsessed dupe who is transformed by his interactions with subsidiary characters, who show up in cameo-like roles. Saren handles beauty and ugliness in his life with some equanimity. The author offers his characters, dignity, stature, and compassion.

Throughout the collection, Maharaj uses a variety of styles and devices including letters, male and female narrators, longer and shorter story lengths, an admirable vocabulary and a command of the Trinidadian Creole. However, the book has problems as well as bright spots—many of the short stories seem hastily written. "Escape to Etobicoke," might have been better as a thoughtful essay. In "Diary of a Downcourage Domestic," Maharaj uses epistolary

form to show the relationship between a woman from Trinidad, who has migrated to Canada, and her husband, who must remain behind. Their letters are emotionally touching in their naivete, surprise, and constant stocktaking as the characters react to the processes of migration and adaptation. Other stories, too, offer glimpses into the essence of change and transformation through migration, and contain astute nuggets on the thoughts and feelings that immigrants such as this family confront as they adapt. In "Aja," a boy grows up, and with his grandfather's blessing, moves to Canada to get a fine job picking apples. We learn of his awakening. "The Book of Ifs and Buts," the book's titular story, is suffused with magic realism. It takes a careful and studied reading to follow Maharaj's clever, playful, and satiric romp through the story. He almost succeeds in this brilliant piece, but I could not find an "Aha!" moment. Maharaj arouses interest with dialogue and details, but falls short in the denouement. Reading this story I gained enjoyment of this author's considerable merits as a writer, but don't look for an epiphany or any marked redemption in this story. It could have been tighter and crisper.

Maharaj's often superb storytelling and writing skills, his deft use of Caribbean dialect, and his honesty make me recommend this remarkable book, despite some weakness in the stories in the middle.

In the foreword to *The Sweet Smell of Mother's Milk-Wet Bodice,* Uma Parameswaran tells us that the method from which her novella emerged "is [as] an excerpt from a larger novel in which I wish to take Namita's story further and develop issues only glanced at in this work." These are the specific polemical goals she started to develop in this book. (In her next, Parameswaran wants to clarify how legal processes are underdeveloped and inequitable when it comes to protecting immigrant women who are in abusive relationships.)

Although Parameswaran claims to present stories of three women, the novella specifically depicts the difficulties of Namita, a South Asian woman newly arrived in Canada, whose in-laws are psychologically abusive to her because of her small dowry. Her husband sides with his parents. After a series of incidents Namita gets help from white service providers. She breaks away, and her plans undergo stereotypical glitches, after which she succeeds in setting up her own apartment.

Parameswaran's plot isn't complex enough for the novella form and does not stretch the imagination; we aren't shown more than the protagonist's surface difficulties faced in the situation. She is transformed, but we learn little about her emotional state or her own thoughts. I kept wishing the book could shine with hope, not just depict what was acquired through a mild perseverance. (A novel can do that, even when life may not.) Adaptation to a new country doesn't just produce a hybrid life, but rather a double consciousness, and a very deeply felt change of identity. Parameswaran could have shown us more depth in the crisis felt by Namita, caught in an unjust world. Although the dialect is stilted and unconvincing, the author does succeed in showing us humour and, if not redemption, at least survival, because of human love. Her choice of topic is that of a committed social activist in Canada. I look forward to the coming novel that will give more scope within which to embed a polemical work as the author forsees it.

In her first book, *Blues From the Malabar Coast,* Nalini Warriar writes polished vignettes, like blue notes. The set of linked stories is exquisitely rendered in rich detail, such as the smells and tastes of South Indian foods: chilies, cumin, pappadums, betel paste, dosas, red rice, cardamon, cashew nuts, and fried green bananas. In

one story, we read about a little boy and his feelings about his body and its functions; in other stories, we discover adults' fascination with the body and its rituals. Warriar also tells us about clothing and shows how meaningful dress (and undress) and adornment can be in a culture.

Characters such as Krishnan reappear in the twelve linked stories about the matriarchal Variyar clan. In the beautiful and optimistic title story, "Blues from the Malabar Coast," Krishnan delightfully recounts growing up as a spoilt little boy in his extended South India family. The author depicts the difficulties of being young, the confusing nature of change and growth, and the usual helplessness of dealing with it when you are too small to understand what is going on.

In the remaining 11 stories Warriar deftly introduces Krishnan's brothers (Mohan, Raman, and Shivan) as well as their sisters (Leela and Parvati), and all their children. Warriar shows us family life according to the institution of cross-cousin marriage. The characters are not tied to India; they move around the globe in search of new vocations. Ven and Seema move to Quebec. An earlier story tells of Ven's travel back to India from Germany. The stories convey the characters' lives and the seduction of memory. Evocatively detailed, the work appears at times to be a gathering of brief, almost autobiographical notes.

Read Nalini Warriar's debut collection for its remarkably assured and original voice and poetic writing. She creates a dynamic ebb and flow of voices and styles in stories that range from first-person narratives to those told in an artful authorial voice. Since she has empathy with her characters, it is possible for the reader to like the naughty children, the newly married man who takes up with another woman when spurned nightly by his bride, and the women who plot outrageously funny incidents to get to the bottom of something. Throughout, we see people going through the business of getting through daily life, but with a zest for life in all its robustness, pathetically funny, and sometimes tragic.

Seclusion and Compulsion

Dave Margoshes and Shelley Sopher, eds.
Listening with the Ear of the Heart: Writers at St. Peter's. St. Peter's $24.95

Béla Szabados and Kenneth G. Probert, eds.
Writing Addiction: Towards A Poetics of Desire and Its Others. Canadian Plains Research Centre $24.95

Reviewed by Sue Sorensen

The Margoshes and Sopher anthology is inspired by writers' colonies at St. Peter's Abbey, a point of pilgrimage for Saskatchewan writers (and others) since 1980. The majority of the work is poetry, but there are memoirs and fiction, as well as a valuable roundtable about SaskLit featuring William Robertson, David Carpenter, and Lorna Crozier. *Listening with the Ear of the Heart* highlights what Saskatchewan literature is known for: personal, accessible work featuring humour, a strong bond with nature, and an unassuming lyricism. This lovely anthology is a glowing recommendation for these rural retreats. The Szabados and Probert book collects critical essays that look beyond the province's borders toward the stimulating topic of art and dependency. But the essayists in *Writing Addiction* only occasionally come to grips with addiction and its impact on literature.

One of the astonishing things about *Listening with the Ear of the Heart* is its joy. An anthology can be a frustrating, miscellaneous event, but this one is nearly all pleasure. The editors have chosen work evoking the retreat experience; the intensity of retreat prompts an answering intensity

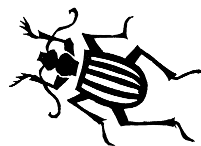
in the works. The expected subjects of faith, work, nature, solitude, and writing itself are represented with clarity and beauty. In biographical notes that accompany the selections, writers, sometimes rather unwillingly, use such words as "awe" and "sacred" to describe their time at St. Peter's. The profundity of their religious feeling is surprising, and many of the poets (some Jewish or agnostic) describe moments of transcendence at the monastery that are rare in contemporary letters.

Writing Addiction seems to follow in the long tradition of addiction confessions, but it is less confessional than it promises and too various in its objectives. It is divided into three sections: "Confessions" offers informal, often quirky musings by creative writers; "Perspectives" includes scholarly explorations of philosophical and psychological issues surrounding addictive behaviour; "Critiques" attempts to bring these two realms together, offering investigations of individual writers associated with some addiction. Of the three, "Critiques" is the most successful, with high points being Ellen Lansky's reading of Scott and Zelda Fitzgerald's alcohol-soaked novels and Cindy MacKenzie's close analysis of the leap and plunge of Emily Dickinson's addiction tropes. This section also contains one of the volume's best essays, Alison Lee Strayer's "The Way of Imperfection," a piece that combines elegance and personal risk. Strayer also offers excellent readings of Virginia Woolf and a determination not to avoid the subject of death when analyzing addictive behaviour.

Most of the other essayists are flippant on the subject of death or neglect it. Surely the lure of death has an imposing role to play in an addict's experience. Yet Aritha van Herk merely says that "suicides make my mouth water." Andrew Stubbs treats William Styron's death wish with disturbing lightness. The theoretical structure that Stubbs creates becomes more massive than the subject, so that Styron's work and depression become incidental to the ideas of Freud and Baudrillard that truly interest Stubbs. And only in the last paragraph of Crispin Sartwell's "Addiction and Authorship," perhaps the most exciting essay, does Sartwell glance at death, coyly admitting its power.

The avoidance of death in this volume is the reason for my use of the term "addictive behaviour" rather than "addiction." An addict is intimate with death's danger and allure. A writer who is intrigued by the notion of addiction, and who wants to bounce it around a bit, can afford to ignore death. The reader who expects gritty particularities in this book will be disappointed. Surprisingly, these essayists give themselves over (like willing addicts?) so automatically to the notion that addiction and writing are analogous. Kristjana Gunnars makes one of the most intelligent attempts at this connection, rallying convincing experts (Cixous, Kroetsch) to testify to her assertion that the "writer is drawn into the act of textual practice by the force of language, and cannot not do so." But surely the case can also be made that addiction and writing are oppositional, that one involves consumption and the other creation.

The irritation I experienced in reading this volume could be an indication that it was doing what it ought to do: ruffle and provoke. In any case, I was genuinely happy to be introduced to Crispin Sartwell, a daring writer. His ideas about the will, language, and personal identity are complex, funny, maddening, and well worth reading again.



One Big & Two Little

Ralph Maud, ed.
Poet to Publisher: Charles Olson's Correspondence with Donald Allen. Talonbooks $18.95

Gil McElroy
Dream Pool Essays. Talonbooks $15.95

Suzanne Zelazo
Parlance. Coach House $16.95

Reviewed by Meredith Quartermain

Many readers besides Olson scholars will welcome Ralph Maud's edition of letters from Charles Olson to his agent and publisher Don Allen, a consulting editor for Grove Press, the editor of the influential *Evergreen Review*, and editor of Four Seasons Foundation. Olson is a giant of North American letters, whose influence was immediately felt, and continues to be felt, in the US and Europe, and in Canada, in, for instance, the work of George Bowering, Frank Davey, Fred Wah, Daphne Marlatt, and Robin Blaser. One of the main vehicles of that influence was Allen's anthology *The New American Poetry 1945-1960*, which was followed by Don Allen and Warren Tallman's *The Poetics of The New American Poetry*. These letters show not only Olson's tremendous influence on the contents of the anthologies, but also how astute he was in defining the nature of the literary movement emerging around him, and crystallizing it with Allen so that it forever changed literature in the western world. Canadians may be amused that Olson was not in favour of including "that Englishy slicky Layton, or that nice Migrant Gael [Turnbull]."

Apart from this, the letters make fascinating reading for their commentary on writers (e.g. Williams and *Paterson*) and literary issues from 1957 to 1969, for revelations of Olson's own research (e.g. his outline of prehistory and ancient history) and for the birthing of *The Distances*, *Human Universe*, *Causal Mythology* and several other Olson texts. Many of them are poems in themselves. "Let me putter in with what I'm sure is the NEXT thing," he comments in 1958, "that is, / IMAGE. And PUN (these are the two big problems of post-beat)." Referring to one of the hallmarks of the new poetics, he summarizes:

(1) the open field leads to the narrowest gate
(2) sd gate is where the squeeze beat talks is for real
(3) "poetics", at sd point, is most serious, and if technical, suddenly drops to, almost, like they say, who do our living for us:
 the cliché, or truth (for which read: image & the pun, or joke, but what a bannanner peel!

This collection is refreshingly free of truckloads of academic footnoting, using instead a briefly annotated index. It is augmented with black and white photos of first-edition covers.

Gil McElroy's first book of poems *Dream Pool Essays* takes its title from Chinese astrology and reveals his interest in physics, cosmology, and epistemology. It contains a fine series of reflective poems entitled "Some Julian Days." "We are awash, / you see, in a sea / of private times, / & the weathers we encounter / just a few yards / beyond this slate-coloured darkness / have begun / to separate," he comments in one. The "exact circle / of my mobility / is consequent upon / the radius recognized / by my one, un- / cemented foot," comments another, neatly re-enacting the cement through the linebreak. Or, consider the following: "In my / limited sphere of simple consequences / & causality, the black / recoiled from history, / caught wind & water, showed / landscape & light, numbers / & alphabets of concrete, / & froze solid / in those associated / directions." McElroy is keenly aware of the limits of human perception, hedged in as it is with various languages, systems, and numbers. At times the poems slip into facile or unelucidating word twisting. At their best, they keep bumping up

against the medium of their perceptions and make good use of line breaks to swerve into irony and to remind us of the smallness of human presence in a vast universe.

Suzanne Zelazo describes her first book of poems, *Parlance*, as collaged. As many writers have discovered, this technique leads to nifty and hilarious thoughts that cannot be found elsewise: "There are too many places like the adjacent. They are always greener and more congealed." But it can also lead to collections of phrases lacking shape and impact, notwithstanding they have been compacted into prose paragraphs with titles like " Flex," "Cabaret," "Snark," "Mesh." Sentences like "Throttle the rare sign of love the atmosphere refers me," especially when surrounded by lots of other similarly surrealistic ones, leave this reader baffled and unengaged, awash in rhythmic monotony. More or less following Tom Phillips, who made a poem called *A Humument* with excisions from a book called *A Human Document*, Zelazo has created "Through the Lighthouse" with excisions from Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse.* The more open form of this piece initially leads to greater rhythmic variation and better pacing. Presumably this is the direction Zelazo will follow in future work.

Mixed Bag

Kathleen McDonnell
The Shining World. Second Story P $8.95

David Ward
Beneath the Mask. Scholastic $6.99

Sharon Stewart
Raven Quest. Scholastic $7.99

Duncan Thornton
The Star-Glass. Coteau $12.95

Reviewed by Lynn (J.R.) Wytenbroek

Children's and young adult fantasy is now thriving in Canada, thanks largely to the popularity of the Harry Potter books. But the desperate haste for publishers to meet that demand has produced a motley assortment of good and bad fantasy.

McDonnell's *The Shining World* is a weak book, at best. It simply fails to capture the imagination. A large part of the problem is the disparity between the age of the protagonist, who is 16 (making the projected readers of the novel between 12 and 14) and the names and diction in the novel. The language is designed for small children. The "Rory Bory" (aurora borealis), the "Hole at the Pole," the "Nordlings" (Northlings) and so on are baby talk. The concepts in the novel are aimed at young adults, but, like the language, the action is often childish. Yet other parts of the novel, such as the complex philosophical discussions between the talking loon Gavi and the poet William Blake, are oriented to a much older audience. The characters themselves, the 16-year-old Peggy and her love interest Gary, are appropriate to the older age group whereas the pirate doll Molly, Gavi the loon, and the childlike Nordling Mi are aimed at significantly younger children. This novel is aimed indiscriminately at a wide range of ages.

Ward's *Beneath the Mask* is a book with both strengths and weaknesses. Also a sequel, the book is confusing at the beginning, as the author seems to assume that his readers are familiar with the preceding novel, *Escape the Mask.* Consequently, with situation, place, and social structures left unexplained, the book at first is hard to follow. Initially, also, the dialogue is quite stilted. The characters Coriko and Thief are engaging although they do not really develop, while the characters of the girls, particularly Pippa and Tia, are weaker than those of the boys. However, the plot is exciting and well-paced, which make this novel a consistent and enjoyable read. The story, about a race that thrives at trade by stealing children to keep a slave group constantly available, is interesting. However,

there are some weaknesses in the plot, such as too many coincidences, or bad guys turn good a little too quickly. Developed themes in the book include: working together, doing what is right despite difficulties, building a better world. The major problem with the book is shared by *The Shining World*—the childish language used in places. Surely the author could have done better than calling the slave groups "onesies," "twosies," "threesies" and "foursies"? These childish names weaken the impact of the novel, again making it seem as though it is aimed at a much younger audience than the plot, the concepts, or the characters suggest.

Raven Quest, however, breaks out of the mold of mediocrity. Stewart has woven a well-told story together with intriguing characters, plenty of action, some suspense, and a consistent style. The novel, about a young raven exiled from his homeland after he has been framed for murder, starts off slowly and drags a little at the beginning. However, the pace soon picks up and the book is hard to put down. The main character, Tok, is engaging and actually develops in his quest for the Grey Lords. His encounters with the outside world constantly challenge his stereotyping and training. This character development is refreshing. Also, many of the secondary characters are intriguing, and we come to care what happens to them. When the young crow Kaa, Tok's companion on part of his journey, dies, the reader feels genuine sadness, as Kaa is likeable and real. We care about whether the wolves will make it to safety with Tok, because the wolves have become our friends.

Written in the "tradition" of Kenneth Opel's popular *Sun Wing* trilogy, this book is stronger than the Opel books, meatier. Stewart does not veer away from tragedy in the animal world yet keeps hope alive. She has done some significant research into the lives of ravens and wolves, which adds to the reality underpinning this animal fantasy. A strong environmental theme moves through the novel. *Raven Quest* presents human domination and destruction of the animal world in a non-didactic yet thought-provoking manner.

The same environmental theme surfaces in Duncan Thornton's *The Star-Glass*, but it is didactic and invasive. *The Star-Glass* is, unfortunately, another poorly written book. The third in a trilogy, the first of which was nominated for the Governor General's award, *The Star-Glass* is an odd book. Officially billed as a fantasy novel, it is an attempt at an alternate history of the settling of Canada by people fleeing from the encroaching darkness in the "Eastern Lands." What or who has caused this darkness we are never told, despite the fact that this book is filled with so much detailed minutiae and repetition that it is almost unreadable. A few doughty souls, heroes of the previous books, set off for the Vastland to find a new home. This land is inhabited by the Riverfolk, who are obviously Celtic, and the Ealda, obviously Native Canadians. There are all sorts of magical beings who also inhabit the land, including Celtic "Tinkers."

The motley assortment of characters is confusing. Since anyone who has even lived in Canada recognizes it as the Vastland right away, the mix of Celts and their fairies, First Nations people (but not their legendary creatures), and fantasy creatures such as Ice Trolls, set in a time when sabre-toothed tigers still roam the lands but the European explorers have muskets, is baffling. The book is neither fictionalized history nor true fantasy but an uneasy amalgam of both. The characters speak in a pseudo-sophisticated eighteenth-century English and the book has an eighteenth-century literary style, which further confuse matters. The primary characters are poorly delineated and one dimensional; none develops.

The novel is overtly self-conscious in style. Every different race the Europeans encounter warns mournfully that their arrival will change everything, but then goes on to cheerfully acknowledge that the coming of the preceding races in their time also changed everything, so it doesn't really matter. This book is poorly written, tedious, confusing, and badly under-edited.

With the demand for Canadian children's fantasy books high right now, we can only hope for better offerings in the future than the three poor or mediocre books reviewed here, and look forward to many more fantasies of the calibre of *Raven Quest.*

Leaving the Past Behind

Ian McGillis
A Tourist's Guide to Glengarry. The Porcupine's Quill $19.95

Beatrice MacNeil
Butterflies Dance in the Dark. Key Porter $24.95

Lesley Krueger
The Corner Garden. Penguin $24.00

Reviewed by Sue Fisher

The coming of age story can take many forms and these three respectively represent a nostalgic last look at a childhood about to disappear, a brutish retelling of a childhood stolen by ignorance, and a traumatic wrestling with personal history. Each of the novels tells of personal transformation that comes only at a cost.

Written for adults longing to recapture the wonder of childhood, McGillis' *A Tourist's Guide to Glengarry* is a novel of unbridled nostalgia. This touching and richly detailed first-person narrative recounts a single day in the life of Grade Four student Neil MacDonald. Anyone who has lived in Edmonton or grew up in the early 1970s will revel in the texture of McGillis' prose. The back-alley meanderings of the narrator and his friends delineate the landscape and ethnic diversity of north Edmonton while their schoolyard past-times, such as collecting baseball cards (looking for the elusive Roberto Clemente), trying to guess the number one song before picking up the weekly CHED radio chart, and spending a dime on a Rum and Butter chocolate bar ("they couldn't call it Rum and Butter if it wasn't real rum. That would be false advertising") create an aching longing for childhood's simplicity.

Larger issues, though, are brewing under the surface. We get glimpses of municipal and provincial politics, and simmering throughout the novel are the neighbourhood allegiances and prejudices that are governed by class immobility. It is no coincidence that at the end of the book the upwardly mobile, Anglo Saxon MacDonald family leaves young Neil's beloved neighbourhood, one that is populated by immigrants, ethnic minorities, and draft dodgers. We see all too clearly what Neil cannot, and mourn his loss of innocence—specifically his falling out with best friend Keith Puzniak, the grandson of Ukrainian refugees and son of an alcoholic father.

Although exquisite in its minutiae, the book as a whole feels episodic instead of thematically integrated. The surprise revelation (a surprise to the narrator if not to the reader) that the family is moving the following day seems more of a contrived plot detail than an insightful reflection on the nature of class, the population patterns of the prairie cities in the mid-twentieth century, and the passage of childhood to adolescence.

MacNeil's *Butterflies Dance in the Dark* tells the coming of age story of Mari-Jen Delene, a poor, illegitimate Cape Breton girl with a learning/emotional disability and sensual good looks that make her suspect to the nuns in her convent school. Oppressed on every front—by her ignorant, superstitious mother, the power-mongering Mother Superior at her school, her oversexed uncle, and a town that shuns her for

her illegitimacy—Mari-Jen struggles to find acceptance and understanding. Her allies are few: twin brothers of above-average intelligence and a Displaced Person,dubbed Daniel-Peter (from DP), who recognizes her natural intelligence and tries to educate her beyond the school system.

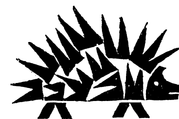
The world of the novel is a compelling one where women are poor, repressed, and often insane, where religion dominates every aspect of life, and where good-heartedness and naïveté are met by cruelty at every turn. A striking image is that of the cruel sexual and physical abuse of the mentally incompetent Aunt Clara by the savage Uncle Jules. On the whole, however, the novel is too relentless in its vision. The ignorant and evil characters are too broadly drawn to be believable. The sympathetic characters are not sufficiently delineated to give the novel a human face. In its attempt to show Mari-Jen's hardships, the novel fails to provide nuance or subtlety for the cruelties it exposes.

Told in the first person by a narrator who has difficulties with language and conveying complex emotions, the novel is comprised almost exclusively of simple sentences. The prose is presented this way by design—it reflects the narrator's learning disability and her patchwork education—but rather than impressing the reader with its eloquence, the 332 pages of the novel fall down under the weight of the simplistic prose.

Krueger's *The Corner Garden* is the only one of the three books under review that reads as if it was written for adults and young adults alike. Despite appealing to a younger audience than the works of McGillis and MacNeil, *The Corner Garden* is the most sophisticated of the three novels both in theme and narrative complexity. Two distinct voices guide the story: that of 15-year-old Jesse Barfoot, who has recently moved from Kingston to Toronto with her mother and new step-father, and that of her aged Dutch neighbour Martha van Telligen, a long-time Toronto resident and one-time Displaced Person. The novel unfolds as a series of diary entries, letters, and interior monologues with both characters (and occasionally supporting voices) speaking in the first-person.

The plot centres on Barfoot's mental and social breakdown in the present and van Telligen's unraveling of a repressed past that has controlled every aspect of her life. Barfoot, a daughter of rape, has recently learned the secret shame of her birth. Intelligent to the point of having a superiority complex, the young girl struggles to resolve the dramatic changes to her lifestyle and the trauma of her past in isolation. She adopts the older woman as a philosophic role model (they read Nietzsche together) not acknowledging van Telligen's reluctance to befriend her or her overarching misanthropy. Van Telligen relives the war years when, as the daughter of a Nazi sympathizer, she naively betrays one of her friends, condemning her to death. Each woman wrestles with a past that she simultaneously has no control over, yet is deeply complicit with.

A novel rich in history, politics, and philosophy and one that wrestles with issues of displacement, identity, and guilt, *The Corner Garden* blossoms slowly into a stunning flower. No easy answers are provided. The characters are flawed, selfish, and at times petty. But the messages offered by the novel—that the consequences of acting on uninformed belief systems are often more devastating than adopting socially tolerated prejudices and that the more we try to retreat from the world, the greater our impact on it often is—are subtle, complex, and worth attending to.



(Mis)Reading the Signs of the Times

Alister E. McGrath
The Future of Christianity. Blackwell P $19.95

Graham Ward
True Religion. Blackwell P $60.95

Reviewed by Steven Epperson

The Future of Christianity and *True Religion*, recent imprints in the "Blackwell Manifestos" series, are described by the publishers as "timely interventions to address important concepts and subjects." Both books exhibit virtues of the genre. They are concise (less than 175 pages), personal, and entertainingly assertive in their intentions and opinions.

In *The Future of Christianity,* McGrath states that Western Christianity (especially mainline Protestant denominations) is in a state of crisis and serious decline, and that "the time is ripe for some serious new thinking." He blames much of the crisis on a "Faustian pact" with modernity made by "Christian" (read: "liberal" and "academic") theologians who left believers with little to offer by way of critique and resistance to cultures in thrall to the secularizing and relativistic hedonism of globalising consumerism. Theologians cut themselves off from their grass roots constituencies and thus, McGrath claims, betrayed the confessional and prophetic foundations of their traditions and the spiritual and liturgical needs of church going people. The result is that Christians have been "robbed of the riches of the Christian intellectual tradition, starved of any sense of mystery and the supernatural, and bewildered by the loss of members to the New Age and evangelical movements."

That Christianity has a future is a given for McGrath. But that future and its flourishing reside in two trends. First, he cites the demographic shift of Christianity's centre from the West to Asia, Africa, and Latin America, sites of "doxological" orthodoxy, and fascinating, myriad experiments on "how to do church." Second, he extols those "organic theologians," in both West and East, who work "within the great historical Christian tradition" and who will commend and defend its orthodoxy.

The Future of Christianity sensibly posits that the fortunes of the faith are migrating east and south and will, as a result, undergo profound transformation. But in the end, this is a flawed, exasperating little book. The manifesto genre, he protests, leaves little room to explore issues crucial for the future of Christianity (e.g. the role of women, the environmental crisis, engagement with the sciences, and the pressures of urbanization). Yet he wastes time and space scoring points against rival theologians and exploring, at length, trivial issues such as the use of the King James Bible.

As well, McGrath both excoriates social scientists and certain theologians and then cites the same with approval (e.g. liberation theologian Leonardo Boff) when it suits his purposes. He also beggars belief with his description of the Catholic church hierarchy (its "collegiality" and dispersion of authority) and his upbeat forecast for Eastern Orthodoxy. These seem less certain when one considers the authoritarian pronouncements and bureaucratic consolidation fostered by the current Papacy and Curia and the anti-pluralism and Judaeophobia of the Russian Orthodox hierarchy.

One last critical note. McGrath looks particularly lame when he lumps the late Paul van Buren in with the "death of God" movement of the 1960s, and then dismisses him (and the rest) with snide *ad hominem* attacks (e.g. "frantic," "trendy young things" who "craved" media attention). In fact, Van Buren was a modest, thoughtful, and cultivated "organic" theologian. His work in the 1980s and 90s (cf. *A Theology of the Jewish-Christian Reality*) grappled with a true "sign of the times": Christianity's failure to con-

front the tragedy of its anti-Jewish theology and history. He was committed to the *integrity* of Christian doctrine and practice, and his work centred on *why* (not just whether) Christianity *should* have a future. That question, in the rush to issue a "manifesto," McGrath never gets around to addressing.

Ward's manifesto, in *True Religion*, asserts that our "postsecular," "postliberal" culture fetishizes "all objects and values" including "religion." The latter has become commodified and "liquidated"; it is all now "special effect," "cheap transcendence," and "re-enchantment." He claims that the future of religion resides in "radical," confessional, "tradition based" theology, and "self-assertive" faith communities that will, in effect, reclaim the glories of a sacramental worldview rooted in sacred time and space. Such a future will inevitably lead to "culture wars" (between the secular and the faithful, and between faith communities) and a "radical politics of difference." Any hope for a constructive resolution will come from those *within* "theological traditions" willing to work out conflicts by: a) resisting "pressure to fetishize their faith," and b) negotiating the competing claims of the faithful in a resacralized, yet pluralistic world.

Ward explores the "liquidation" and possible future of religion through a collage technique that roams from analysis of modern Continental theology, through examinations of pop artifacts (e.g. Baz Luhrman's *Romeo and Juliet*), to flooding references to Critical Theory. He assumes that his readers are *au courant. Caveat emptor!* This is not a manifesto for "general readers."

In the end, *True Religion* suffers certain problems. Theses are asserted, yet hardly proved. As well, it is, despite pleadings to the contrary, reductively nostalgic. For example, Postmodernity is "nihilistic," "cheap," and "pathological," while the medieval synthesis is a visionary, interconnected "realm suffused with divine activities."

That is to say, like McGrath's manifesto, *True Religion* depends upon a binary view of "Enlightenment" and its myriad progeny as villains in a tale of debasing accommodation with the world, with the confessionally "orthodox" as heroes. This reader is particularly troubled when Ward instanced "the Jewish people," and "the Jews" (with Moses Mendelssohn as "Exhibit A") as examples of those who, "wishing to be colonized," both "internalized" and exemplified the reduction of "religion" to a universal essence and to mere morality. Ward continues in this vein when he posthumously assassinates the late painter Mark Rothko ("the Jew who had lost his faith") and dumps on Rothko's chapel paintings in Houston for their "numbness," "futility" and "nullity," for "utterly denying the sacred." Perhaps, what one takes from the Rothko Chapel are the knives one brings to sharpen.

If the foregoing is a preview of a "tradition based," sacramental world of the future, give me the robust, old-time religion (and secularism) of the Enlightenment.

The Puzzle of Adventure

Janet McNaughton
The Secret Under My Skin. HarperCollins $14.95

Curtis Parkinson
Storm-Blast. Tundra Books $11.95

John Wilson
Secret. Beach Holme $9.95

Reviewed by Lynn (J.R.) Wytenbroek

A realistic adventure about three teenagers lost while boating in the Caribbean, *Storm-Blast* presents an initially picturesque but ultimately frightening view of the ocean. The fast-paced adventure teaches about boating and seamanship. The primary character, Regan, is a likeable young teen, fighting his sense of worthlessness as he can

never please his demanding and dismissive father. The story traces his proof, both to himself and his family, that he has courage. His problem-solving techniques ultimately save him, his sister Carol, and his cousin Matt after a storm carries them far out to sea. His ability arises partially from his willingness to learn from others. But *Storm-Blast* is not a "problem" book. It is an exciting, entertaining adventure with some true teen angst thrown in for good measure. The message of the book lies in the development of the protagonist.

Although Al Lister, the protagonist of *Secret*, is the same age as Regan, Wilson's novel is much more sophisticated than Parkinson's exciting but simply narrated story. Al's sections of the novel are narrated in first person, so the reader is brought close to the action and the emotions of the protagonist. But other sections are narrated in the third person, from the perspective of a native warrior circa 1610 AD. Furthermore, Al travels from the present time, where he has been on an archaeological dig with his father in James Bay, to the past, where he meets Henry Hudson at the end of his last, fateful voyage and befriends Jack, Hudson's son. Most of the book is set in the past, as the Hudson explorers meet with Natives and are then destroyed either by disease or, at the end, by an Iroquois attack. Only Jack and Al survive, with Jack taken in by the Natives after the Iroquois are defeated and Al returning to his own time after a blow to the head.

Secret combines adventure with insight into a mysterious piece of Canadian history. Hudson and his crew never returned from their last voyage to James Bay, so Wilson's story about their ultimate fate is pure speculation, although interesting and plausible. Historical detail about first contact and the clashing cultures is made fascinating by both the adventure and the "solution" to the historical mystery. *Secret* is a particularly historical novel, vibrant with excitement, and haunted by a mystery big enough to captivate any reader.

McNaughton's *The Secret Under My Skin* is science fiction, set in the 2300s when the Earth is beginning to recover from the destruction of the environment caused by uncontrolled materialism. After global warming has helped wipe out civilization, and society has re-established itself within the rigid structures needed to survive massive environmental cataclysms, people are left with an intense fear of technology. This fear is used by dictatorial governing powers to control society, leading to a "technocaust" where thousands of people in the technologies and sciences were sent to concentration camps from which most of them never returned.

The Secret Under My Skin is set at a time when the Weaver's Guild, a politically powerful working association of women, seeks to restore democracy. Also the Masters of the Way, keepers of all scientific and technological knowledge, they seek to return that knowledge to society for the healing of the people and the Earth. Sixteen-year-old Blake Raintree is taken from a workhouse for discarded street children into the home of a Master of the Way where she quickly becomes involved in the battle of the Weavers and Masters against the ruling and oppressive Commission.

The Secret Under My Skin challenges readers to rethink our consumerist and environmentally destructive way of life. The novel pulls no punches. Entire chunks of the North American continent, where the book is set, are now under water because of melting ice-caps. No one dares walk outside without protective gear because of the damage to the ozone layer. The poisons infesting air, soil, and water are beginning to dissipate, but all food must be treated to remove toxins before it is eaten. A large segment of the society has been reduced to a slave class to serve the needs of the rest, and survival is the best

that can be hoped for by most, while only a privileged few ever attain comfort.

We come to know and like Blake, the Master William and his warm wife Erica, and the caring and gifted Lem Howell, who lost both his precious wife and baby son to the technocaust. Lem particularly stands out, a survivor of a terrible tragedy, deeply and permanently scarred and yet caring enough to help the disenfranchised Blake find her identity, a gift she repays by helping him recover his lost son. The novel advocates love, kindness, basic freedoms, and the health of the earth. Yet all of these themes are subordinated to McNaughton's powerful characterizations and to the haunting story she has woven around them.

Emily Montague

Laura Moss, ed.
The History of Emily Montague. Canadian Critical Edition. Tecumseh $24.95

Reviewed by Janice Fiamengo

The Canadian Critical Edition of *The History of Emily Montague* joins what editor Laura Moss calls the "embarrassment of riches" of four other editions (one of them in the rigorously edited CEECT series published by Carleton UP). Its publication raises the question of what particular need the edition supplies. General Editors John Moss and Gerald Lynch point to extensive supplemental documents as the series' distinguishing feature, arguing that the "comprehensive critical setting" uniquely facilitates academic study. Given that the CEECT edition focuses on textual matters and that the other editions omit critical apparatus, this volume does fill a crucial gap, providing opportunities for in-depth classroom study. Although I have some reservations about a few of the editor's selections and editorial choices, in general I commend Laura Moss for fine work in assembling a wealth of critical resources.

The novel has interested scholars for many reasons: usually considered the first Canadian novel (although its Canadianness is debated), it was written just a few years after the British Conquest of Quebec and offers both an extended treatise on the companionate marriage and a detailed portrait of the new colony's geography, politics, and social life. Balancing culturally between New and Old Worlds, generically between the novel of sensibility and the travel adventure story, and politically between a progressive feminism and a pro-British imperialism, it repays a range of reading strategies, which are fairly represented by the critical essays Moss has selected. Four new essays were written specifically for the volume. In a lucid and informative contribution, Pam Perkins places the novel in the context of other British accounts of North America, arguing that Brooke's decision not to exoticize the landscape sets the novel apart as a complex attempt to figure the new colony as a potential home. Focusing on structure and theme, Faye Hammill discusses the novel's representation of Canada both as literary subject and as setting for literary production. Moss and Cecily Devereux both engage with the novel's professed and submerged imperial ideologies, with Moss focusing on the points of ambivalence in its presentation of British colonial rule and Devereux analyzing the dominant narrative of empire, in which Canada becomes the arena for the production of Britishness. All offer very useful and accessible readings.

These four new essays join a selection of reprints chosen as representative critical texts; the majority are judicious choices. Ann Messenger contemplates the novel's intertextual link—via Arabella Fermor—to Alexander Pope's *Rape of the Lock*, considering the novel as Brooke's response to Pope's portrait of women. Juliet McMaster suggests the possible canonical influence of

Emily Montague by considering it as a source for a satirical piece by the young Jane Austen. Katherine M. Rogers compares *Emily Montague* to contemporary novels of sensibility to assess its departures from convention. The only poor choice is Robert Merrett's pretentious and badly written indictment of Brooke's imperialist propaganda, an essay that confuses author and character and ignores the novel's comedic elements. I was also disappointed that Moss' own contribution, which is something of a corrective to Merrett's, is rather too short to make its case persuasively, and wondered why Dermot McCarthy's essay on the novel's racial ideology, a cogent analysis along the lines of Merrett, was so severely truncated.

Truncation is, in fact, an irritant in this otherwise satisfying collection. In the Documentary section, the extreme brevity of selections limits their usefulness, such that the four tiny excerpts from *The Old Maid*, the periodical Brooke edited, indicate little more than that Brooke was interested in social conduct; how and to what ends one cannot determine. In the Reception section, very short notices of the novel by Ida Burwash, Charles Blue, and E. Phillips Poole offer little more than confirmation that the novel was noticed—rather unenthusiastically—by early twentieth-century critics and might just as well have been briefly summarized in Moss' literary biography. (Other short notices, however, are interesting, such as Carl Klinck's assessment of the novel's literary value and George Woodcock's comments on its Canadian status.) And far too many of the reprinted essays in the Critical Excerpts section are butchered, their arguments impaired by frequent and substantial excisions. Inevitably, an editor must make difficult choices about what to exclude, but Moss should have protected the coherence of individual selections. This problem is not, however, a fatal flaw. The edition is an important teaching volume that makes possible the rich and contextualized readings the series advocates. As such, it is welcome.

Now You're a Man

Jean Bobby Noble

Masculinities without Men? Female Masculinity in Twentieth-Century Fictions. UBC Press $29.95

Reviewed by Marc A. Ouellette

Jean Bobby Noble's book clearly borrows part of its title from Judith Halberstam's examination of "female masculinity." However, given its serious concern not just with the content of the texts and events under consideration—that is, the personal, critical, and often legal responses to Radclyffe Hall's *The Well of Loneliness*, Leslie Feinberg's *Stone Butch Blues*, Rose Tremain's *Sacred Country*, and the story of *Boys Don't Cry*'s Brandon Teena—but also with the ways in which (ideological) constructs are expressed, Noble more aptly (and frequently) reminds readers of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's statement that "sometimes masculinity has nothing to do with men." This observation, borne out by Noble's careful investigation of invariably controversial novels (and films), also suggests Sedgwick's assertion that Gender Studies scholars should criticize "not through, but *of* the [pre-existing] categories of gender." Noble reminds readers that gender, sex, and sexuality are separate categories which are too easily conflated and that they are not the only or even the most significant signifiers of identity. For example, female masculinity is most frequently conflated with lesbianism yet this need not be the case, as Noble demonstrates.

Recognizing that gender is (re/de)constructed through pre-existing discursive categories, Noble uses pronouns carefully to illustrate both the self-articulation of the characters in the treated texts, and the dominant culture's attempts at incorporat-

ing the transgressive. What cannot be sold will be othered. Noble's strategy is to refer to characters displaying female masculinity in the terms the characters (would) employ: *Boys Don't Cry*'s Brandon Teena and Stephen from *The Well of Loneliness* are "he," while Jess(e) from *Stone Butch Blues* becomes "s/he" and Mary/Martin in *Sacred Country* remains "she." Although potentially confusing—as it was for the jurors deciding the fate of Brandon Teena's murderers—this move immediately destabilizes the very act of reading gendered subjects and texts, and simultaneously points to a radical individualization beyond the realm of gender. Otherwise, gender is circumscribed by the cultural purchase of the pertinent pronouns.

Unlike Halberstam, Noble feels no need to disavow the contingency between female masculinity and male masculinity. This invokes two concurrent processes. First, as Noble asserts, the move is moot because both are always already derivative forms which depend on passing for an essentialized ideal that obviously does not exist, yet is entirely prior to the subject. Second, what Noble's argument delineates (but does not name as such) is clearly a radical re-essentialization. Here, Diana Fuss' distinction between radical and reactionary essentialization, that is, "between 'deploying' or 'activating' essentialism and 'falling into' or 'lapsing into' essentialism," might have informed Noble's conclusions. As Fuss elaborates, "the radicality or conservatism of essentialism depends to a significant degree, on *who* is utilizing it, *how* it is deployed, and *where* its effects are concentrated." Turning the male gaze back on itself, as do the characters Noble considers, effectively re-essentializes the body. The characters' "corporeal instability" occurs because of bodies that have been identified as, performed as, and whose materiality has been lived as masculine. Noble's strategic pronouns, then, echo the counter-discursive (and new) social formations articulated in and through the texts he thoroughly elucidates.

Muscular Prose

Monique Proulx
Trans. David Homel and Fred A. Reed
The Heart Is an Involuntary Muscle. Douglas & McIntyre $24.99

Reviewed by Louise Ladouceur

With such a beautiful title, I could hardly not read the book. It promised rapture and kept its promise, much like the books written by Pierre Laliberté, the writer at the heart of the story, the mysterious genius who rejects glory and lives like a recluse so that he can secretly pillage other people's lives as inspiration for his novels. This is what Florence discovers when following a trail that begins at the hospital room where her father has died. What were her father's last words, her only inheritance? What did he tell Laliberté that she should have heard? If Florence doesn't like writers and their books, those "corpulent things that aren't even true," this is not the case for Zeno, her partner in Mahone Inc., a small Web site construction business offering exposure to lesser-known artists. A great admirer of Pierre Laliberté's writings, Zeno would do anything to get close to his secretive idol. This will have dire consequences for everyone.

This complex, witty, and often brilliant book is a mystery novel about literature and those who create it. It is sprinkled throughout with valuable insights into the process of writing, such as: "any writer who intends on dealing with the human soul should follow intensive training as a nurse, a garbage collector or an embalmer before being permitted to write a line." It is also a testimony to the power of books, a power that will eventually transform Florence. But, first, she must learn to read: "One hundred times I found myself wanting to

give up, one hundred times I goaded myself on. And then came the moment when I no longer needed goading. That which I feared most had come to pass. I lost everything. My self-control, my freedom. The book destroyed my willpower and moved forward on its own, carrying me with it like a soulless rag, with no resistance."

In an English translation that is smooth and efficient, the book reads like an exercise in virtuosity, touching upon weighty questions and leaving one with fragments of answers. As a reader, one finds oneself in a situation not unlike that of Florence as she tries to make sense of the teachings of Pierre Laliberté inviting her to see the universe from within. In that sense, there is much to discover in this muscular prose about writing and reading, and about facing the fears that they both confront us with.

Niagara Fools

Linda L. Revie

The Niagara Companion: Explorers, Artists, and Writers at the Falls, from Discovery through the Twentieth Century. Wilfrid Laurier UP $24.95

Thomas Hallock

From the Fallen Tree: Frontier Narratives, Environmental Politics, and the Roots of a National Pastoral. U of North Carolina P $26.28

Reviewed by Christoph Irmscher

When Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, perhaps the most pacific of American nineteenth-century poets, saw the great Niagara Falls for the first time, his nerves were, he wrote in his journal on 9 June 1862, shaking like a "bridge of wire." Niagara was too much for him, he decided. On he went, as fast as he could, first to Toronto and then to Montreal. No wonder that he is missing from the gallery of distinguished travellers assembled in Linda Revie's new book, an exhaustive and somewhat exhausting survey of pictorial and verbal representations of the Falls since the day Louis Hennepin first laid eyes on them.

Revie is interested in the aesthetics behind these accounts of the Falls, and she delineates the intellectual terrain—defined by Burke's notion of the "sublime," Gilpin's "picturesque," as well as by persistent notions of "savagery"—her artists and writers had to navigate. There is interesting information on almost every page of *The Niagara Companion*, but at the end the cultural landscape Revie traverses seems more real to us than the actual one, and we still don't know why there have been, to quote Woody Woodpecker, so many "Niagara Fools." Revie's readings sometimes remain rather cursory, such as when she wonders why somebody as progressive as Margaret Fuller would envision naked Indians swinging tomahawks when she looked at the Falls. But Fuller in fact *begins* her travel account, *Summer in the Lakes*, with this fantasy—and it is one she clearly despises and later identifies as produced by the "warped" minds of whites. Her highly allusive, meandering style, developed in the "Conversations" she held at Elizabeth Peabody's Boston bookstore, allows her to both evoke and question or discard conventional images.

I'm not sure either that I agree with Revie's interpretation of Frederic Edwin Church's famous 1857 painting of the waterfalls, as seen from the Canadian side. Church did not include any of the by then ubiquitous tourists in the painting; still, his purpose was not to restore the falls to their original wildness. Consider his later rendering of the Falls from the American side, completed a decade later, a dramatic scene full of everything the Canadian side supposedly lacks: wild movement, flying mists, mystique.

Revie's artists and writers used the Falls to enact their own fantasies of aesthetic bliss and national belonging. But what is it about waterfalls that, for the American writer, makes them unlike anything else on the continent? Meriwether Lewis was so disgusted with the "imperfect idea" his clumsy pen gave of the Great Falls of the

Missouri River that he crossed out the sketch that he had made on site. But his frustration didn't last long—Lewis ends his journal entry with a mouth-watering description of the sumptuous dinner of "buffalo humps" and "fine trout" he enjoyed that night. In *From the Fallen Tree*, Thomas Hallock is intrigued by such juxtapositions, and he usefully reminds us that the journals of the Corps of Discovery owe their shape and momentum less to Jefferson's imperial design than to the daily interactions of his men with the changing landscapes in which, like the natives they encounter, they must find their food.

Like William Bartram, one of his subjects, Hallock has amassed a vast and diverse body of material, expertly shuttling back and forth between history, natural history, geography, and literature. And with all its copious notes and sidebars, *From the Fallen Tree* would have satisfied also the demands of Bartram's mentor, the precise merchant Peter Collinson, who liked "Billy's" drawings so much because in them he found "no particular omitted." Hallock calls his sources "cartographic texts," because they seek to turn infinite space into finite place and nudge unknown terrain into an imagined and fully comprehensible future landscape that reflects the writer's own as well as his culture's needs and preferences. But every space appropriated by the white colonist had already been someone else's place, and Hallock memorably describes for us those moments in early American writing where the narrative "slides off script"—for example, when a Native man tells the Massachusetts governor and mapmaker Thomas Pownall that "you take a deal of Pains to spoil a good World" or when the New World's first female botanist, Jane Colden, faithfully lists the Native uses and medicinal qualities of the plants she otherwise subjects to the strictures of Linnaean binomial taxonomy.

Few American writers lived more lightly on the precarious "middle ground" between western arrogance and native knowledge than William Bartram, whose "aquatic prose," as Hallock beautifully calls it, successfully bridged the tensions between the two worlds. At first blush, it seems that Bartram's awe-inspiring pastoral paradise survived only in fiction—in the world of Cooper's *The Pioneers*, for instance, where the whites who play Indians either vanish into the sunset or reveal, like Oliver Effingham, that their Indianness was just make-believe. However, one man's performance may be another man's fight for survival. Hallock movingly concludes his account with Native journalist Elias Boudinot, who in 1826 turned the white identification of land and nationhood on its head by arguing the need for a Cherokee republic.

Surviving

Chava Rosenfarb

Survivors. Cormorant $29.95

Gillian Chan

An Ocean Apart: The Gold Mountain Diary of Chin Mei-ling. Scholastic Canada $14.99

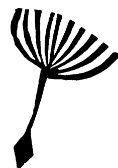
Reviewed by Rocio G. Davis

Stories of immigrant survival and adaptation make important statements here about the power of the past over the present. The experiences of people in home countries crushed by war or poverty are often juxtaposed to the present Canadian reality, nuancing imagination, lifestyles, and choices. Chava Rosenfarb's *Survivors* is composed of seven stories that unveil the often tragic consequences of outliving the Holocaust. Emotions are conveyed in a spare prose that chills. "A Friday in the Life of Sonia Zonabend" recalls Hemingway's "Big Two-Hearted River," where the eponymous protagonist attends obsessively to minute details in an effort to keep sane and

maintain control of her life. Rosenfarb's characters are often moved by bizarre compulsions to actions that they know are morally reprehensible but which make sense in the context of their tainted perspectives: in "Last Love," Gabriel takes his wife Amalia to Paris to die and procures a young lover for her; and Manya kidnaps a baby in "Little Red Bird" to replace the daughter who died in Auschwitz.

The stories of these characters, threatened by historical erasure, show the futile conflict with a past that condemned them to death. Rosenfarb's survivors struggle through each day either clinging desperately to each other or coldly rejecting the idea of the past. On occasion, reinventing oneself becomes a possibility, but the truth of the past always intervenes. Dr. Brown, in "Serengeti," loves his wife Mildred, who represents a separation from his past, but finds himself drawn to one of his colleagues, another survivor. Several characters are beckoned to death by the experience or knowledge of a survivor—Amalia's young lover in "Last Love" drives over a cliff to be reunited with her; Françoise is thrown off a precipice in Machu Picchu by Leah, who had been comforted by this imaginary lover; Edgia's revenge on a former *kapo*, who had become a friend, leads to her own death.

By telling the stories of survivors, Rosenfarb negotiates the trajectories of persons displaced from their land, culture, and histories. Locating most of the stories in Canada, she posits an alternative space wherein these stories can be continued, where hope can be nurtured. Importantly, she writes these characters into the story of Canada, effectively widening our perspectives on the immigrant narratives that made the country. A similar strategy operates in Gillian Chan's *The Gold Mountain Diary of Chin Mei-ling*. This juvenile text, part of the *Dear Canada* series, centres primarily on the year 1923 in the life of young Mei-ling, who lives in Vancouver's Chinatown with her father and longs for her mother and brother's arrival. The journal entries recount a well-developed combination of children's culture—school, peer relationships, ambitions—within the prevailing intercultural context of Vancouver. The difficult situation of the immigrants is conveyed in Mei-ling's artless entries: the lonely life of the bachelor Mr. Chee; the long hours at work in her father's restaurant and the occasional abuse by whites; the poverty that prevents them from sending for the family; the institutionalized racism that leads to the Chinese Exclusion Act. The relations between immigrant groups are also foregrounded: Mei-ling's best friend is Bess, an Irish Canadian whose father is an alcoholic, and their class is a microcosm of the diversity in Vancouver in the 1920s. Yet there is hope for Mei-ling as a Christian woman since Miss MacDonald, made aware of the child's intelligence, helps her prepare for a good high school. Though the diary ends after the year is over, an epilogue allows the reader to learn that Mei-ling becomes a doctor and is eventually reunited with her mother and brother in China, where she goes to work. A historical introduction helps situate this individual chronicle in the context of Asian immigration to Canada. The literary text becomes a strategy for writing this story into the Canadian imaginary, explaining and validating the presence of the Chinese in Canadian cities and foregrounding the immigrant processes of identification with Canada. For younger readers, this text serves as an avenue to a more comprehensive appreciation of Canada's multiethnic reality.



Racial Rhetoric

Patricia E. Roy
The Oriental Question: Consolidating a White Man's Province, 1914-1941. UBC Press $29.95

Reviewed by Bonnie Huskins and Michael Boudreau

The Oriental Question is the second volume in a trilogy exploring White attitudes toward Asian immigrants in British Columbia. In her first volume, *A White Man's Province* (1989), Patricia Roy examined opposition to Chinese and Japanese immigrants in British Columbia from 1858 to 1914. This volume explores the "consolidation" of British Columbia as a "white man's province" in the interwar period, as the 1923 Chinese Immigration Act and the renegotiation of a series of gentlemen's agreements with Japan virtually halted Asian immigration to Canada. The third volume will begin at the outbreak of the Pacific War in 1941 and conclude in 1967, when the final obstacles to full citizenship for Canadians of Chinese and Japanese origin were removed by the Canadian government.

Roy devotes a few pages in the "Introduction" to a review of recent theoretical directions in the area of race and race relations. She critiques theoretical approaches such as Kay Anderson's *Vancouver's Chinatown* (1991) for underplaying the "complex origins" of anti-Orientalism. Indeed, the crux of Roy's book is an attempt to explain the mutable and complex motivations behind racial rhetoric. Why, Roy asks, did anti-Asian agitation persist in British Columbia after its consolidation as a white society? One tenet of her argument is the episodic nature of racial attitudes: during the Great War and the Great Depression, anti-Asian attitudes declined as residents became preoccupied with more vital social and economic concerns; they peaked in the 1920s because of post-war dislocation and a high Japanese birth rate, and again in the late 1930s as Japan flexed its imperial muscles. Roy also identifies a shift in racial rhetoric, from a generalized fear of the "Oriental menace" to a more exclusive concern with the Japanese. By the interwar period, Chinese immigration had dramatically declined and China had little international clout. Many Canadians even expressed sympathy for the Chinese victims of the Sino-Japanese War. The Japanese, on the other hand, experienced a notable increase in birth rate, and as imperial Japan grew in power, so too did the fear of Japanese "saboteurs" living in Canada. Another change in the interwar period was a shift in political focus from provincial to national jurisdiction. As provincial politicians became increasingly powerless to restrict immigration, they contributed less to the discourse over racial issues. Moreover, as the international scene worsened, concern over national security rose.

In *A White Man's Province,* Roy argued that "the Asian question" evolved from an emphasis on economics (with "racial overtones") to a concern over race (with "economic underpinnings"). In this second volume, Roy is more attuned to the complex and interconnected roots of racism: "Seldom, if ever, did [racial antagonism] have a single biological, social, or economic cause: rather it was based on combinations of these factors, whose relative weight varied according to the individual or group affected and to the time in which the antipathy was expressed."

Despite Roy's efforts to develop sophisticated explanations for the construction of racial attitudes, she remains rather dismissive of theory in general: while admitting that theoretical approaches to this topic are "useful," she makes a point of noting that she relies more on "empirical evidence" to warrant her conclusions. This is unfortunate because a synthesis is needed which

balances empirical evidence and theoretical sophistication.

Roy should also elaborate on the role of gender in the process of racialization. Roy mentions that the Chinese community was gendered in its overabundance of males, and again as legislators attempted to prevent white women from working for Chinese employers. Roy also argues that the gender of white inhabitants mattered little in determining their opposition to Asian immigration. These insights are suggestive, but a more sustained analysis is required.

Nonetheless, *The Oriental Question* is a solid empirical work, using government records, contemporary newspapers, memoirs, and secondary literature. It would be a highly useful monograph for an undergraduate audience, since it brings together a broad range of information in a readable and cogently-argued style. Roy admits that the study is not comprehensive, but is primarily an examination of the actions and reactions of white inhabitants. She contends that we need more analyses of the internal dynamics of the Chinese and Japanese communities. Roy does attempt to address the lack of active Asian voices in her earlier work. She documents several instances of agency and integrates Chinese and Japanese records, such as personal correspondences, records from such community organizations as the Victoria Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association, and ethnically-based newspapers such as the *Vancouver Chinese Times* and the *New Canadian.* She also consults reminiscences and new scholarly works written by Asian Canadians and by scholars from outside the Chinese and Japanese communities. Nonetheless, linguistic barriers prevent her from making more profound inroads into Chinese and Japanese history in British Columbia. In that sense, her work remains a traditional piece of historiography in its focus on white Canadians and their role in sustaining and perpetuating institutional racism.

L'oie, le chat et la souris

Pierre Samson
alibi. Leméac $12.95

Sylvie Desrosiers
Le jeu de l'oie : Petite histoire vraie d'un cancer. La courte échelle $21.95

Compte rendu par Pamela V. Sing

Trois animaux énumérés à la La Fontaine, deux métaphores employées dans les ouvrages recensés ici, chacun incitant à sa manière à réfléchir sur la littérarité de différentes façons de traiter d'un vécu donné. Le jeu de l'oie : jeu où notre sort est déterminé par des coups de dés. Entre le point de départ et la dernière case, que de vicissitudes. Chez Sylvie Desrosiers, les chiffres livrés par chaque coup de dés suggèrent différentes interprétations servant toutes à préfacer le récit de différents moments dans la vie d'une femme atteinte d'un cancer du sein. Si la manière de vivre chacun des moments varie selon le caractère de chaque femme, toutes sont traquées par la peur de mourir. Pour transformer son rapport à la maladie, l'auteure narratrice l'écrit. L'ouvrage qui en résulte se voudrait un « roman ». Le jeu du chat et de la souris : jeu pervers où l'agresseur maîtrise la situation, mais prolonge la chasse pour son plaisir. Chez Pierre Samson, l'agresseur s'avère le lecteur ou le public, et la souris, l'auteur, mais contrairement au jeu classique, ici, c'est la souris qui mène le jeu en se retrouvant toujours ailleurs que là où on l'attend, d'où le titre de l'ouvrage, *alibi,* dont le sens étymologique signifie « être ailleurs ». Ce faisant, l'artiste se transforme en « un possible salaud », et la discussion des modes et règlements du jeu de prendre la forme d'une acerbe critique de nombreuses pratiques culturelles au « Queue-bec », dont notamment le roman, les instances de l'institution littéraire et le traitement des homosexuels. L'essai-pamphlet qui en résulte fournit des réponses aux questions

anti-littéraires ou paralittéraires posées par les lecteurs de sa trilogie brésilienne (publiée entre 1996 et 1999). Aussi sa lecture constitue-t-elle un « acte anti-littéraire ».

Sylvie Desrosiers a écrit pour la jeunesse, pour le magazine *Croc* ou pour des galas du Festival Juste pour rire. Il en ressort une écriture ayant l'habitude de privilégier une expression orale, familière, voire populaire et souvent humoristique. Un tel style, secondé par la voix et le témoignage de dix autres femmes ayant connu un même diagnostique, contribue à donner un visage humain au « cancer qui tue » et favorise l'objectif de l'auteure : démystifier cette maladie afin de mieux communiquer l'espoir de la rémission. Tel que l'annoncent les aspects paralittéraires du volume (bandeau publicitaire qui promet que l'achat du livre vaudra le versement d'un dollar à la Fondation québécoise du cancer, préface en italique signée par le président fondateur de cet organisme et informations sur celui-ci à la toute dernière page), ce texte a une incontestable valeur sociale. Selon Pierre Samson, cependant, un vrai roman ne saurait être ni utile, ni émouvant, ni facile ou gentil.

Au contraire, la littérature doit déstabiliser, voire « dépraver le lecteur et l'ordre des choses ». *alibi,* en effet, critique la société et la culture qui ont formé son auteur, allant de Réjean Ducharme et Lise Bissonnette aux Éditions Boréal en passant par la critique et la théorie littéraires, les media et les organismes de subvention. Cependant, il s'agit d'une dévastation « util » dans la mesure où elle voudrait forcer le lecteur à « reconstruire son univers de certitude » : la réflexion mène, au-delà de ce qui est écrit sur la page, dans un ailleurs. Une fois valorisé, cet espace qui rappelle la raison d'être de l'essai (paru dans la collection « ici l'Ailleurs ») mène l'auteur à traiter de son homosexualité. Samson dénigre l'engouement du public pour les détails reliés à son vécu, mais ici, ils servent à souligner la manière dont son identité sexuelle, en faisant de lui un exclu de la société, lui a appris à s'échapper par et vers l'imaginaire et à assumer sa « monstruosité ».

Il s'avère donc que même si les deux ouvrages recensés ici renferment chacun une définition différente du roman, chacun d'eux a été conçu par un écrivain conscient de sa différence. Chez Desrosiers, le sentiment d'être « crissement en dehors de la photo de groupe » a produit un livre bienveillant. Chez Samson, « l'excentrique » qui a fini par « approuver le mépris de [s]es proches » a signé (encore) un (autre) livre provocateur.

Icons of Identity

David P. Silcox

The Group of Seven and Tom Thomson. Firefly $85.00

Reviewed by Sherrill Grace

In this sumptuous book on the Group of Seven, David Silcox has gathered a splendid collection of the most important, familiar, and loved images created by the Group, by Tom Thomson who, had he lived, would have been a member, and by three men who joined the Group after its founding in 1920—Casson, Holgate, and Fitzgerald. The quality of the colour plates and of all other aspects of production is excellent, so this 441-page volume will make a valuable addition to any art lover's library. However, Silcox has not simply produced yet another coffee table book about Canada's most famous painters. This volume, while not a scholarly study per se, is informed by Silcox's knowledge and by his personal belief that the Group shaped Canadian identity.

Silcox argues that these painters set out to create a Canadian art *and* to educate Canadians about who they were at a determining moment, immediately after World War I, in the nation's history. He addresses other familiar aspects of their legacy such

as their contribution to the so-called myth of the North and its importance for national identity, and he provides brief biographies and historical contexts for the artists, their exhibitions, and their impact. All this is familiar ground, but Silcox also provides some new perspectives. These less familiar points add significantly to the book's value. He includes examples of figural, urban, and war painting, thereby modifying the notion that these artists only painted landscapes; he stresses the scope of their art by organizing the volume by geographical region; he includes examples of their book and magazine illustration and notes their contributions to theatre set design and murals. The picture that emerges presents the Group and its individual members as actively engaged with their society and as astutely marketing their nationalist message.

And Silcox is not afraid to criticize. He addresses their exclusion of women painters, even Emily Carr, and he explains that, contrary to being vilified, their paintings were praised, collected, and exhibited because their brand of modernism was safe—they were not extreme, revolutionary, or out to *épater* their Canadian bourgeois public. Although I think that Silcox realizes his goals for this major book, I too have some criticisms: why, I wonder, does he not look beyond his own discipline for greater contextual appreciation of his subject? In the case of the Group, the painters showed the way by involving themselves in many other areas of endeavour, but Silcox stays close to pictorial concerns. Given Canadians' familiarity with the paintings of Thomson and the Group, the more interdisciplinary the cultural context in which we learn to see them, the more profoundly we will understand our identity, *especially our northern identity*. If the arts show us who and where we are, it is because they are rooted in their time and place and speak to that location. The images Silcox gathers worked as icons then because they engaged their cultural roots; if they are to work as icons now, they must continue to speak to us from a changing subsoil of cultural identity.

Lyrics in Flight

Sue Sinclair
The Drunken Lovely Bird. Goose Lane Editions $17.95

Jan Zwicky
Robinson's Crossing. Brick Books $16.00

Ray Hsu
Anthropy. Nightwood Editions $15.00

Reviewed by Gillian Jerome

In *Lyric Philosophy* (1992), Jan Zwicky argues that philosophy must expand its self-definition beyond analysis if it is to be true to its own ideals; for Zwicky the poem is a means of making philosophy by lyric invention—"a flight from the condition of language." In her book *Wisdom & Metaphor* (2003), she expands this idea of the poet as philosopher by speaking directly about the power of metaphor to enable poets to think "truly" because "their thinking echoes the shape of the world." Sinclair, Zwicky, and Hsu are poets of philosophy who wrestle with the limitations of language and human history. Sinclair and Zwicky try to make lyric sense of the world by stopping and wondering at places of beauty and loss; the poems of Hsu and Zwicky reflect philosophical minds rigorously (and passionately) engaged with questions of history, although Hsu's poetics are far more postmodern.

In Sue Sinclair's third book of poetry, *The Drunken Lovely Bird,* the speaker meanders through urban landscapes, divining the everyday: white flowers fall like lost gloves and streetlights arch their long necks like waterbirds. Many of the poems explore solitude through short enjambed sentences saturated with metaphors. Many of the lines are remarkable for their ethereal

resonance, as in the opening of "Lilacs":

> For those who have lived
> where lilacs bloom, who have lost
> their immunity
>   to idleness and wander through
> doorway after doorway
> when the lilac trees open their infinite
> mauve rooms. For those
> who give in and glide a little behind
> their lives, a hand trailing
> in the water
> behind a rowboat.

The most resonant poems in my mind, "The Bather" and "June," describe everyday subjects, namely an older woman wading into the ocean, and a group of young men playing basketball outside the poet's window. The success of "The Bather" is achieved through exposition and spare, but inventive imagery:

> She is not young and has no waist,
> her bosom rests on the bulge
> of her midriff. But the ocean barely
>   notices her.
> She slides into it like a slip,
> though it's more like undressing, a slip
>   being removed.

The meditative poems in the book move slowly, their tone dolorous. At times Sinclair's vision suffers from an existential despair that seems comical. In "Jellyfish" for instance, the sea creature is compared to an overweight, emotionally reticent man. In other poems, the accretion of grief does not always culminate in a satisfying breakthrough; instead, characters are weakly represented, or the poem becomes another account of the poet and not the environment. However, Sinclair triumphs when the speaker comes to life in poems such as "Refrigerator" by turning a wry eye on loneliness. Sinclair's best poems offer paradox and wit to temper the pathos.

In *Robinson's Crossing*, Jan Zwicky returns to her family homestead in Northern Alberta and in particular to Robinson's Crossing, described as the place where the railway ends and European settlers, including her great-grandparents, had to cross the Pembina River and advance by wagon or on foot. Zwicky takes us to the liminal space of the frontier to reconsider the New World, the problems of Canada, and of philosophy, history, and art, that dog us still after 500 years of colonialism: Who are we? Where are we? Why have we come here? And, in coming, what have we done?

These poems are finely tuned to the intricacies of space and language, with lines that play against themselves in varying pitch and tone. In the first poem of the book, "Prairie," Zwicky articulates what Gaston Bachelard calls "a phenomenology of the soul" as she dwells in the intimacies of home. The first lines deliver a slow accretion of the details of encounter until the momentum turns on "sun," and the pace of longing quickens, driven by the landscape and the body's desire:

> And then I walked out into that hayfield
>   west of Brandon,
> evening, late July, a long day in the car
>   from Nipissing
> and long days in the car before that; the sun
> was red, the field a glow of pink, and the
>   smell of the grasses
> and alfalfa and the sleek dark scent of
>   water nearby.

The speaker continues to describe her childhood memory of the "big hasp" that held the leaves of her farmhouse table together. Something as simple and familiar as a table's hasp evokes the domestic geometry of childhood imagination, and so the hasp's opening simulates an ontological shift in the speaker that resonates throughout the entire collection as a metaphor for nostalgia, which we experience both as loss and revelation.

In "Robinson's Crossing," the centrifugal poem, Zwicky narrates the family legend of her great-grandparents arriving in Alberta from England, living in a shack, buying some land, and putting down roots. The

adult speaker returns to her homestead to trace the family history from the beginning; while raking the grass for her mother, she discovers that the "musty sweet / dank, clay-ey; green" earth is the same smell as her family: "the body's scent, the one / that's on the inside / of your clothes, the one a dog / picks up."

While the family is connected to the earth, so too is the family embedded in the hostile culture of empire. The poet gazes at a photo, taken in the 1930s, of a summer camp on the river flats between her family's farm and the town, and sees "at least a dozen tipis; horses; smoke." The displacement of the First Nations people is never sentimental; the poet posits herself, her family, and all European settlers on a continuum that reveals itself in cultural genocide and ecological despair. And, yet, the problem of history, for Zwicky, is complicated by the poet's love for her family and her family's love for the land, and so these poems combine personal history and a complex understanding of the colonial experience.

Ray Hsu's *Anthropy* reminds me of Ondaatje's *Coming Through Slaughter*, with its disjunctive narrative style and figurative language. Just as Ondaatje writes a poetic historiography of Buddy Bolden, Hsu recasts the life story of Walter Benjamin. He integrates references to Benjamin as well as James Dean, Dante, Daedalus, Odysseus, Dostoyevsky, Virgil, James Joyce, Diomedes, Menelaus, Helen, Kenzaburo, Midas, Chet Baker, and Fernando Pessoa. This crowd of historical figures is brought to life: the famous interact with each other, other characters, real or imagined, and the poet himself. The result is a surreal commingling of times, people, and places: a dream of apparitions.

Clearly Benjamin's work shapes the book, and most specifically Benjamin's *Arcades Project*, a history of nineteenth-century capitalism; by its very form Benjamin's book poses a radical philosophy of history akin to what Hsu attempts with this book of poetry. Hsu's book, like Benjamin's unfinished project, is fragmented and often elliptical.

Anthropy is divided into three sections, Third Person, Second Person, and First Person, that reflect Hsu's aesthetic preoccupations. Hsu's entries form a multifarious collection of fragments (poems, prose, monologues, epilogues, film scripts, interviews) that examine perspective, continuity, memory, authorial authenticity, translation, and the objectifying limitations of language—it's a book about language, but more so about history: how we go about defining it, recording, and retelling it, especially in times of war. It is also an attempt at depersonalization and the fracturing of the self: the poems that invoke anonymous personal history (perhaps not the poet's) are placed alongside, for example, a found translation of Dante's *Inferno* (XXXII–XXXIII) and an invented, cinematic recounting of Benjamin's suicide in the voice of his ex-wife Dora Kellner.

Hsu's epilogues on Benjamin read like the dream-like sequences of an experimental film. He recasts episodes between 1939 and 1940, the most dramatic time of Benjamin's life, and arguably, of the twentieth century, when the writer escaped Nazi Paris and travelled by foot with a group of refugees through the Pyrenees to Spain, carrying only a valise which held the *Arcades* manuscript. After being stopped by Spanish authorities in the village of Port Bou and threatened with deportation to France, Benjamin overdosed on morphine. The epilogues capture this time in disjunctive fragments such as "1," which projects Benjamin into the war-torn Paris he escaped:

> Benjamin crouched beneath the rotting metal.
> Here, there was no such thing
> as brick. They had forgotten how wooden planks,
> slatted together, made boxes,

> made brick. A city of wood could burn
> to the violence of a fiddle.

In "6," a prose poem, Hsu reinvents Benjamin's experience of walking through the Pyrenees on his way to Spain:

> In the Pyrenees, he said, you can hear the loneliness of a bridge. You can hear pure resistance to soft insects in the evening. Go quietly: you may see where passing water unwraps the hard pattern of the stilts.

This is not garden-variety Canadian lyric narrative. It's a difficult book, yet the poetry is simple at times and the lyrics beautiful, as in "An Epithalamium":

> The music is an echo of your body
> I brought it in from the
> rain, arriving behind us.
> It is the mirror of your ear
> your breath
> the pattern of your steps and
> you reading
> to me.
> You make me
> silent with love.

This book might be challenging to the reader unfamiliar with Benjamin's theoretical work and biography, but Benjamin's ascent and popularity in academic circles during the last two decades likely ensure that this book will find an appreciative audience.

Private and Public

David Stouck
Ethel Wilson: A Critical Biography. U of Toronto P $50.00

Margaret Macpherson
Nellie McClung: Voice for the Voiceless. XYZ Publishing $15.95

Reviewed by Janice Fiamengo

Ethel Wilson's life both invites and resists a full biography. Her polished, obliquely provocative fictions—many of them containing autobiographical elements—present an intriguing contrast to the seemingly conventional doctor's wife who created them. Yet Wilson remained private to the end of her life, and significant gaps appear in her life record, stretches of years from which no letters or other documents survive. Moreover, she was reluctant to speak of her creative process, seeking to foster a (false) image of herself as an unstudied writer who gave little thought to publication. David Stouck has surmounted these difficulties to produce an elegantly written and critically astute account of Wilson's life that makes clear how the losses of childhood, a long literary apprenticeship, and a combination of insecurity and tenacity were all important influences on her development as a writer. The volume effectively blends biography, cultural history, and critical appreciation.

Stouck argues that Wilson's childhood experiences, especially her father's death from pneumonia when she was nine years old, formed her sensibility and preoccupations—particularly her awareness of how any life is precariously buttressed against disaster. The experience of loss influenced Wilson's focus on accidents, sudden changes of fortune, and mistakes that shape a life: one thinks of Mort's freak drowning in "Tuesday and Wednesday" and the spontaneous lie with which his wife's cousin makes him a legendary hero; and of the boating accident that permanently scars Ellen Cuppy in *Love and Salt Water.* As an adult, the illnesses of her husband added to her awareness of being "on the brink," and her fiction is peopled by characters seeking safe harbours of various kinds—as witness Lilly Waller in "Lilly's Story," whose determination to protect her daughter from the truth of her illegitimacy is both ruthless and compelling. Stouck insightfully and unobtrusively links the informing impulses of Wilson's personal life to the narrative anxieties threaded through her work.

This argument is enhanced by Stouck's

deft presentation. Wilson's early years—the deaths of her missionary parents and her subsequent immigration to Vancouver to live with her maternal grandmother—are set out in a few pages that immerse the reader in the tragedy, pride, and resilience of Wilson's remarkable family. Early Vancouver is vividly presented, with attention to its stark contrasts and rapid development as a booming frontier town on the edge of a rainforest. Except for four years at a Methodist boarding school in England, Wilson lived until she was 31 with her grandmother on Barclay Street, an environment that provided longed-for stability as well as a somewhat repressive moral environment. Two years after her grandmother's death, she married Wallace Wilson, to whom she was passionately devoted. Stouck's portraits of family members and of the Vancouver places that were to emerge so luminously in Wilson's work make for a deeply absorbing account.

Moreover, Stouck's examination of the Wilson papers has yielded fascinating insights into the author's creative and professional life. We learn, for instance, of how the Macmillan Company in Toronto dithered over the drafts of *The Innocent Traveller*, causing anxiety to the timid author trying to shepherd her first book-length work into print. Accounts of Wilson's negotiations with publishers—her willingness to delete whole paragraphs at her editor's suggestion, but her stubbornness about commas and word choice (she balked at dropping the word *fastidious* from Frankie Burnaby's vocabulary in *Hetty Dorval*)—give intriguing glimpses into the writer's character and priorities. When editors disapproved, as they frequently did, of her intrusive narrators, Wilson quietly defended her approach. Titles were always a problem for the author, who wavered between multiple working possibilities; for a time, *The Equations of Love* was readied for publication as "The Laugh of the Sea Gull." Always Wilson made extensive revisions to her manuscripts, as when she pared down and made suggestive rather than declarative the philosophical meditations in *Swamp Angel.* This section of the biography, including contemporary reviews and Stouck's sensitive critical commentary, constitutes a major contribution to Wilson criticism.

In the last third of the biography, Stouck tells how Wilson, though always hampered by shyness, became a significant figure on the West Coast writing scene. She developed a lively and combative friendship with Earle Birney in the early 1950s when they participated together in a creative writers' group that often met at the Wilson home. Unafraid to criticize Birney's polemical social vision, she wrote to him of the "Damnation of Vancouver" that "an indictment becomes dull and loses its force, and as a piece of art or a piece of moral indignation, it fails." Ultimately a difference of opinion over the utility of creative writing classes led to a bitter falling out. With Margaret Laurence, in contrast, the older Wilson developed an unfailingly supportive relationship based on Wilson's delighted recognition of Laurence's enormous talent. Sometimes remembered as cold and insincere, she impressed others as remarkably generous in her encouragement of younger writers. In the late 1950s, Wilson felt confident enough, despite self-consciousness about her lack of university education, to give a number of talks at UBC on Canadian literature that confirmed her wariness of nationalist boosterism and her stress on writing as an intensely private, mysterious activity that could not be taught. All of this and much more, Stouck has assembled in a well-paced, amply detailed, and scrupulously fair biography.

Margaret Macpherson's *Nellie McClung: Voice For the Voiceless* is a very different order of biography, addressing a public figure who translated personal convictions

into national causes. Part of the Quest Library collection by XYZ Publishers, which has also produced volumes on such figures as Isaac Brock, Norman Bethune, and John Diefenbaker, this is a lightweight, popular biography with no claims to rigour or comprehensiveness. It offers a glimpse into the life of the energetic and effective temperance activist, feminist, popular novelist, and Christian progressive, presenting McClung as a spunky and articulate champion of all good causes, who forced the Premier of Manitoba to tour Winnipeg's sweat shops and held audiences spellbound when she campaigned for woman suffrage. With such compelling material, a writer would be hard-pressed to produce a dull biography, and Macpherson's chronicle of McClung's political advocacy is, indeed, electrifying. The book does not claim to present a new or comprehensive perspective on McClung (a number of biographies already exist, most notably Mary Hallett and Marilyn Davis's *Firing the Heather* [1993]), yet it is a lively and affectionate account that will provoke readers' interest in the social issues and personal experiences that propelled McClung's dynamic career. Included at the end of the narrative is a chronology placing McClung's life events in a Canadian and international context.

Macpherson's light touch ensures a pleasurable read, but this is by no means a full or reliable record of McClung's life. Many important—and sometimes controversial—aspects of her writing and activism are missing, including more than a passing reference to her work within the Methodist, and then United, Church in support of women's ordination, her declared support for the Alberta Sterilization Act of 1928, and her newspaper articles defending Japanese Canadians' rights during World War II. Macpherson does not engage at all with recent race-inflected debates about the meaning of McClung's legacy. Moreover, her decision to mix biographical fact with fictionalized dialogue and conjectured detail makes for a sometimes jarring hybrid form. Despite the author's declaration in the Acknowledgements that she employed fiction in a manner faithful to McClung's "true spirit," some readers may find the frequent novelistic flourishes irritating. Like Stouck's *Ethel Wilson*, Macpherson's biography was clearly a labour of love, but it skims a bit too lightly over the surface of a complex and now contested life story.

Reading Voices

Judith Thompson

Late 20th Century Plays, 1980–2000. Playwrights Canada P $47.00

Comps. Sherrill Grace and Angela Rebeiro

Voice of Her Own. Playwrights Canada P $25.00

Reviewed by Marlene Moser

These two books, published by Playwrights Canada Press, are welcome additions to the resources available in Canadian drama, both for academics and for a more general readership. The collection of plays by Judith Thompson, *Late 20th Century Plays: 1980-2000*, is a laudable undertaking, on one level, simply as it recognizes Thompson's stature as one of Canada's preeminent playwrights. *Voice of Her Own*, a collection of long monologue plays, makes available five diverse plays, both the title and the introduction foregrounding their importance as works by women, especially as a variant of the autobiographical form.

Late 20th Century Plays brings together several key works from Thompson's oeuvre, and may well soon replace *The Other Side of the Dark* as the preferred volume for university instructors who teach Thompson's work. Ric Knowles' introduction is geared to students or informed readers who have not encountered Thompson's plays in a substantial way before, introducing them to

ways of "reading" Judith Thompson, whether through character, language, or plot, and generally guiding them in ways of dealing with the "underneathness" that permeates her plays. Clearly written and accessible, the introduction suggests ways into plays which might not be easy for first time readers. Knowles is also always mindful of the plays as performance. The volume is completed by an Afterword by Australian scholar Helen Gilbert; she speaks to how the landscapes in Thompson's plays poetically travel to other places. In addressing the resonances that Thompson's plays have outside Canada, Gilbert firmly positions Judith Thompson as an international player.

In this collection, we see several major plays, such as *The Crackwalker, White Biting Dog, I am Yours, Lion in the Streets, Sled,* and *Perfect Pie.* These full length plays are supplemented with the short monologue *Pink.* As much as I like *Pink,* it seems strange that *Tornado* is omitted (it appears neither as radio play nor in its revised version as a stage play). It is also puzzling that *Habitat* is not included in this collection, especially because Ric Knowles and Helen Gilbert, in particular, both make extensive references to it.

Re-reading these plays, I am struck again and again by Thompson's unique voice. She hears and feels her characters profoundly. Thompson consistently makes daring choices, positioning character after character in pitches of unstable emotions; they rock between love and hate, shifting precariously into the arms of the other. Her scripts *read* well; characters come vividly to life through dialogue and action. And yet Thompson, as actor and director, understands the difference that performance makes. Her propensity for revising is obvious in the plays collected in this volume. As in the version anthologized in *Modern Canadian Plays* (volume II) by Jerry Wasserman, two options are given for the final scene of *Lion in the Streets.* In addition, *I am Yours* contains extended monologues by both Mack and Dee (scenes 12 and 14), elaborating on the first version published in *The Other Side of the Dark* and in the first edition of *Modern Canadian Plays* (volume I) by Wasserman. These re-writings offer further insight into Thompson's characters and their motivations and provide new material for readers accustomed to the first versions.

Voice of Her Own is a very different animal. Unlike Thompson's plays, not all of these plays *read* well. The first play, Kristen Thomson's *I, Claudia,* is in some ways the strongest play in the collection. Thirteen-year-old Claudia's understanding of herself and the adults in her world, as she struggles through her parents' divorce and her father's remarriage, is profound and sophisticated, as she begins to recognize her own complicated desires and her sometimes contradictory impulses. It is testament to Thomson's writing that *I, Claudia* leaps from the page without the aid of photographs (although this is a mask play.) The end point is Sharon Pollock's *Getting it Straight* in which Eme descends into madness: the fragmented, poetic language of this piece indicates the liminal space between sense and nonsense that Eme has been made to occupy in this chapter of her life.

These two plays, as the strongest literary pieces, book-end the collection, with the other more performance-reliant plays making up the other moments in this journey to adulthood. (Grace organizes the plays from childhood to late middle life.) Linda Carson's *Dying to be Thin* follows a teenage girl's struggle with bulimia; *Je me souviens* is Lorena Gale's lament for a Montreal she both loves and hates; and Linda Griffiths' *Alien Creature* chronicles the death of the poet Gwendolyn MacEwen at age 46. These three plays rely heavily on presence and performance. Consequently, *Dying to be*

Thin reads as theatrically naïve, relying on its autobiographical documentation for its strength. (There is no acknowledgement of this play as a play for young audiences, which I believe would help to frame its reading.) *Je me souviens* is flat without the presence of Lorena Gale, whose narrative it is. Similarly, *Alien Creature* needs Griffiths' personal charisma. Grace signals how some plays were omitted because they were not as good "*on the page*," but it seems to me that little was done to fill out these chosen texts in a way that helps the reader engage with the scripts as performance. The notes to *Alien Creature* indicate that magic illusions were used throughout the play, but that virtually no indicators of this magic are left in this version "in order to free the reader's imagination." This tactic does not work. It's much easier to grasp the implications of the script more fully if all the stage indicators are included, especially as this is a text written by the actor who performed the original. We want to see her vision. *Je me souviens* presents another, most troubling, "reading" difficulty. Lorena Gale speaks as an "expatriate anglophone, montrealaise, quebecoise, exiled in Canada." (Note the missing accents.) She speaks powerfully against various kinds of discrimination and about the ongoing sense of displacement she has experienced in these contexts as a black woman living in a kind of exile from Montreal. But her articulation of these feelings is not served by the written text. Sections of the play are in French, but these are riddled with errors: missed accents, faulty conjugations, spelling errors. This is not joual; this is sloppy copy-editing. The typographical errors explicitly work against the text as the reader is constantly reminded and bothered by these errors, reading them as inadequacies. Closer attention to such detail, as well as to performance indicators such as photographs, would immensely help overcome some of the difficulties in "reading" performance.

Sherrill Grace prefaces her introduction with a quotation about the differences and uniqueness of each woman's voice, but she arranges the plays in order of life experience from childhood to late middle life, setting up a singular narrative with a beginning, middle and end, positing a move from innocence to experience, a move which the plays themselves belie. She declares she "simply cannot hear Joey or Krapp or Billy" (to cite famous monologues by men) the way she can hear Heather in *The Occupation of Heather Rose*, but gives no basis, other than the production she saw, and presumably, gender, on which to base this assertion. The introduction is strongest when it gets inside each play and leads us into their autobiographical/biographical workings. I would have liked to have seen these ideas more fully developed and explained and possibly used more explicitly as a rationale for the plays included here. The autobiographical/biographical connections are obvious with plays like Carson's, Gale's, and Griffith's, but less so with Thomson's and Pollock's. And if it's not relevant, then we need to know this. Also, these plays were first performed by the actor/playwrights who wrote them. There is more to be said on this phenomenon and it's unfortunate that the similarity does not merit any commentary. Despite these shortcomings, this is a good collection, useful for actors looking for audition monologues, and for students, academics, and general readers alike.

"Reading" voices that are meant to be heard onstage is always difficult and I am glad to see these collections published by Playwrights Canada Press, and I am grateful for the work this press does in promoting Canadian drama and theatre. But I do also lament the financial constraints under which the publisher is no doubt operating. Photographs would help *Voice of Her Own* enormously, and would add much to our ongoing understanding of staging Judith Thompson, especially as

criticism about performance contexts accrues. We need performance documents too, in addition to the scripts. And, in the same vein, the design of both of these volumes can best be described as serviceable: uninspired covers and run of the mill typeface. We need to think beyond words. A better graphic design sensibility would do much to reflect the creativity and vision of these offerings.

Writing In The Dark

RM Vaughan
The Monster Trilogy. Coach House $16.95

Dennis Cooley
Seeing Red. Turnstone P $12.95

Di Brandt
Now You Care. Coach House $17.95

Reviewed by Leslie Stark

These books fearlessly probe the dark places where few dare to excavate—exploring conceptions of horror and monstrosity, violence, humanity, popular culture, and the current state of societal decay. Each of these writers addesses the "monsters" of our times with relentless honesty and resolute courage, while guiding their readers on a journey as playful as it is frightening.

RM Vaughan's *Monster Trilogy* unites three monologues, first staged separately—each a powerful, disturbing one-woman show. The women embody a triple-faceted representation of vicious self-deception and dangerous obsession. Beginning with *The Susan Smith Tapes*, Vaughan inhabits the deluded, media-distorted mind of the infamous child-killer, as she appeals (from her prison cell, with a video camera) to first Oprah, then Jerry Springer, then Barbara Walters. Vaughan has the ability to twist subtly the reader/audience's perception of the media—of a "monster"—into a pitifully childlike version of pathetic self-indulgence, and at the same time, allow the reader/audience's vision of her instability and unreliability to render her laughable, almost endearing, in her vastly inappropriate and rapidly degenerating attempts to revise and justify various versions of the "story."

A Visitation of St Teresa of Avila upon Constable Margaret Chance continues to provide a look at another "monstrous" woman. Chance is hilarious, feisty, terrified, and cruel. Torn by her need for a firm sense of self rooted in her black and white values of race, religion, genetics, and the world around her, she grapples with her own demons and takes the reader/audience along for a ride. She is a brassy, ballsy, racist, sexist, redneck pig, but her candour is as refreshing as it is disturbing. Her own growing sense of the potential horror within herself is a glaring revelation of the world as it crumbles around her, as she clings to the scraps of a belief system that is slowly torn to shreds, and threatens to engulf her.

The final play, *Dead Teenagers*, shows a Reverend on the verge of breakdown. She explains her obsession with "dead teenagers" as not sexual, but spiritual: like her predecessors, however, the Reverend's growing sense of desperation reveals, in layers, the depths of her self-delusion. She descends into irrationality, and like her sisters, illustrates for us the darkness contained in our ability to deceive ourselves, our own inner "monstrosity."

Seeing Red takes on the darkness in a more playful manner: Cooley explores the myth, culture, and imagery of Dracula with a fearless commitment to the darkest elements of the archetype, the issues of passion, obsession, violence, and sexuality. He balances reckless devotion to the romantic with a witty sense of comic self-deprecation that defies the reader not to be seduced by his take on the myth. His use of multiple personal voices, perspectives, and styles, and the mix of classical and contemporary

versions of the Dracula persona give enough leeway that tongue-in-cheek readings never descend into vampire-cliché: Cooley hypnotizes and enraptures his readers as Dracula seduces Lucy, bending language into spells to captivate the reader's sense of heightened arousal. Cooley's ability to twist sensuality and horror into deliciously fun reading stems from a fearless refusal to subscribe to tradition or convention, a childlike determination to play "in the dark," and an ability to mesmerize his audience with a hypnotically dizzying array of characters, perspectives, and approaches to the mythical vampire.

Cooley's repetitions of blood and bone act as catalysts for the alchemic ritualism of his words. The sense of growing desperation is also prevalent as a rhythmic undertone, growing deep in the silences between Cooley's stanzas, and in the repetition of shoulder, collar, breath, teeth, he evokes familiar but still relevant territory—vulnerability, passion, obsession, sex, death, mortality. But Cooley's greatest gift lies in the power of his storytelling; ideas of horror, passion, violence, and obsession are rendered accessible to the reader through Cooley's whimsical blend of empathy and humour, bringing originality and vitality to an undead story that is as delicious as it is dark.

Now You Care by Di Brandt takes the reader on an emotionally poetic dance, evoking the melancholic and the ecstatic, while revealing in rhapsodic lament the excruciating pain of beauty transforming into desolation. Her prairie-girl roots are revealed in nostalgic visions of endless grass and sky, awakening and embracing the tender roots of the prairie-child in me as we journeyed back:

> Into grass
> The cricket sung fields,
> The goldenrod,
> The wild roses.

But Brandt does not sink into sentimentality; we are only coddled for a moment before she traces landscapes of oppression, anger, violence, and passion with fearless depth. The sparse vitality of the breathless, impassioned voice brings honesty and credibility to her vision: the decay of society, the cracked earth of drought, the yellow grass, the smog. We see the monstrosities we have done upon ourselves, and upon the earth. But rather than leave us in darkness, Brandt offers reconciliation, rebirth: "Let the prairie (steppe, veldt) recover its grandmotherly strength: long rooted grasses, sweet weeds."

The book ends with the section "Heart," which explores in dense, rich, savoury prose the bittersweet tang of memory colliding with a new awareness, the sour-sweet taste of nostalgia, the hunger pangs of life, angered laughter and joyous tears, the sheer beauty of daring to defy the destructive nature of the self and to rejoice in the divine nature of human frailty and fallibility. Brandt's answer to the bleakness of modern existence is defiance; she encourages the reader to rejoice in the beauty of our natural selves, the innocence and exuberance of "wild grass" and natural selection, the cyclical nature of destruction as a reflection of creation, as a way of showing, as all the writers in this review do, that darkness is just the other side of light.

Desire's Library

Robert Rawdon Wilson
The Hydra's Tale: Imagining Disgust.
U of Alberta P $34.95

Holbrook Jackson
The Fear of Books.. U of Illinois P US $15.95

Reviewed by Len Findlay

The rights and responsibilities of the literary imagination are a persistent source of debate. And the two books under review here, the one new and the summation of a distinguished academic career and eventful life, the other the reprint of a work first

published in 1932, offer information and provocation aplenty.

Robert Rawdon Wilson's study of disgust is handsomely produced, compendious, learned, street-smart. It can be read as a serious meditation on relations between the human sensorium and imagination, an erotic sampler for the middle-aged academic male, or as episodes in the history of the heroic male self—in this case American, middle-class, well educated, far travelled, and intellectually and sensually "pluralist." This remarkable book addresses an abundance and an absence: the one attesting to the metamorphic powers of disgust, the other to the lack of effective theorizing about it. Wilson takes disgust to be an unexamined commonplace yet also a version of something close to "infinite." It is hence like beauty and imagination in being a favoured residence of presumption and prescription as well as the source of some of our most compelling utterances and investigations. Wilson is often as brilliant as he is ambitious in unpacking the "psycho-visceral and the moral" elements of disgust. He organizes his argument in a deliberately corporeal and transgressive way, refusing to disembody either intellect or imagination, and refusing to suppress a penchant for the rhetorical or referential belch, piss, ejaculation, fart, fidget, grope. We follow the Hydra's spoor and stench to "its" lair and body, and thereafter engage with its many eyes, its heads, and finally its venom. Human aversions have their gradations, histories, and argots too, and these versions of variability and contingency take us from the tempting but lethal simplifications of momentary disgust to the complexities of societal and individual change. Accordingly, and most effectively here, the "question of theory dogs every step of [this] study of disgust." Human beings can, it seems, acquire a taste for or professional objectivity toward almost anything. The potentially tolerable or pleasurable continues to impress, surprise, and outrage us. Yet there is scant solace here for the prude and the moral censor—and "For this relief much thanks."

It is hard to argue with Wilson's main contentions, and easy to admire the ways in which he supports them by assessing five main explanatory models—moral, social constructionist, psychoanalytical, Sartrean/existential "nostalgie de la boue," and Bataille's radically anti-normative receptivity. The testing of theory is combined with illustrations from elite and popular culture (Monty Python as well as *Middlemarch,* Edmund Spenser as well as the Sex Pistols), and Wilson adeptly supports the claim that, in the grand schema of the (re)presentable, disgust is "the opposite of the sublime." It endures unendurably beneath the bowels of the (body's) building rather than above its lintels. Wilson's readings of canonical texts are acute and suggestive, as are his engagements with "shock art." The redemptive and accepting versions of disgust associated with Sartre and Bataille are brought into productive tension in the notion of "perverse geometries" aptly borrowed from H. P. Lovecraft. Notions of the precious and the loathsome are constantly rethought in light of artistic and cultural practice, before the final chapter comes back tellingly to the jolts and arcana of personal abjection and self-disgust.

However, the contrast here between "theory's rigidity and the imagination's suppleness" seems overdrawn, both romanticized and reductionist. Appeals to the imagination or the rule of metaphor, like appeals to theory, can be reactionary or servile as well as emancipatory. Such appeals can also lead to the apparent trivializing of the effects of sexual abuse as "dreary," while the use of parables allows some irritatingly cheap shots against hiring trends in English Departments. A gargantuan, globe-trotting but Amero-centric hedonism tends to

crowd out the political, including Canadian specificities and differences within that assimilative pseudo-entity, "North American culture." Important differences between modernism and modernity are ignored or elided, while recurrent references to terror serve to underline only the incompleteness of its treatment here. Concerns about Wilson's penis, both conscious and unconscious, make him seem equal parts self-absorbed and self-satisfied prick, while intensifying doubts about the gender politics of this book. Someone who prefers Kristeva's version of the "dialectic" to Marx's is a long way from this reviewer's view of the world. But Wilson can be a wonderfully engaging writer who makes the most of his scholarly and social experience, even if in ways that make him sometimes seem, even when off his motorcycle, too much of a sleazy rider. *The Hydra's Tale* is deep as well as devoutly impure, and I intend to return to its provocations often.

I am curious why Holbrook Jackson's *The Fear of Books* has been reprinted as an Illinois paperback. Alas, this reprint offers no fresh context for Jackson and his work, but only an anodyne blurb praising the work for "uphold[ing] books as the soul and beacon of genuine human decency." Now it is true that censorship is alive, well, and in the eager service of Homeland Security, but this reprint (along with his Burtonian *Anatomy of Bibliomania* and *The Reading of Books*) seems to have been planned well before 9/11, even though a number of its lessons and challenges are very pertinent to that event and the chilling that succeeded it. Jackson's experience defending fin-de-siècle decadence and making his living as a versatile man of letters helps him weave together a densely documented defence of literary imagination, freethinking, and freedom of expression. Quotable quotes abound, and the foolishness (and worse) of censors is rehearsed across two millennia. But it is hard to read this book otherwise than as an anthology to be dipped into occasionally in search of examples that may for a time discomfit or discourage the Thought Police. At the same time one must bear in mind, as Jackson constantly does, Anatole France's warning: "Intolerance is of all periods."

The Craft of Fiction

Sharon Rose Wilson, ed.
Margaret Atwood's Textual Assassinations: Recent Poetry and Fiction. Ohio State UP $49.95

Nicole Côté and Peter Sabor, eds.
Varieties of Exile: New Essays on Mavis Gallant. Peter Lang $45.95

Reviewed by Annette Kern-Stähler

Ten essays by some of the best-known international scholars on Margaret Atwood discuss her recent poetry and fiction, with special emphasis on her short fiction (including her experimental prose pieces), in *Textual Assassinations.* Addressing postmodern, postcolonial, cultural, and feminist issues, the essays focus on Atwood's "textual assassinations," which, in these recent works, "occur . . . both in form and content." While many of the texts discussed here feature actual murders (e. g. *The Blind Assassin*, *Good Bones and Simple Murders*), assassinations of form are really the common ground. Atwood's "technique of undermining conventional thought-patterns, attitudes, values, or textual norms by turning them on their heads" in *Murder in the Dark* and *Good Bones and Simple Murders* is discussed by Reingard Nischik; her reworking of traditional plots, genres, characters, and intertexts in *Good Bones* and her metafictional questioning of master patterns in *Alias Grace* are examined in two essays by the editor of the volume, Sharon Rose Wilson; her "assassination" of arbitrary distinctions between science and poetry, and between nature and culture, in

the poetry collection *Interlunar* is considered by Shannon Hengen. Karen Stein discusses the "assassination" of male-centred narratives while Kathryn van Spanckeren considers poetic tricksters and the subverting of convention in her poetry, focusing on the collection *Morning in the Burned House*. Coral Ann Howells examines the deconstruction and transformation of myths as addressed in Atwood's essays dealing with the question of Canadian identity and Canadian history in *The Robber Bride*. Carol Beran investigates her satire of the myth of the polite Canadian and outsiders in *Wilderness Tips*. These essays are illuminating examinations of the craft of Atwood's recent poetry and fiction.

"Are we living through an irony epidemic?" Linda Hutcheon asks in her introduction to *Double Talking* (1992). In a contribution to the same book, Karen Smythe points out that "[t]he study of irony in Gallant's fiction is fast becoming a commonplace." Irony is the focus also of *Varieties of Exile: New Essays on Mavis Gallant*, edited by Nicole Côté and Peter Sabor; as Côté points out in her introduction, it appears that the exile's experience of displacement is best conveyed by the displacement of meaning in language, i.e. irony. The short volume, based on a one-day symposium in Paris (1999), is divided into three parts: essays, a round table discussion, and a question and answer session with Mavis Gallant. The first part consists of four essays on multiple experiences of exile, "be they geographical, culture or language related"—that of "radical insecurity," for instance, which is addressed by Janice Kulyk Keefer in her analysis of post-war Polish émigrés to Paris in "Forain" and "A State of Affairs," to whom the "lighted windows" in the city remain exclusive. As Keefer pointed out in one of her earlier studies of Gallant (*Reading Mavis Gallant*, 1989), a feeling of insecurity in the reader is engendered by irony. Similarly, in her introduction Nicole Côté emphasizes that the exile's feeling of displacement and otherness is conveyed by irony, "the discontinuity between sign and meaning," which "produces the same intense feeling of exile from the meaning of things." The thematic and structural link of exile and irony is further elaborated on by Danielle Schaub in her discussion of "The Other Paris," "Potter," and "His Mother." Schaub convincingly argues that irony translates the exile's experience and emerges as one of the "markers of exile." Irony is also one of the rhetorical devices that are "carrying strategies of displacement," one of the "group of signs in Gallant's texts with doubled meanings" analysed by Marta Dvorak. Agnès Whitfield focuses on Gallant's "position vis-à-vis language," considering "Across the Bridge" in conjunction with the autobiographical preface to her *Selected Stories*. In both texts, "the trope of the bridge is used to represent the crossing from one language to another," which is, however, "endlessly deferred or displaced."

Gallant's view of the "unbridgeable inequalities of language" is addressed in the ensuing round table discussion on the translation of her work, in which the author states that "l'anglais et le francais n'ont rien en commun, ni les mêmes mots ni la même résonance, pas du tout, pas seulement linguistiquement, mais historiquement. . . . On n'a pas en anglais ou en français la même conversation. On ne parle pas du même sujet. On ne peut pas." In translation, however, the linguistic differences have to be bridged. Translators and critics of Gallant's work and reception in France discuss and share experiences of translation, especially the difficulties of translating her style and syntax. Gallant's desire to keep her own English and French separate is taken up in the question and answer session, in which she mainly addresses the role of the critic and the process and language of her writing. English,

being linked to her "imaginative thinking," is her "langue écriture." "If I began to write an excellent French," Gallant says, "I would lose English as my writing language, but without linking French to imaginative thinking." The final two sections of the volume, which the title, unfortunately, does not refer to, will be of great value not only to students and teachers of Gallant but to anyone interested in the translation of fiction. Regrettable, too, are the great number of editorial inconsistencies, especially in the introduction and bibliography.

Of Note

Dana Bath
Universal Recipients. Arsenal Pulp $19.95

There's no shortage of disaffected and alienated female characters in our national literature. Margaret Atwood and Barbara Gowdy (as well as such newcomers as Kelli Deeth and Madeleine Thien) have made this strangely benumbed figure an enduring one.

With her lyrical second story collection, *Universal Recipients*, Montreal-based Dana Bath adds to this depressed (albeit burgeoning) population. The female characters at the core of Bath's 13 "fictions" are often wanderers and strangers to themselves, to all appearances lost or adrift at the prime of their adulthoods. From the envy-driven narrator (a former anorexic) of "Just Ahead of Us in Line" to the befuddled Eliza in "A Kettle"—for whom "things are always clearest . . . when love is leaving"—Bath's women seem unable to navigate through life's complex choices.

And while the complexity of adulthood is a bountiful area for focus, the sameness of voice and generalized stultifying atmosphere Bath generates from one story to the next (whether the setting is Tokyo or Ottawa) encourages readers to ponder the author's restricted scope. Such consistency—whether in post-card sized "Aerugo" or "Operculum" (37 pages)—does not serve Bath well because instead of showcasing her thematic foci and formal innovations, it merely hints at her uniformity. —BRETT JOSEF GRUBISIC

Anne Cameron
Family Resemblances. Harbour $24.95

Family Resemblances is a captivating book about ties that bind us and hurt: family. It has a strong narrative voice with made-up words and authentic dialogue. Crabs boiled in a pot "clitter and scritch" with their claws, and a man who resists condoms says, "Why take a bath with your gumboots on?"

The story moves right along. Gus, the protagonist's father, is a male slut with a fast fist. This could be a tough sell, but he has enough redeeming qualities that readers will understand why his wife keeps going back to him. Cameron tells a good story. She's good at portraying both the comforting, seductive qualities of family and the way those we love and trust can betray us at a deep level. The relationships between women are complex and believable. What isn't so believable or clear is the book's time frame. Is it the fifties? Present day? Contraception appears to be non-existent; every woman Gus has sex with gets pregnant. Cameron also eschews the use of images. The unnamed location is equally unsatisfactory. It's 20 miles out of Nanaimo 60 years ago, a strange, almost lily-white culture of ex-Scots, "Scandihoovians" and no strip malls—Nanaimo's distinguishing feature. —ZOË LANDALE

Lynda Hall
Telling Moments: Autobiographical Lesbian Short Stories. U of Wisconsin P $33.02

Telling Moments makes a fine creative companion to Lynda Hall's previous edited collection of non-fiction lesbian writing and

includes many of the same authors. Many icons of lesbian fiction (Anna Livia, Emma Donoghue, Jewelle Gomez, Sarah Schulman, Lesléa Newman and Canadians Marie-Claire Blais and Marion Douglas), are represented and appear alongside promising newcomers, of whom Janet Mason and Barbara Brice Morris are particularly notable. There are also contributions from writers better known for non-fiction and/or poetry such as Karla Jay and Minnie Bruce Pratt. Poignantly, the collection opens with a charming story by the much mourned Gloria Anzaldúa.

Most stories are published here for the first time; the writing is professional and sophisticated, aware and self-reflective. Hall employs two unique features that enhance the book's usefulness—most pieces open with a picture of the author and close with the author's reflections on the autobiographical aspect of the story and her writing process.

Hall's disappointingly short introduction discusses the interaction between fiction and reality, and contextualizes the collection within current works such as *The Mammoth Book of Lesbian Short Stories* (1999), edited by Emma Donoghue. However, it fails to acknowledge a number of relevant precursors variously edited by Judy Grahn, Gynergy's Lee Fleming, and The Women's Press Lesbian Writing and Publishing Collective. Unlike these earlier books, and despite its claim to challenge the academy, Hall's collection is heavily weighted toward writers who are themselves academics. Despite the diversity of contributions that explore multiple identifications, *Telling Moments* engages rather than challenges the academy. —L. CHRIS FOX

Maggie Helwig
Between Mountains. Knopf $34.95

Set in the aftermath of the Balkan wars that erupted in the 1990s, Maggie Helwig's second novel is a moving love story that follows the uneasy relationship between Daniel Bryant, a London-based Canadian journalist, and Lili Stambolovi, a Serbian Albanian interpreter from Paris whose work takes her to The Hague and the war crimes tribunals there. Into the fabric of the romance, Helwig weaves two secondary narrative strands—the first focused on Nikola Markovi, a Serbian literature professor-turned-warlord, standing trial for genocide; the second centred on Father Jamie Bennington, an Anglican priest who preaches the coming of the apocalypse on the streets of London and his only follower Paja, a Bosnian refugee.

All of the characters in this book are torn between agency and impotence. Markovi's notion that he did "certain things" because he could not fight the momentum of history parallels Paja's feelings of helplessness about the future—in his mind, "wars never end." Daniel and Lili struggle with careers that demand objectivity and the simultaneous desire to bring about justice. The politics of translation—translating reality onto the page, translating words from one language to another—is a central theme of the novel, as both Daniel and Lili struggle to understand what constitutes the truth. *Between Mountains* becomes, in the end, a heartbreaking commentary on the devastating repercussions of war and the tentative power of love to heal. —LISA GREKUL

Robert Hilles
A Gradual Ruin. Doubleday Canada $29.95

Governor-General's Award-winning poet Robert Hilles's second novel, *A Gradual Ruin*, illustrates the way the lives of two individuals come to intersect. One narrative follows Tommy, a Canadian soldier trapped behind enemy lines in World War II, who must battle enemy soldiers, fight for survival in a Russian gulag, and negotiate with the Canadian army bureaucracy

before returning home to Winnipeg.
The other narrative follows Judith, a young girl who, through a series of misadventures, runs away from a foster home in Kenora and ultimately finds refuge with Tommy.

There is enough material here for several novels, and the result is an episodic narrative that spends little time developing scenes, details, or characters. Too often Hilles tells us how characters feel without showing us that they do, in fact, feel this way. The characters themselves are curiously without effect. Much of the novel relates military and Soviet atrocities, yet these scenes leave little mark on reader or characters. The same is true of Judith's story. Because the characters are not developed, the reader has little investment in them, and the important themes about individual connection that Hilles works with remain ineffective. However, the relationship between Tommy and his father, which unfolds through letters, is surprisingly touching, making this reader wish that Hilles had lingered longer over other parts of the narrative. —ALISON CALDER

Britt Holmström
The Wrong Madonna. Cormorant $22.95

"In this city, where the image of Madonna and Child cropped up everywhere, the young girl ought to have fit right in, sitting silent on the stone wall, a sleeping infant on her lap, an ageless landscape for a backdrop." Except this girl does not fit in, since she is an unwed teenage mother from Sweden sitting in a cemetery in Zagreb, Yugoslavia in 1965. *The Wrong Madonna* is the story of Lisa Grankvist, and the journey to forgiveness that she must travel. Moving from the swinging 1960s in London, England, to the 1990s in Hamilton, Ontario, Lisa is a lost soul. While some of the attempts at locating the story in London of the 1960s jar a little (such as a night of orgasmic sex with Jimi Hendrix), Holmström deftly crafts a narrative in which the interweaving of the past and the present constructs a compelling narrative of loss: both a loss of self, and the loss of one's home. Avoiding sentimental pitfalls and easy resolutions, Holmström's novel has a sense of completion at the end when Lisa finally returns to Sweden after 30 years in exodus. —ANNE LYDEN

Robert Hough
The Stowaway. Random House Canada $32.95

The Stowaway's perspective alternates with each chapter for roughly the first two-thirds of the novel. In one thread, Hough introduces two Romanians who have hidden aboard the *Maersk Dubai* and the cheerful Filipino bosun who discovers them, Rodolfo Miguel. To the horror of Rodolfo and most of the Filipino crew, the ship's Taiwanese officers cruelly order the migrants into the Atlantic Ocean.

In the alternating thread of the novel, Hough concentrates on Daniel Pacepa and Gheorghe Mihoc, also Romanian migrants, as they escape a destitute society which never recovered from the terrifying reign of Ceausescu. The roguish pair work their way across an often-hostile Europe. Unaware of their predecessors' fate, Daniel and Gheorghe sneak aboard the *Maersk Dubai* where they, too, are eventually discovered.

The men in *The Stowaway* are driven by poverty, terror, and the contradictory urges to conform and also challenge rigid social hierarchies. While the characters create identities and forge relations over shared cultural backgrounds, Hough never uses any cultural code as a shortcut for character motivation or plot development.

The Stowaway seems utterly real, but its convincing tenor results more from Hough's compact writing and his understanding of character than the novel's connection to real events from 1996. —JOHN CORR

Isabel Huggan

Belonging: Home Away from Home. Knopf $34.95

As much as Isabel Huggan's *Belonging* is a book about the meaning of home in today's globalized world and about the challenges of living in a foreign language, it is also a book about love, loss, and the art of fiction. *Belonging* is a book of lessons. Together with the author, readers learn a great deal about what people and places can teach. The attentive reader will also perceive that *Belonging* offers a lesson in how life can be turned into fiction. This is the raison d'être for the three short stories with which the book closes. In this sense, *Belonging* might be understood as a "how to" book about writing. Unlike any textbook, however, it is written with exceptional literary sensibility. Indeed, this quality earned it the 2004 Charles Taylor Award for Literary Non-Fiction, as jurors explained. Their praise is well deserved. In *Belonging,* a snowfall turns the world into an opal and silence feels like a secret ("Saving Stones"). Infused with the melancholy of memory and worldly knowledge, yet hopeful and appreciative, *Belonging* is a pleasure to read even as Huggan delivers difficult truths about life and love and their inevitable loss. Happily, writing offers haven. —CHRISTL VERDUYN

James King

Transformations. Cormorant $29.95

Transformations is the third novel by James King, who is well-known for his literary biographies of subjects from William Cowper to Jack McClelland. It is, in King's words, "very loosely based on some incidents in the early life of Daniel Home," a nineteenth-century medium remembered today as the object of Robert Browning's enmity, inspiring Browning's long dramatic monologue, "Mr Sludge, 'The Medium.'" In its exploration of the meaning of artistic creation, *Transformations* has affinities with the fiction of A. S. Byatt and Jane Urquhart. King's narrative is highly readable, and he does a fine job of interweaving the fictional and historical characters. A rather melodramatic murder mystery plot sits uneasily with the main subject matter. The use of slightly archaic clichés—"the bereft," "these little castaways," and "a tender eye" all occur within two pages—was no doubt intended to evoke a Victorian ambience, but at times the novel is in danger of turning into a romantic potboiler. King defends Home by implying that the truths of the spiritual world are subjective: his portrayal of the medium makes a fascinating contrast with the wheedling fraud of Browning's poem. — J. RUSSELL PERKIN

Andrea MacPherson

When She Was Electric: A Novel. Polestar $21.95

Grice's notion of conversational implicature assumes that conversationalists work co-operatively. Conversational implicature, used successfully, allows the participants to make words "say" more than their conventional meanings. But, if the listener misses the presence of conversation implicature in an utterance, the additional meanings can be lost. The deployment of an unreliable narrator runs the same risk: if the reader misjudges the narrator's reliability, additional meanings inherent in the structure of the text may be misinterpreted. In the case of *When She Was Electric*, overlooking the operation of an unreliable narrator would result in overlooking an interesting narrative investigation into the construction of memory and identity.

Ana, the first-person narrator of *When She Was Electric*, is unreliable and MacPherson provides us with the necessary cues to that identification. The adult Ana, in a moment of emotional crisis, narrates the events that radically altered her adolescent self's sense of identity. But her knowledge is limited to her own subjective interpretation of experience. Frequently, as the third person interjections of Min's

thoughts demonstrate, Ana misinterprets and misunderstands the events around her. MacPherson's unreliable narrator allows her to invite her readers to join with her in interrogating conventional understandings of the reliability of memory and the stability of identity. —DIANA LOBB

Lillian Nattel
The Singing Fire. Knopf $34.95

In *The Singing Fire*, Lillian Nattel imagines late-Victorian London as seen from the perspective of two immigrant Jewish women. Depicting a world where men who speak Yiddish are as likely to be pimps as friendly *landsmenn*, where immigrants from Poland and Russia disturb the fragile acceptance of earlier Jewish immigrants from Germany, and where the "Jewish question" is debated, Nattel recognizes that there is no single immigrant story. Particularly impatient with clichés about female behaviour, she creates two heroines who contest in different ways the dominant patterns of female representation in British and Yiddish nineteenth-century literature. The result is a work that combines the gritty details of the realist novel with the magical world of dead stepmothers who promise biological mothers to look after their daughters, and then complain, "*When you're dead, who listens*?"

Playing against expectations, Nattel begins with a young woman tricked into prostitution, who then escapes the predictable fate of a fallen woman in Victorian fiction. She marries, years later saves another young woman from the same fate, and eventually becomes the mother of her illegitimate child. Satirizing the depiction of Jewish girls in British literature—"A Jewish girl is always pure and beautiful and dies a real Christian"—and in Yiddish theatre—"Why must the Jewish heroine throw herself off the tower?"—Nattel portrays immigrants affected by and contributing to an evolving culture. Although one character protests that there are "too many songs about Jewish mothers," *The Singing Fire* proves her wrong. In a manner both comic and lyrical, Nattel reveals that the songs we know do not tell the whole story.
—ADRIENNE KERTZER

Robert Strandquist
The Dreamlife of Bridges. Anvil $18.00

The Dreamlife of Bridges portrays the struggles of two broken characters. Leo has never recovered from his son's suicide, and the novel portrays his downward spiral as he becomes unemployed, an alcoholic, and homeless. His one prized possession is his toolbelt, an ironic symbol, since, as the back-cover blurb tells us, he is "capable of repairing almost anything but himself." June is a single mother whose vindictive ex-husband regularly files false reports of child abuse. She must deal with the legal consequences of attacking the social worker who comes to remove her son.

There are real and potential links between the two, most notably the Lion's Gate Bridge, where Leo takes up temporary residence and June performs her community service. The bridge represents human connections, but these are more the stuff of dreams than reality. Strandquist tries to arouse sympathy for his protagonists, but loads the dice against them so thoroughly that they are like emotional punching bags. Leo's alienation and lack of purpose are so profound that he comes across as a passive victim of consistently terrible circumstances. Both ultimately build new emotional bridges. The novel features very poetic passages, fine handling of symbols, and a striking portrayal of Vancouver's underclass. Overall, however, the book's impact is attenuated by its formal disjointedness and the characters' general inability to win—or, at times, even act—against stacked odds. —ALLAN WEISS

Harry Potter and the Canadian Fantasy

Lynn (J.R.) Wytenbroek

The Harry Potter phenomenon has publishers, writers, and educators scratching their heads. How did this brow-beaten boy with a scar on his forehead become the primary icon of childhood today? Why are even reluctant readers reading and digesting 400-page tomes about Harry? Harry has turned the world of children's literature on its head—of that there is no question. But maybe instead of asking the impenetrable "why," we need to be looking at all the ways in which Harry Potter has altered children's literature and our perceptions of it in less than a decade. And we need to consider how the Harry Potter phenomenon has not only changed children's literature, but also adult literature. Adult readers line up in the thousands for the midnight sales of each new book. This persistent, likeable boy has blurred the line between children's and adult fiction. Given this influence on both children and adults, in what ways has the Harry Potter phenomenon affected Canadian children's literature in particular?

The Harry Potter books have contributed in four significant ways to Canadian children's literature and, to a lesser degree, to Canadian adult literature. They have influenced publishers and writers, and shaped, then extended a cross-over between children's and adult literature. Also, they have provided some significant questions for educators to grapple with.

Ten years ago, writers of children's fantasy in Canada had little chance of getting published. Few publishers were willing to risk publishing children's fantasy in Canada, as they felt there was no market. What Canadian fantasy was available usually had to be published first in the United States before a publisher here would pick it up. Publishers seemed to believe that Canadian children were not interested in fantasy.

All that has changed in the last five to seven years. Now publishers are screaming for fantasy fiction to fill the demand created by the Harry Potter books. But was it the Potter books themselves that caused Canadian children to want to read fantasy? Of course not. The enduring love of C.S. Lewis's Narnia books, of Tolkien's *The Hobbit*, of Frank Baum's Oz books, and the lingering fascination with the R.L. Stine horror/fantasy books shows that children have always loved fantasy. For some reason, Canadian publishers did not acknowledge that love, despite the endless popularity of the appallingly written Stine books, a popularity which suggested that starving readers would read absolutely anything to fill their imaginations. It took the immense popularity and, of course, financial success of the Potter books to make the publishers sit up and pay attention. Now, more and more fantasy is offered to children and

young adults from the Canadian publishing industry. Some of it is excellent, as we can see with Andrea Spalding's *The White Horse Talisman* and *The Dance of the Stones* or Edward Willett's *The Spirit Singer* or Linda Smith's Freyan Trilogy or Monica Hughes' final book, *The Maze.*

Children's fascination with fantasy and the role of fantasy in their lives is, therefore, a topic that educators and academics need to put their minds to. Certainly, since Bruno Bettelheim's seminal work on the subject, *The Uses of Enchantment* (1976), there have been both child psychologists and literary critics who have looked at the formative influences of fairy tales and fantasy on children's minds and imaginations. But little of this work has directly influenced classroom pedagogy, as indicated by the realism promoted by most teachers. When these same children show little interest in reading, educators are quick to blame television, video games, and the Internet. And certainly these have had a profound effect on children's reading habits. Yet Harry Potter has shown that children love to read now as much as they ever have. So maybe part of the problem is the books we are pressing on children, or making available to them—books that inhibit their enjoyment of reading. As adults, most of us prefer realism, and therefore it is realism we present in the classroom. However, fantasy appeals to children's fertile imagination, making fantasy much more interesting than realism is, at least until puberty. This whole topic needs serious examination by pedagogues, before we lose the momentum of the Potter books, and lose our young readers once again.

Two groups of writers are responding in very different ways to the Potter phenomenon. There are the "band-wagon" writers, who produce much of the mediocre fantasy currently pouring from publishing houses across Canada. But their writing lacks the style of the Potter books. One of the things that has amazed some educators about the popularity of the Potter books is the high and demanding level of diction Rowling uses. Yet Grade Three students are reading these books and either understanding the frequent large words from the context or are actually stopping to ask or look up what they mean. Good writers for children have always known that children are capable of understanding much more advanced diction than most educators believe. Rowling has shown that children love to learn new words and are neither cowed nor emotionally damaged by being presented with diction they do not understand. The poorer writers of fantasy continue to write down to children. In the light of the Potter books, this paucity in diction and style is now glaringly obvious.

Another exciting group of writers responding to the Potter craze includes both experienced, published authors who are finally being able to publish their fantasy in Canada, and young writers who are writing fantasy because their imaginations, in flight, reconstitute the world. These writers are bringing to birth fine works of fantasy here in Canada. They are the ones who will inspire the young readers lucky enough to find them to continue to read, continue to dream, continue to imagine.

Many adults are found in the huge lineups outside shops, often hours before the doors open to sell the latest Harry Potter book. Many, interviewed by local media, have confessed that they are not buying the book for a child–they are there to get their own copy. Many of us have seen, on ferries, in airplanes, at bus stations, on subways, adults reading the latest Potter book, or one that has been out for several years. Gone is the furtive hiding away of *The Hobbit* when another adult comes near. Adults are openly fascinated with Rowling's world and characters, and feel no shame in letting others see what they are reading.

Other books have crossed the lines between adult and child readers, particularly in fantasy. *The Lord of the Rings* immediately springs to mind. However, while precocious 12-year-olds may sit immobilized for days by Tolkien's Middle Earth, that fantasy was written for adults. It has been adopted by children the world over, and is as likely to be found in the children's section of the library as in the adults' section. But it was not written for children. Harry Potter was. Certainly there have been other books for children that adults have enjoyed over the years, maybe that have meant even more to adults than children. J.M. Barrie's *Peter Pan* with its biting social satire and sardonic look at the Victorian education system immediately springs to mind, as do the challenging philosophical Earthsea books by Ursula K. Le Guin. But there has never been such an open fascination with a children's series before.

Perhaps part of the explanation for this cross over audience lies in a sophisticated style and fascinating characters. The early books, particularly *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* and *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban,* are superbly well written. But that could be said of other excellent children's books. What is it in the Potter books that has captured the common imagination of adults and children alike? What has caused these books to become the literary and social success that they have become?

Perhaps when hunger and desperation, disease and war are making a mockery of our self-styled "civilization," a time when people are feeling spiritually and emotionally hollow, these cleverly written but insightful books are helping create a new myth. This myth makes sense to children and adults alike.

The most important influence the Potter books can make on Canadian fiction, adult and children's alike, is to make us pause and begin to search out those writers who can feed that deep human need for spiritual fulfillment and emotional cognition accomplished by true myth, and bring it to birth in a whole new generation of fantasy literature. For it is fantasy literature and, to a lesser extent, soft science fiction, that uses myth and mythic awareness most directly. We need writers who speak to us through alternative worlds; we need publishers who will provide access to such worlds, and educators who will promote them; and we need readers who will listen to the language of the soul to be found most profoundly and most clearly through fantasy literature.

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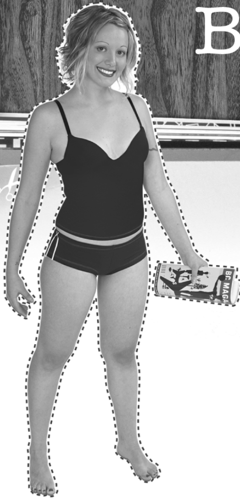

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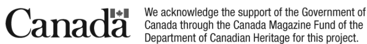

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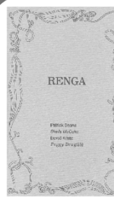
Amanuensis

Phil Hall is well known as a writer and supporter of "work poetry." He stands in solidarity with workers, with the little guy, the often faceless many.



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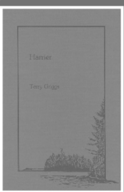

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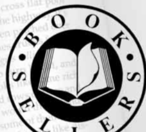

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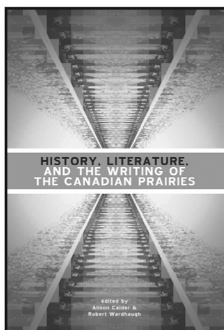

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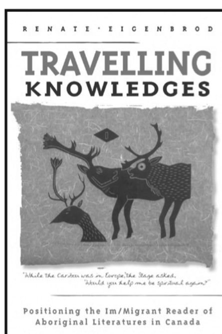

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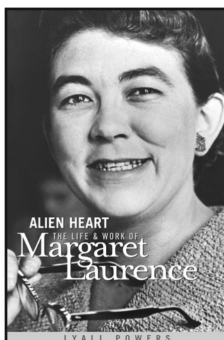

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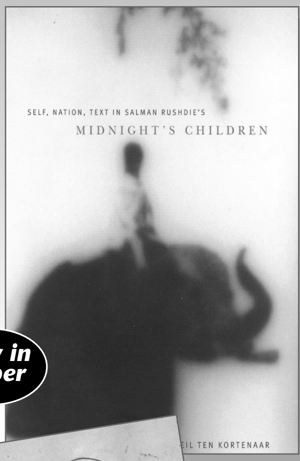

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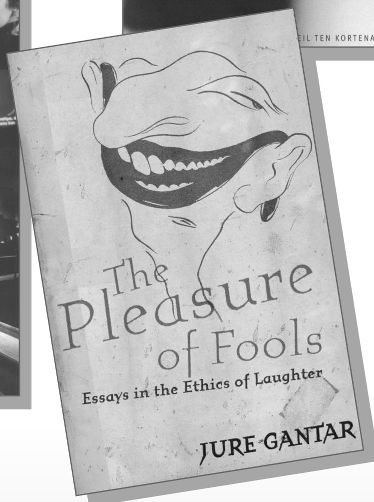

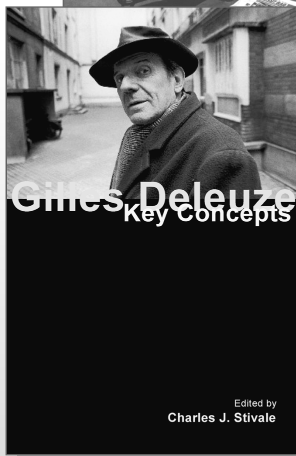

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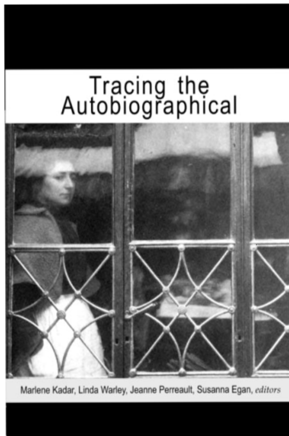

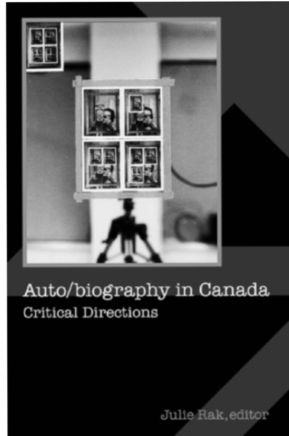

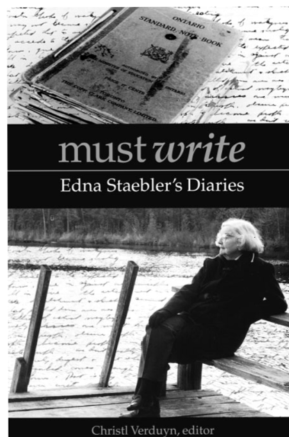

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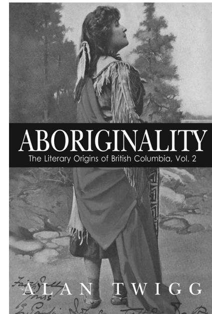

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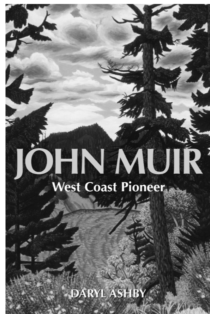

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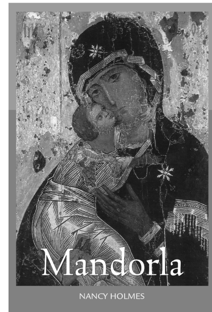

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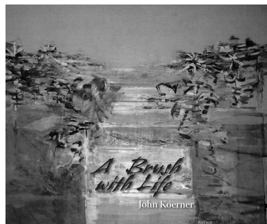

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