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Guest Editorial

Am I a Canadian Writer?

M.G. Vassanji

What is Canadian literature? What is a Canadian novel?

I am not going to be so foolhardy as to attempt to define these terms; many have wandered into this wilderness—and returned, what else but bewildered if they were honest, or with simplistic or outdated notions if they were naive; this is hardly surprising—the country is changing around us even as we speak, stirring up a host of conflicting ideas and interests, and to look for an essence, a core, a central notion within that whirlwind is surely an illusion. To define this country or its literature seems like putting a finger on Zeno's arrow: no sooner do you think you have done it than it has moved on.

But I think I can still ask, Am I a Canadian writer? Why, you may ask. Whence this perversity? (Has anyone been calling you names, at least recently? Has anyone said you are not a Canadian writer? Well, the issue did arise several years ago, I believe, but this time the question is my own. Why, you ask?) Because an author often asks, or is asked: Whom do you write for? Who is your audience? And an author often, egotistically, vainly, as it has been observed, wonders in those dark moments that are supposed to be all creative but aren't always so—surrounded perhaps by a pool of bad reviews; the publisher perhaps seen to want a compromise, a betrayal; garbage seems to be published and yet is hailed as great world literature—dejected, he wonders: Who will remember him? Who will read him, after he's sailed off into the sunset? And if he's read at all, then, as what? Where? In a Canada, where he still has to spell out his first name? Where he finds himself sputtering out in frustration, I am no more ethnic than you are; I am not a

professional multiculturalist, a specimen demonstrating this country's political or social reality, justifying its place on some UN list of wonderful places just behind Switzerland and ahead of Belgium? and where he has to assert, I am not an immigrant writer, my writing is not immigrant. Or will there be a place for him in the land where he was born, that has a special place in his heart, which he thinks has been relegated to the margins of this world, but where he is seen as only historically relevant? And what about overseas, when he has to take pains to make his hosts realize that no, he is not a brown Eskimo; his land is not quite that of the red-coated Mounties, and the whales, and the north, but something different and complex—a city where it snows, but where there are also a lot of people who look and speak like him?

These are the frustrations of looking for a place to belong.

In many countries, these frustrations do not even arise. If you have come from outside, you don't belong. Period. I can think of France or Germany, or the Middle East, or Japan. How dare you think of yourself as a French writer? You have to prove yourself. (Get rid of the headscarf first.) But in Canada and the United States, which are relatively new countries and constituted of constantly arriving immigrants, the situation is different and dynamic and, happily, we may say, full of contradictions.

Traditionally, a new Canadian or American was someone who left the shores of Europe, and later China and Japan, set foot on the new soil, kissed the earth, and adopted the new land; forgot the old. At least, let's assume this for the time being (forgetting the special privilege of coming from Western Europe and Britain, with which there was a cultural continuity and constant contact). The succeeding generations were adapted, spoke the language and idiom, played baseball or hockey or football, had integrated. That is the traditional model of immigration; it still makes a lot of people very comfortable. It makes the sociologists of immigration feel like mathematicians. (There is a QED-ness to this picture of immigration.)

Canadian literature, correspondingly, would be characterized in this traditional picture by something essentially Canadian; it would explore, address the core of what Canada is and means; you might think of the theme of survival; you might think of nature—the cold, the wilderness, the prairie, the mountains, the Atlantic; of a certain, privileged kind of colonial experience. We all know the Prairie-grandmother novel; the growing-up-in-Newfoundland-or-Nova Scotia, walking-along-the-beach-with-an-ancestor novel; the World War I novel; the cool-thirtysomething or -fortysomething Vancouverite novel.

These are all venerable Canadian themes.

You might say I have forgotten the multicultural nature of this country.

But I ask myself, what is multiculturalism? Isn't it simply a waiting post, a holding area for immigrants, a quarantine to hold the virus and keep the peace while succeeding generations have time to emerge, fully integrated, assimilated? What a joy to behold a young Canadian of Asian or African background, speaking an accepted Canadian dialect; and what a pain in the backside, the contentious parents who claim their version of English is as good, if not better, and curry is simply great? Who is multicultural except the immigrants from Asia, Africa, the Middle East; those whose language is not English, whose culture is not western and Christian?

What does it mean then when a book set in India or Africa—for example—is hailed as a Canadian novel, receives a prize? What is it seen as? Is it seen as saying anything of significance about Canada? Anything about its history, its politics, its national concerns, its character; its landscape; its psychology? What will future generations think about it, as Canadian?

Perhaps it is considerations like these that went into the making of the Authors Section of the Canadian Literature Archive, with a special section, an appendix, allocated to Canadian Tamil writers; and perhaps considerations like these also go into the making of literature syllabuses for high schools and courses at universities. They don't know what to make of us.

It is tempting to say that a novel by a Canadian citizen is a Canadian novel, no argument. A book by a Kenyan writer who has never set foot in Canada is not a Canadian novel. This is a safe statement, it gives us an outer bound, tells us at least what cannot be called Canadian. But that is not enough. One may well ask: Are three or five years, after which one stands before a judge, swears loyalty, and obtains a piece of paper, enough to produce a Canadian sensibility, a Canadian work of literature?

We might say that any book written in Canada is different from the same story written elsewhere; this is contentious, for there is a question of degree; but there is some truth in it. But is that enough? When students of the future examine Canadian literature of the past, will they see Rohinton Mistry, or Harold Sonny Ladoo, to put it explicitly, as Canadian writers? Is anyone going to trawl through their works to bring out nuggets or essences of Canadianness? Will they (do they) think of Anne Marie Macdonald or Margaret Atwood in the same way as they think of MGV? Don't we think of Marquez as Colombian, Joyce and Beckett as Irish? Is Nabokov really an American writer? And do we really think of Conrad as English? And so,

whom are we fooling here with our generous, inclusive definitions of Canadian literature?

Recently I met a young writer of Chinese descent, who told me how fed up he was of the stories of ghosts and bound feet and Chinatown that characterized so much Chinese Canadian and Chinese American fiction; he was impatient to tell the world, to tell Canada what being Chinese Canadian was all about. It was about dominating mothers, he said. About the war between the sexes. It is such young people that make the older writers nervous, threaten to make them irrelevant in a new Canada.

Whenever I pass through Toronto's Don Mills area, throbbing with new Canadian life, I know for a fact, I am envious about the stories that will come out from there. They will be defining stories; defining what?—again, a new Canada. But what will my stories define?

It is in those moments that I wonder if I have a home, as I thought I had, as I think I have every morning that I wake up (except for some of the more bitter winter days). All is not lost, however. There is a way out for writers of my ilk, of course, it is the only way out, and it is honesty itself. As simple as saying the emperor has no clothes on at all. That way out lies in the admission that it does not matter, it should not matter to me as a writer what the world takes me as, will take me as. I cannot write, honestly call myself a writer of fiction, a truthful fiction if I decided to write in such a way that I would be seen as more of a Canadian; as more or less of anything. A novelist is, and that is it. Others can put labels on you for their purposes—theses, papers, editorials have to be written after all—but you cannot work under the shadow of a label. The temptation is there, of course, to write a big "Canadian" novel and the pressure is there, which you see evident sometimes in what I call the "multicultural" novel, in which the author and the character strive hard, do their level best to be Canadians. But a character with depth, who is rooted deep in something, in a history, a culture, a psychological makeup, I believe eludes them, because all or much of their imagination is taken up with waving the flag as vigorously as possible. See what a cute Canadian I am. Or else we are presented with the Komagata Maru story for the nth time. If that is all we can come up with, as Canadian and South Asian with substance, then that proves a point. Striving too hard goes against honesty, against the creative impulse, and shows pitilessly that there really is nothing beneath the surface.

And so for the rest of us who do not want to demonstrate the workings of multiculturalism, we say, What does it matter what you call me; what

posterity takes me for? This is what I am: I live on such and such a street, in Toronto or Winnipeg or wherever; I have lived before in other places that I could name for you; I have brought up two or three children, I pay my taxes, contribute to a few charities, try to mow my lawn regularly. I clear the snow, though I tend to wait a little in the hope that the sun will come out and do the job for me. This is what I can write about, this is what the inspiration was, where it took me: a street in Dar es Salaam, a village in Ghana, a tenement in Calcutta.

The story should end here, and it does for me. But once in a while, one likes to play the polemical game, and go further, in a way that does not matter to one's creativity but helps to address questions outside of it.

And so, one asks: Isn't there any way, then, in which I can be truly Canadian?—not out of kindness and generosity of other Canadians—which let us admit proudly and gratefully have been there—but essentially Canadian, so that a person in Berlin or Tokyo, for example, or Nanaimo or Cornerbrook, two archetypically Canadian places in the minds of some, would look at one's work and say, Yes, of course it is Canadian? If so, then we have to define a new, adulterated, complex essence for Canada.

One might define and truly recognize a category and a phenomenon called Canadian Postcolonial; those of us who would be described by this term are essentially those who emerged from the colonies in the 1960s and 1970s; we tell the stories of those societies—stories which have not been told, or do not have a ready reception in the centres of the world; we are the historians and mythmakers; the witnesses. We are essentially exiles, yet our home is Canada, because home is the past and the present, as also the future. We belong to several worlds and Canada has given us a home, an audience, a hospitality, a warm embrace. We get a category all to ourselves because there are so many of us.

But we might go further and say that not only are there so many of us, we also have entire communities here, consisting of people who have shared our experiences; we are telling the stories not only of there, but also for people here. We are bringing the stories here to accompany those who have arrived here. They came with their clothes, and sometimes with their pots and pans, and left it on us to bring their stories here. These stories are not only for their consumption; they are not for nostalgia; they are their history, describe their being. And therefore they are for their future generations as well. And that puts a whole new dimension or shade to the question of who we really are.

If we are telling the stories of so many Canadians, aren't we then telling the stories of Canada as well? What kind of Canada? This is not a Canada only of the Mounties and hockey, the north and Newfoundland, the beer commercials, into which newcomers assimilate; it is a Canada which constantly adjusts and redefines itself, though in degrees. It is a Canada that is as much urban as it is the north. If ten percent of a nation resides in one city, then a cityscape deserves to be recognized as being essential, as essential as the Rockies, as the Prairies, the Atlantic. The Americans have done this; Canadians are embarrassed to do it.

This idea is, naturally, anathema to many people; for one, to those whose Canada of the mind and memory and history, of the images and essence imbibed in childhood, jars with the kaleidoscopic reality outside their windows. Neighbourhoods, cities, no longer look the same; is the sense of national self also going to change as drastically? Are we turning Oriental? We would like to be politically correct, we will admit that a Canadian after all is anyone who is a citizen. But there is a limit. There are strong emotions involved in the idea of a changing Canada. And there are also those who have lamented the fact that this country has not had a powerful mythology, a dominating sense of itself as an entity; has had no essence, so we have had to accept the wimpy notions of the underdog, the self-deprecating, or the numbskull but consistent and dogged Canadian, and a literature that goes with it. Just when the country had begun to have a sense of itself and its literature, here come these fellows and gals who write about the tropics. Give them the space, this is a tolerant country: but are they truly, completely Canadian?

The idea I am putting forward is that new Canadians bring their stories with them, and these stories then become Canadian stories. Canada's past lies not only in the native stories of the land itself, but also in Europe, and now in Africa and Asia; Canadians have fought not only in the World Wars, but also in the wars of liberation of Africa, Asia, and South America. We have veterans and heroes not only of those European wars, but also of wars elsewhere. Our children, however much they sometimes pretend that our past does not matter to them, also demand that. The stories of the Jewish Holocaust, the holocausts in Rwanda, the Partition of India, and the massacres of Cambodia are also Canadian stories.

Two to three hundred thousand new Canadians come to these shores every year; few people will say that this country has turned for the worse because of that; to remain viable as a country, we have no choice but to

allow our population to be augmented by 0.5 to 1 percent every year. And as much as many would like to hold up Cornerbrook or Nanaimo as emblematic of Canada, the reality is constantly shifting.

In this kind of convex reality, in which the world comes in, gets refracted and reimagined through Canadian writing, there is perhaps a place for writers such as I, who will always wash upon these shores.

This editorial is a version of an address given at the Annual Congress of the Humanities and Social Sciences Federation of Canada, University of Manitoba, Summer 2004. —MGV

debbi waters

And She Lives On

FOR AMBER WEIDMAN

erin with her banana saffron miles too flowery for december pops seeds salted has bottled water and then her and mickey start talking about the war values surprised it hadnt happened sooner early twenties wants to be a marine biologist with her terribly straps skinny falling as she wrestles erin its slippery turquoise tank top responsible doesnt care who smokes around her just loves the choice watching the news having dinner with her mom and dad wearing her painters smock dress a find in a warehouse thinking shell pick a bottle of wine write write a friend in hungary

cant really talk to them her grandmother maybe her cool aunt getsa ride home changes into sweats and goes to the grocery store smokes pot when its time not into the underground passes a deli buys a slab of halvah goes home to do a paper
it will be called
AFGHANI WOMENS MANY WARS
JUST MAYBE ITLL GET PUBLISHED IN SOME
QUARTERLY

she LAUGHS OUT LOUDwhat a crazy dream im not that
important.
now research

banana yellow turqoise
a natural born survivor
and erin has brown eyes.

Jodi Lundgren

"Colour Disrobed Itself from the Body": The Racialized Aesthetics of Liberation in Michael Ondaatje's *In the Skin of a Lion*

In the first of CBC Radio's now annual Canada Reads programs, celebrity participants selected Michael Ondaatje's *In the Skin of a Lion* as the novel that all Canadians should read. That this novel, which depicts ethnic minority labourers building Toronto's public works in the early 1900s, should in 2002 prove useful to a state-sponsored exercise in national community-building prompts renewed inquiry into its ideological and aesthetic dimensions. During the debate, the novel's advocate, Barenaked Ladies' front man, Steven Page, supported his claim that the novel is "a beautiful book about the immigrant experience" (qtd. in Moss 6) by citing the representation of men who work as dyers in a tannery:

> Dye work took place in the courtyards next to the warehouse. Circular pools had been cut into the stone—into which the men leapt waist-deep within the reds and ochres and greens, leapt in embracing the skins of recently slaughtered animals. In the round wells four-foot in diameter they heaved and stomped, ensuring the dye went solidly into the pores of the skins that had been part of a live animal the previous day. And the men stepped out in colours up to their necks, pulling wet hides out after them so it appeared they had removed the skin from their own bodies. They had leapt into different colours as if into different countries. (130)

That Page recalled the beauty of the imagery rather than the suffering of the workers attests to the risk involved in depicting what is finally lethal work as a visual spectacle. The focus on beauty further obscures both the racial connotations of the colour imagery, and the relevance for a multicultural nationalist thematics of such an image as leaping "into different colours as if into different countries."

In a *Canadian Literature* editorial, Laura Moss, mentioning Page, criticizes the "watered down aestheticism" of the readings typically performed by the celebrity contestants on Canada Reads (8): "most often it has been the politics of the novels that is lost in the commentary on the texts" (8). The celebrities' aestheticism finds reinforcement in the wider critical reception of Ondaatje's work. As Glen Lowry points out, the predominantly "formalist readings" have ignored the texts' political implications and have "effectively [elided] 'race' as an element of [Ondaatje's] writing" (par.1). This separation of aesthetics and politics—tenuous at the best of times—is especially unsustainable in the case of *In the Skin of a Lion.* At the same time as the novel's repeated images of adopting and shedding coloured skin are visually compelling, they deploy discourses of ethnicity, nationality, race, and class. Indeed, the imagery borrows intensity metonymically from the power struggles associated with it.

In *The Ideology of the Aesthetic*, Terry Eagleton espouses a definition of the aesthetic as "a vision of human energies as radical ends in themselves which is the implacable enemy of all dominative or instrumentalist thought" and that "signifies a return to the sensuous body" (9). As Peter Hitchcock explains, this definition of the aesthetic as sensuousness opens up a new strategy for "readers of working class culture" who have found it difficult to "maintain the aesthetic as a viable category" (25). Hitchcock further notes that although Marx "takes seriously labor's sensate experience in his elaboration of class, . . . it remains severely undertheorized in working class representation" (27). I argue that Ondaatje's novel not only attests to historical injustice (specifically, to the existence of a "vertical mosaic" of ethnicity) in Canada, but also attempts to liberate or redeem the exploited workers through the sensate representation of labour, harnessing what Herbert Marcuse calls "the emancipatory power of . . . sensuousness" (*Aesthetic* 66). Defined as sensuousness, of course, the aesthetic cannot remain autonomous of the social discourses that constitute the body, and, although the novel's overt emphases on class and ethnicity threaten to elide the others, the discourse of race structures and delimits the novel's central image of liberation: the shedding of coloured skin. Its logic hinging on the fact that populations have been enslaved because of skin colour, this image restricts the possibility of liberation to the racially unmarked body.

Significantly, the novel was written during a peak period of immigration from Asia and the Caribbean and appeared in print the year before the federal government passed the Canadian Multiculturalism Act. Ondaatje, once

accused of disguising his Sri Lankan heritage (Mukherjee 114), said in a 1990 interview that he "didn't want to write an Asian story for the very reason that it would have been interpreted as a personal saga." In discussing elsewhere what motivated him to write the novel, Ondaatje says both that "Canada has always been a very racist society—and it's getting more so" (Turner 20) and that a novel "can be a permanent and political reflection of your time" ("Michael Ondaatje" with Bush 247). Thus, although Ondaatje deliberately chose to distance the story by writing about European immigrants in an earlier era, his comments cue us to read *In the Skin of a Lion* as an implicit critique of the ongoing racial stratification in contemporary Canadian society.

A vertical mosaic of ethnicized class divisions informs the relations among the characters in *In the Skin of a Lion*. Although "Canada as a nation is built on immigrant labour" (Ng 474), when Ondaatje conducted research on the history of Toronto, he discovered that the "armies of immigrants who built the city" are unrepresented in its pages (Turner 21). Astounded that he could find out "exactly how many buckets of sand were used" to build the Bloor Street Viaduct, but that "the people who actually built the goddamn bridge were unspoken of" (Turner 21), Ondaatje perceived an opportunity to redress this historical imbalance. In its focalization through working class characters, his novel counters the absence noted by Canadian sociologist John Porter in 1965: "there is almost no one producing a view of the world which reflects the experience of the poor or the underprivileged" (6), "nor does class appear as a theme in Canadian literature" (6, n.3). Porter, who encapsulated the results of quantitative research in the title of his seminal work, *The Vertical Mosaic: An Analysis of Social Class and Power in Canada*, identifies a major representational challenge faced by Ondaatje when he notes that the "idea of an ethnic mosaic, as opposed to the idea of the melting pot, impedes the processes of social mobility" (70). Considering that "any form of class politics is ultimately concerned with overcoming or at least lessening class differences, not with affirming and celebrating them" (Felski 42), the concept of ethnic pluralism as the affirmation of cultural difference stands revealed as an ideological tool that secures the continued dominance of white, anglophone Canadians (71-2).[1] The patterns of imagery in Ondaatje's novel question this ideology but remain embedded within a racialized logic that ties liberation to the shedding of coloured skin and/or the attaining of whiteness.

The importance of ethnicity, and implicitly of whiteness, within *In the Skin of a Lion* undermines the humanist rhetoric advanced at times by the

protagonist, Patrick Lewis, a Canadian-born working class man of unmarked ethnicity (hence presumably of British descent) who has arrived in Toronto in 1923 as part of a wave of "native off-farm migration" (Porter 57). As a member of the "landless proletariat," Patrick joins with an urban "immigrant proletariat" in filling the ranks of the "lower level of unskilled workers" in Toronto (Porter 57). A withdrawn, even anti-social person, Patrick tells Alice Gull, the anarchist actress who becomes his lover, that he does not "believe the language of politics" (122) and, later, that "the trouble with ideology . . . is that it hates the private. You must make it human" (135). Alice, who performs allegorical political theatre for illegal gatherings of immigrants, accuses Patrick of believing in "solitude" and in "retreat," and calls attention to his privilege as a member of the dominant British Canadian ethnic group, in contrast to "three-quarters of the population of Upper America," who cannot "afford" Patrick's "choices" or his "*languour*" (123). Whether or not Patrick enjoys as much social privilege as Alice claims (he points out that he has only "ten bucks" to his name [123]), these conversations sensitize Patrick, as point of view character, to questions of class, ethnicity, and representation, themes that recur in metafictive passages from this point forward in the novel.

The connections among skin, colour, nationality, language, and ethnicity receive their most overt, and ultimately self-reflexive, articulation in the scene depicting tannery workers stepping out of vats of red, ochre, and green dye, having "leapt into different colours as if into different countries" (130). Lest the identification of nationality with dye be considered solely metaphoric, the text clarifies that the dyers "were Macedonians mostly, though there were a few Poles and Lithuanians" who "on average had three or four sentences of English" (130) and to whom "the labour agent" gave "English names" (132).[2] Whereas the assigning of English names obscures the men's linguistic differences, their national identities actually determine, and are reinforced by, their status as dyers.

By themselves, the emphasis on colours and the analogy between "wet hides" and the workers' skin (130) in this key passage might encourage objectification of the men or idealization of their occupation. This possibility dissolves immediately, however, in Patrick's awareness of representation as a process: "If he were an artist he would have painted them but that was a false celebration" (130). That the men have, nevertheless, just been verbally painted is, as Linda Hutcheon notes, ironic (98). Yet this instance of self-reflexivity conveys more than irony; it motivates the reader to reflect on the function of aesthetics and on the politics of representation. Patrick wonders:

> What did it mean in the end to look aesthetically plumaged on this October day in the east end of the city five hundred yards from Front Street? What would the painting tell? . . . That they had consumed the most evil smell in history, they were consuming it now, flesh death, which lies in the vacuum between flesh and skin, and even if they never stepped into this pit again—a year from now they would burp up that odour. That they would die of consumption and at present they did not know it. (130-31)

The superficial spectacle of bright, playful colours belies the life-threatening consequences of the dyers' jobs. This scene thus illustrates the idea, shared by both Theodor Adorno (160) and Herbert Marcuse, that guilt inevitably imbues the aesthetic because art "cannot represent . . . suffering without subjecting it to aesthetic form, and thereby to the mitigating catharsis, to enjoyment" (Marcuse, *Aesthetic* 56). Despite this belief in art's inherent guiltiness, Marcuse goes on to argue in *The Aesthetic Dimension: Toward a Critique of Marxist Aesthetics* that art enlists sensuousness to subvert the tyranny of reason, mobilizing images that foster in the audience both the desire for liberation from oppression and the will to enact it (62-63; 66). From this perspective, the aesthetic intensity with which Ondaatje depicts the dyers creates effects other than the simply cathartic or conciliatory. For example, after the introduction of the dyers, the reader, disarmed by the intensity of the imagery, is likely to absorb the empirical statements about working conditions that follow. An affective response, in other words, need not preempt a critical reaction and may even precipitate cognitive transformation. In a related vein, Carol Becker argues in an article on Marcuse that subversive art "does not necessarily move the intellect to a direct perception of injustice"; rather, it may "move the spirit and thus indirectly affect social change" (120).

The relations between sensory experience and emancipation remain, however, particularly fraught in the case of the sensate representation of labour. Although many of the work scenes in *In the Skin of a Lion* respond to Marcuse's call for emancipation of and through sensuousness, the text is honest about the distortion of sensory experience within the institution of alienated labour. In the case of the tannery workers, for example, the dye eventually rinses off, but this cleansing proves superficial since their bodies have been permanently altered: "What remained in the dyers' skin was the odour that no woman in bed would ever lean towards. Alice lay beside Patrick's exhausted body, her tongue on his neck, recognizing the taste of him, knowing the dyers' wives would never taste or smell their husbands in such a way" (132). Such sensory details serve as a reminder that, at least in

the Marxist framework, "only with the supersession of private property will the senses be able to come into their own" (Eagleton 201).

The text's liberatory elements are further compromised by the racialized discourse of colour that accompanies (and often provides the grounds for) them. For example, in a later scene, the workers leave the factory on a Saturday afternoon, "the thirty or so of them knowing little more than each other's false names or true countries. *Hey Italy!* They were in pairs or trios, each in their own language as the dyers had been in their own colours. . . . *Hey Canada!* A wave to Patrick" (135). That Patrick is used as a synecdoche for Canada establishes the British heritage of the unmarked Canadian citizen. Importantly, Patrick does not work as a dyer, thus retaining, as Alice insists, some advantage over immigrants whose first language is not English. Consequently, for the dyers, emancipation is directly linked with disrobing from the colours that have been tied to their non-anglophone country of origin:

> For the dyers the one moment of superiority came in the showers at the end of the day. They stood under the hot pipes, not noticeably changing for two or three minutes—as if . . . they would be forever contained in that livid colour, only their brains free of it. And then the blue suddenly dropped off, the colour disrobed itself from the body, fell in one piece to their ankles, and they stepped out, in the erotica of being made free. (132)

Since the colours have been associated with the labourers' various non-British countries of origin, their loss suggests loss of heritage and rebirth as generic, English-speaking Canadians, like Patrick. A metaphor of assimilation, this scene invites a critique similar to that made by Smaro Kamboureli of the 1988 Multiculturalism Act. In fact, in the following excerpt from Kamboureli's *Scandalous Bodies: Diasporic Literature in English Canada,* the dyers' shower scene might be substituted for the Act with only modest alterations:

> [It] advocates a sort of pan-Canadianism through a universalizing rhetoric . . . . By releasing "all Canadians" from the specificity of their histories, this legal document seeks to overcome difference rather than to confront incommensurability. Belying its intent to address systemic inequities, it executes an emancipatory gesture in the name of homogeneity and unity. (101)

Like the Multiculturalism Act, Ondaatje's text releases the dyers from the "specificity of their histories," executing an emancipatory gesture that nevertheless presumes a common European heritage: that "colour disrobed itself from the body . . . in the erotica of being made free" racializes this moment of emancipation as white. As Eric Schocket argues about Rebecca Harding Davis' story "Life in the Iron Mills," whiteness here emerges as "the promise

that the working class will not be forever excluded from the political and social prerogatives of . . . white skin privilege" (47). This image correctly anticipates that these European immigrants or their descendants will become more evenly distributed among the economic strata of Canadian society. Just as the members of these groups attain social mobility, however, Canada will open its gates to third world immigration (starting in 1962), and, as sociologist Raymond Breton remarks, "whether or not the overall pattern of socio-economic mobility for minorities of European origin will repeat itself for visible minorities is not clear" (88). Noting that race, rather than ethnicity, "has become critical in accounting for patterns of inequality," Breton speculates that "colour difference may be of greater significance since it makes ethnic boundaries more visible. Accordingly, it may lead to more persistent patterns of social exclusion and discrimination than is the case when culture is the prime factor of differentiation" (105). If the socio-economic mobility of "visible minorities" depends on the metaphor of freedom that Ondaatje employs—that of shedding coloured skin—then the prospect is not encouraging.

As an Italian Canadian, the professional thief Caravaggio, an important secondary character in the novel, belongs to the immigrant group that holds "the lowest position in the class system" (Porter 84) during the time period of the novel. While he is in prison, "three men who have evolved smug and without race slash out" with the intent to murder him. Their only apparent motive is racism or xenophobia, as these racially unmarked men accompany their physical attack on Caravaggio with shouts of "Fucking wop! Fucking dago!" (185). This attempted murder constitutes the novel's most blatant evidence that some "immigrants of European origin" were seen as "racially different and inferior" and subject to "prejudice and discrimination" (Breton 105). Caravaggio survives the prison attack thanks to Patrick's vocal intervention, but his escape from prison (and from possible future attacks) depends on altering his skin colour: "*Demarcation,* said the prisoner named Caravaggio. *That is all we need to remember*" (179). Fellow members of a crew painting the prison roof "daubed his clothes and then, laying a strip of handkerchief over his eyes, painted his face blue, so he was gone—to the guards who looked up and saw nothing there" (180). As Glen Lowry notes, the "notion of 'demarcation' . . . functions to further establish Caravaggio as a 'racialized' figure" (par.10). If Caravaggio must adopt colour to attain freedom, however, to sustain his liberty requires stripping himself of it. He accomplishes this with a can of turpentine and a shirt-tail (181-2). This figure

of delible racial demarcation suggests the "innate" commonality of European Canadians within an economically and ethnically stratified society. The figure used to signify Caravaggio's freedom supports the idea that non-British European immigrants can assimilate into the social order—especially if, unlike Caravaggio, they adopt "English names" (132)—at the same time as it casts doubt on the ability of visible minorities to do the same.[3]

Significantly, when, near the end of the book, Patrick prepares to swim through the intake tunnel of the Waterworks (which he has earlier helped to build) in order to confront Commissioner Harris and to dynamite the plant, he changes his skin colour with the help of Caravaggio and Caravaggio's wife, Giannetta:

> On deck Giannetta watches Patrick, a small lantern beside them, the only light on the boat. He takes off his shirt and she begins to put grease onto his chest and shoulders. He watches her black hair as she rubs this darkness onto his body. . . . Caravaggio begins to dress Patrick with water-resistant dynamite—wrapping the sticks tightly against his chest under the thin black shirt. They both wear dark trousers. Patrick is invisible except by touch, grease covering all unclothed skin, his face, his hands, his bare feet. *Demarcation.* (227-8)

The racial connotations of the "darkness" that is rubbed onto Patrick's body are then foregrounded momentarily in a descriptive passage: "The lemon-coloured glare from the waterworks delineates the east end. Caravaggio could lean forward and pluck it like some jewel from the neck of a negress" (229). As Eric Schocket says of Rebecca Harding Davis' story, "race is everywhere" in this novel and particularly in this scene, though characters of colour are not (47). When Harris, who is spending nights in the building because of working-class unrest and union agitation, sees Patrick, he is confused: "Even if he had known the man before he would not recognize him now. Black thin cotton trousers and shirt, grease-black face—blood in the scrapes and scratches" (234). Patrick's counterfeit blackness is emphasized again as he condemns the tunnellers' exploitation: "Harris watched the eyes darting in the man's dark face" (235). Clearly, in this scene, as in the ante-bellum American literature discussed by Schocket, "blackness is used to give evidence of class difference" (Schocket 57). Yet, as Frank Davey argues, "throughout the episode the novel creates a Harris who refuses to be constructed as Patrick's opposite" (154): "My mother was a caretaker," Harris tells Patrick. "I worked up" (Ondaatje, *Skin* 235). Indeed, the racialized imagery of difference reinforces Harris' insistence on the fundamental commonality between himself and Patrick, for, were Patrick to remove the

black grease that distinguishes him from Harris, "what lies beneath is a whiteness that can be claimed as common property in a nation economically divided" (Schocket 57). In this scene, racialized representation reinforces the equation between social mobility and white skin, thus further reifying the vertical mosaic.[4]

The imagery of whiteness receives an alternate articulation in the case of Macedonian immigrant Nicholas Temelcoff, who perceives the acquisition of English as integral to upward mobility: "If he did not learn the language he would be lost" (46). Although he initially learns English from "radio songs" (37), like many of his fellow labourers, he decides to work nights at a Macedonian bakery and attend school during the day, where he engages in "fast and obsessive studying of English" (46). Distinguished by his powerful drive to master the language, which he finds "much more difficult than what he does in space" (43), Temelcoff also sets himself apart as an exceptional, aerial bridge worker. In the bridge scenes, Temelcoff's display of highly refined skills illustrates Marx's idea that capitalism's "massive unleashing of productive powers is . . . inseparably, the unfolding of human richness" (Eagleton 218). As Eagleton explains, "the capitalist division of labour brings with it a high refinement of individual capacities . . . Through capitalism, individuality is enriched and developed, fresh creative powers are bred, and new forms of social intercourse created" (218). The scene that describes Temelcoff's spatial awareness illustrates such situated knowledge:

> His work is so exceptional and time-saving he earns one dollar an hour while the other bridge workers receive forty cents. . . . For night work he is paid $1.25, swinging up into the rafters of a trestle holding a flare, free-falling like a dead star. He does not really need to see things, he has charted all that space, knows the pier footings, the width of the crosswalks in terms of seconds of movement—281 feet and 6 inches make up the central span of the bridge. Two flanking spans of 240 feet, two end spans of 158 feet. . . . He knows the precise height he is over the river, how long his ropes are, how many seconds he can free-fall to the pulley. . . . After swinging for three seconds he puts his feet up to link with the concrete edge of the next pier. He knows his position in the air as if he is mercury slipping across a map. (35)

The spatial and temporal mastery Temelcoff exhibits in this scene rivals the dominance that Commissioner Rowland Harris exerts over space in his masterminding of Toronto's public works. By valorizing Temelcoff's skill over any that Harris exhibits, the text constructs an alternate economy, even granting Temelcoff cognitive mastery over Harris: "*He* knows Harris. He *knows* Harris by the time it takes him to walk the sixty-four feet six inches

from sidewalk to sidewalk on the bridge" (43). Furthermore, "he knows the panorama of the valley better than any engineer. Like a bird. Better than Edmund Burke, the bridge's architect, or Harris, better than the surveyors of 1912 when they worked blind through the bush" (49). The text valorizes sensate, situated knowledge without overestimating the impact of its own subversions of value on the economic base, however, in that Temelcoff also knows Harris "by his expensive tweed coat that cost more than the combined weeks' salaries of five bridge workers" (43). This materialist reminder exemplifies the way that Ondaatje both reveals injustice *and* imagines alternatives: he dextrously moves between the idealist alternate economy he constructs by aestheticizing labour, and the antagonistic social reality that that alternate economy counterposes and implicitly questions.

The scenes of labour offer some aesthetic compensation for the distortion of sensory experience, working, as Fredric Jameson writes of modernist art, "to restore at least a symbolic experience of libidinal gratification to a world drained of it" (63). The bridge scenes with Temelcoff accomplish this compensation by invoking a discourse of skilled play that rebels against the "prevailing reality principle of domination" (Marcuse, *Aesthetic* 62). Since the pleasure of Temelcoff's activity takes place within the context of labour, it appears to illustrate Marcuse's thesis that "a society split into classes can afford to make man into a means of pleasure only in the form of bondage and exploitation" ("Affirmative" 115). Yet, Marcuse also believes that this physical exploitation contains the seeds of its own undoing:

> When the body has completely become an object, a beautiful thing, it can foreshadow a new happiness. In suffering the most extreme reification man triumphs over reification. The artistry of the beautiful body, its effortless agility and relaxation, which can be displayed today only in the circus, vaudeville, and burlesque, herald the joy to which men will attain in being liberated from the ideal. . . . When all links to the affirmative ideal have been dissolved, when in the context of an existence marked by knowledge it becomes possible to have real enjoyment without any rationalization and without the least puritanical guilt feeling, when sensuality, in other words, is entirely released by the soul, then the first glimmer of a new culture emerges. ("Affirmative" 116)

In Ondaatje's representation, Temelcoff does appear to triumph over his own exploitation and to prefigure a new cultural order of realized human potentiality. Moreover, Marcuse's insight that the aesthetic provides a momentary release from instrumentality accounts for much of the power of Ondaatje's descriptions of labour. That these poetically heightened scenes comprise, by their impact, the core of the text's progressive contribution to

the representation of working class lives finds support in that, time and again, reviewers isolate these passages for praise:

> Ondaatje describes manual work as well as any writer I have read, not the psychological effects but its physical sensations: he describes it from the inside, as if he knows it. Work brutalizes, but it is one's connection to the world. (Packer 3)

> Descriptions of the skill and agility of the bridge workers and the laborers who build a tunnel under Lake Ontario, going about their work in the yawning maw of danger, are . . . graphically stunning. (Steinberg 70)

> Finally, one is left remembering the descriptions of work and men at work. . . . And the desperate hardships and terrible exploitation of the workingmen, which led to injuries, deaths, desperation and anarchism. (Kizer 13)

The last review, in particular, suggests that, as strategy, the practice of aestheticizing labour does not idealize it, but honours those who performed it and commits their suffering to memory. As Marcuse argues, this remembrance performs a radical political function: it "spurs the drive for the conquest of suffering and the permanence of joy" (*Aesthetic* 73), a conquest that can occur only through social transformation. If the need for "transformation . . . of oppressive social circumstances" (Reitz 82) becomes lost as the circumstances are aestheticized, however, then the results are reactionary, as Patrick acknowledges when he reflects that to paint the dye-workers would be "false celebration" (130). Instead, through its self-reflexive aesthetics and materialist details, Ondaatje's text never lets the reader forget for long that the characters perform their work as alienated labourers.

Although I have argued, adapting Marcuse, that the novel's celebration of physical skill models a future "rich, all-round expansion of human capacities" (Eagleton 223), Temelcoff's labour takes place within "exploitative social relations": "the division of labour maims and nourishes simultaneously, generating fresh skills and capacities but in a cripplingly one-sided way" (Eagleton 219). To concretize this maiming, the novel features Daniel Stoyanoff, who had returned from North America to Nicholas Temelcoff's Macedonian village, buying "a farm with the compensation he had received for losing an arm during an accident in a meat factory. . . . Nicholas had been stunned by the simplicity of the contract" (44). This exchange of a limb for money starkly denotes the commodification of the human body. A similarly haunting image emphasizes the human dispensability in construction work: Temelcoff's "predecessor had been killed" in an accident, "cut, the upper half of his body found an hour later, still hanging in the halter" (41). As far as Temelcoff is concerned, then, personal liberation occurs only

when, having saved enough money to "open up a bakery," he "slides free of the bridge" (49). Rather than participating in collective struggle, Temelcoff rises to the status of entrepreneur as a "solitary" (34) man of exceptional ability.

Even though Ondaatje's protagonist, Patrick—a literate, Canadian-born working class man of British descent—is a prime candidate to rise within the vertical mosaic, he becomes an anarchist (albeit of dubious ideological commitment), spends several years in jail, and, as is revealed in the partial sequel to *In the Skin of a Lion, The English Patient*, will be killed in World War II, shortly after his release from prison. In contrast, Temelcoff, who emigrated to Canada without a passport or "a word of English" after war erupted in the Balkans, achieves social mobility by studying English and by distinguishing himself as an extraordinary labourer who eventually becomes an entrepreneur. Particularly since the success of Temelcoff's bakery transcends the Macedonian community—"His bread and rolls and cakes and pastries reach the multitudes in the city" (149)—the contrasting careers of Patrick and Temelcoff illustrate the fluidity of the vertical mosaic among European immigrants in the early decades of the twentieth century. Indeed, the text's recurring metaphor of losing skin colour and/or attaining whiteness as liberation from class oppression makes clear that the novel encodes the mobility only of European immigrants. Just as Patrick covers himself in black grease when he becomes the self-appointed spokesperson and avenger for the working class, so whiteness characterizes Nicholas when he appears as a businessman. In his first appearance as a baker, Temelcoff is "meticulously dressed in jacket and tie" but wears "no apron so that the flour dust [continues] to settle on him as he [moves] through the bakery" (139). Later in the novel, Patrick, released from prison after serving time for wilful destruction of property, walks to the "Geranium Bakery," which is coded as a large and prosperous establishment: "He passed the spotless machines, looking for Nicholas. Buns moved forward along rollers till they were flipped over into the small lake of sizzling shortening. Finally he saw him in his suit covered with white dust at the far end of the bakery, choreographing the movement of food" (210). As proprietor, Temelcoff's realm of expertise is no longer movement but the orchestration of production: the term "choreograph," previously used to denote the spatial territorializing of the tycoon Ambrose Small (58) and of Commissioner Harris (111), now applies to Temelcoff. More importantly, the repeated image of Temelcoff's being covered with flour signifies his success as a baker and once again associates

upward mobility with whiteness. By emphasizing the centrality of whiteness to the class mobility of immigrants from continental Europe in the 1930s, Ondaatje's text exposes the racial stratification in existence at the time of the novel's composition.

The narrative's attempts to resolve the social contradictions present at its time of composition deserve particular scrutiny in the wake of the novel's endorsement by the inaugural "Canada Reads" program. As Marxist aesthetic theorists Theodor Adorno, Fredric Jameson, and Herbert Marcuse acknowledge, artworks do not, by themselves, effect social transformation (Adorno 190; Jameson 266; Marcuse, *Aesthetic* 32). Yet, as Marcuse notes, art "can contribute to changing the consciousness and drives of the men and women who could change the world" (*Aesthetic* 32-3). *In the Skin of a Lion* works to transform the consciousness of its readers not only by revising history—which, it insists, can no longer be told from the totalizing point of view of the ruling class—but by revolutionizing representations of labour via the aesthetic. At the same time, however, its patterns of emancipatory imagery naturalize and reinforce a racialized vertical mosaic that compromises its vision of human liberation. Ultimately, the images of social mobility in *In the Skin of a Lion*, depending as they do on the ability to adopt or disrobe oneself of skins, coloured paint, dark grease, or white flour, unfortunately signify that the mosaic's verticality will not be dissolved as easily—or at least it will not happen as "naturally"—for non-white people in Canada as it has for those of European descent.

NOTES

1 Writing in 2000, Smaro Kamboureli updates Porter's analysis—but reconfirms its basic precepts—using a quotation from Michael Ryan: "the prominence of ethnic discourse today . . . is symptomatic of a culture in which 'the contradictions that arise within . . . society are resolved in ways that assure the continuation of a ruling group's hegemony'" (94). Porter treats as banal the privileges assumed by charter groups, including the prerogative to decide "what other groups are to be let in and what they will be permitted to do" (60). Contemporary scholars of multiculturalism, in contrast, perform rigorous analyses of its manifestations in order to reach similar conclusions (see, for example, Bannerji, Mackey, and Day). This may indicate that multiculturalist rhetoric has developed as a more subtle way to achieve the same goal of perpetuating the ruling group's hegemony, while the continued banality of dominance—as exemplified by such adages as "the majority rules" and "the strongest prevails"—remains a fundamental barrier to social and global equality.

2 Notably, Caravaggio, an Italian Canadian who later becomes a professional thief, retains his Italian name when he works as a tarrer. Perhaps not incidentally, he fights regularly

with his foreman. In this context, the foreman's use of Caravaggio's actual surname (28) may signal his anger (as when a parent reprimands a child by using the child's full name), but it also suggests the refusal of the wily, bilingual Caravaggio to conform to an anglophone norm.

3 Interestingly, in *The English Patient,* Caravaggio's ability to assimilate works in reverse. In the Canadian military, he is identified as "Italian" (35), and he serves in Italy as "not quite" a spy at the end of World War II (34). Moreover, Caravaggio, frequently referred to in *The English Patient* by his first name, a linguistically and nationally indeterminate "David," appears as a cultural insider, especially in contrast to Kirpal Singh, nicknamed "Kip" by a commanding British officer and characterized as "the Sikh" for much of the novel. After the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, it is tellingly Caravaggio who agrees with Kip that "they would never have dropped such a bomb on a white nation" (286). Although, as in the first novel, Caravaggio's Italian Canadian identity occasions suffering in prison (in this case, torture by the Germans), within the narrative of *The English Patient*, his whiteness exempts him from the worst atrocities. Caravaggio's career in the second novel thus remains consistent with the racial ideology at work in *In the Skin of a Lion.*

4 Although Ondaatje's novel helps to thematize the missing Canadian discourse of class, its use of racialized imagery to express class relations re-opens the discursive aporia, for the figure of common whiteness underneath counterfeit colour finally (and falsely) erases class disparities. As Schocket contends, "to experience race as a modality of class is often to experience class not at all" (57).

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Barry Dempster

Dancing

Bruised and clustered,
you hurl your body
into the rage of the music
the way pollen flings itself
into a cloud of bees,
sex slamming against the floor.

The joy of being
all engine, spunk racing
through corridors, elbows
and knees bruising the air,
heart leaping in your eardrums
like a crazy kangaroo.

Before the algebra of bones,
each breath is chemical,
oxygen burning down
those houses of sweat,
the flow of you, searing
glow across the smoky night.

Every motion is a thrust,
a screw, speed busting
the laws of decency,
making you feel deathless
and rude, the kind of boy
who slays dragons with his hips.

It's a wonder you don't
disappear, a lift-off
into flaming outer space,
the atoms of your thighs
whirling into some sort of
other life form, music made flesh.

Andrew Lesk

Ambivalence at the Site of Authority:
Desire and Difference in *Funny Boy*

In a discussion of Sri Lankan writers whose dabbling in constructions of national identity "are located in an amorphous and transient cultural space," Prakrti observes that Shyam Selvadurai's *Funny Boy*, in particular,

> stands apart as the work of the future not only because it hits at the very core of the normative heterosexual middle class system immersed in a patriarchy of its own making that we live our quotidian life by, but also because it challenges this normative code to such an extent that it begs a redefinition of the gendered ethno-cultural parameters of the modern post-postcolonial nation state in crisis. (Prakrti)

Prakrti's contention is that Selvadurai's writing on Sri Lanka, like Michael Ondaatje's *Running in the Family* and Romesh Gunasekera's *Reef*, poses profound social challenges to a changing country, intensifying its interrelated disputes concerning ethnic belonging, religious ties, and sanctioned national cultures. That Sri Lanka is "post-postcolonial" proposes that the country has moved from colonialism to post-colonial sovereignty, and now to self-assertion (despite the various violent ruptures and internal disagreements about the state of the nation).

Within this beyond post-colonial situation, Selvadurai delineates the country's "normative code," revealing how the nation's political rift is similar to its social upheavals. Significantly, Prakrti gestures toward the idea that violent masculinist ideas underpinning viable nationalisms are fundamental to understanding the (il)logic of Tamil/Sinhalese Sri Lankan strife. New

nations, especially those either adapting to or throwing off the vestiges of colonialism, often reference conservative ideas about male prerogatives (closely wedded to masculinity) and heterosexuality that might result in a strong and procreative country, not only in racial strength but in the social strata. With *Funny Boy*, Selvardurai "very subtly critiques the value charged, hierarchical masculine-feminine gender equation. . . . This aspect is all the more ground-breaking in that the text subverts the existing patriarchy by highlighting the oppression experienced by males at the hands of patriarchy through the constructed norms of masculinity" (Prakrti). Arjie, Selvadurai's protagonist (and thinly-veiled autobiographical self), is apparently both foil to and member of the (economically) privileged male class and comes to embody the tensions in these post-postcolonial struggles.

But does Arjie, in any comprehensive, sense queer[1] what the Sri Lankan majority might conceptualize as viable nationhood, especially as it, though disturbed, carries on hybridizing its former colonizer's concepts of Western congruity, contiguity and coherence, all of which are underscored by the imperatives of heteronormative masculinity? In assessing the ways in which one might view Arjie's challenge to the status quo, Daniel Coleman states that "[h]is is not a single choice between gay and straight, Tamil and Sinahalese, upward and downward mobility, or colonial subject and post-colonial agent. It is an action that impinges on all these axes of difference at once" (10). Although Coleman is certainly correct in outlining how *Funny Boy*'s various machinations push the very limits (as Prakrti has suggested) of citizenry and belonging, Selvadurai's examination of these various convergences reveals that the Sri Lanka national narrative (concerned with how to constitute, politically and socially, the national body) is exacerbated by facets of society that refuse marginalization.

Arjie is accorded a measure of agency: his self-liberating forms of disobedience (especially in the penultimate chapter) flow from a sense of personal injury. I find, however, that Arjie evinces disinterest regarding affairs beyond the immediate; in his attitude of childlike stasis he holds on to things as he wishes they might be. His engagement with transgressive difference—that is, his gender and sexual "disobedience"—is mostly congruent with an expression of male prerogatives that can deliver a measure of power.

There is a tension, then, between Selvardurai's critique of the masculinist discourse which informs his protagonist's subject position, and Arjie's ability to be at once "inside" the masculinist discourse to which he biologically defaults as male, but also outside it, as (self-) estranged funny boy.

Ultimately, though Arjie appears excluded from the nation's embattled yet governing discourses of heterosexual masculinity, and though he resists efforts to enlist him in taking sides in the national debate, he succumbs to paralysis.

This paralysis, however, is contrary to what Gayatri Gopinath sees as Arjie's active and mobile challenge to "modern epistemologies of visibility, revelation, and sexual subjectivity" (267). Gopinath, in her incisive analysis of *Funny Boy* and diaspora, argues against understanding Arjie's presumed homosexuality through largely imported Western categories of sexuality, though such markers may indeed be present in Sri Lankan society. Instead, Arjie's narrative journeys possess "radically different and distinct significations. It is through a particular deployment of South Asian popular culture that this defamiliarization of conventional markers of homosexuality take place, and that alternative strategies for signifying non-heteronormative desire are subsequently produced" (267).[2] The resultant reconfigurations of sexuality parallel the categories of nation, gender, and class, and the result, Gopinath argues, displaces heteronormativity "from the realm of natural law . . . [that] instead launches its critique of hegemonic constructions of both nation and diaspora from the vantage point of an 'impossible' subject" (275).

From this vantage, Arjie's eventual expulsion from Sri Lanka might be seen as a failure to reconcile an impossible subject with the more welcoming "possible citizen." Gopinath's theoretical perspective is viable, certainly, but it does not adequately reflect Arjie's lived experience. The queerness that Arjie symbolizes may well be mobilized as an intellectual insurgency by which to reconceptualize (sexual) citizenry and national belonging. Arjie does not, however, act upon the radical nature of his experiences. Though he is, as a youth, relatively disempowered, he does behave, up until the time of his expulsion, with an eye to how he can consolidate his prerogatives and maintain at least personal agency.

I contest Coleman's and Prakrti's arguments for an Arjie who demystifies with his queer attitude and empowerment the complex engines of masculine power and its concomitant interests in post-postcolonial Sri Lanka, and I examine how it might be otherwise: that Arjie's contretemps actually mirror but do not devalue the upheavals to which he is witness. Arjie's attempts at queer insurrection unwittingly mimic the repressive urges of (emerging) nation states. These states embrace an emboldening masculinity based on biological and essentialist notions of distinct gendered social roles—and in this simplified equation Arjie, unwittingly perhaps, acquiesces.

That Arjie is eventually forced to leave the country might suggest an inability to understand how the warring factions in the embattled Sri Lankan state are nevertheless agreed in their reading of how queerness, including homosexuality,[3] is inimical to the national project. What is perceived as a "feminine" (read: disempowering, weak) form of citizenship is either repressed or expelled. William Spurlin calls this rendering of "the imperial imprint of homosexuality" a ploy that any nation, in suppressing its own inability to totally vanquish incertitude and equivocation in the political body, will use as a dissimulating weapon:

> The nation-state's fantasy of itself as masculine similarly points to and extends the ambivalence at the site of authority. . . . [T]he nation-state . . . both *projects and masks difference* through strategies of repetition and displacement, asserting mastery of the Other through its discourse. (197, my emphasis)

Masculine mastery is achieved by constantly playing subordinate entities—women, queers, the economically disadvantaged—off one another in order that they will lack the energy to rally and challenge the dominant regime. Although it appears that national statesmanship consolidates power, it actually manoeuvres rhetorical impulses. No *real* substance forms the core of masculinity, Spurlin implies; rather, its dominion, especially as federated authority, becomes constituted by and through what it is able to suppress.

Arjie—both within and outside the dominant system as visibly male and homosexually conflicted—enjoins privilege. But can he in any way serve as a template upon which to redraw the emerging nation-state? Does Selvadurai suggest that the queerness Arjie also embraces could provide an alternate direction for Sri Lanka? As a nascent queer and (initially, at least) a gender misarranger, he appears to undermine the hallmark of his biological maleness: prerogative. At once empowered and disempowered, he is both a boon and a threat to the system that constitutes him as a post-postcolonial citizen,[4] underscoring the national paradox that reveals itself as Spurlin's "ambivalence at the site of authority." Masculinity is ambivalent because it incorporates aspects of that which it externally banishes: femininity. The bonds between the men who may colour the nation-state's constitution with their masculinist fantasies share this contingency and inconclusiveness because such bonds are created through both the courting and discounting of women. Women are necessary, but only insofar as they may acknowledge and support male hegemony.

Arjie's own homosocial impulses,[5] however, are largely shaped by his apparently homosexual disposition, one that might be thought, in Sri Lankan

majority discourse, to resemble a feminized and colonized subject. Therefore, while he may display the *right to agency*, he inadvertently, perhaps, demonstrates the inefficacy of his compromised and paradoxical state. His personal trauma indeed reflects (and reflects upon) the national struggle, but his position as a Sri Lankan citizen of the future is comprehensively untenable. Cindy Patton and Benigno Sánchez-Eppler observe that when "a practitioner of 'homosexual acts,' or a body that carries any of many queering marks moves between officially designated spaces—nation, region, metropole, neighborhood, or even culture, gender, religion, disease—intricate realignments of identity, politics, and desire take place" (3). Nothing in Sri Lankan national discourses allows Arjie to rehearse his "realigning" identity, inasmuch as there is little space for those who might practice sexual acts arising from supposedly transgressive desires. Sri Lanka, as in the novel, is too busy fighting the presumably unrelated battles of establishing national boundaries.

Of this particularly traumatic period in Sri Lanka history, Krisantha Sri Bhaggiyadatta writes that *Funny Boy*'s interrelated, cumulative stories are organized so that they seem "almost to follow a curriculum for sociology: gender, compulsory heterosexuality, racism, the national security state and terrorism" (225).[6] More specifically, the novel shows "people confused and torn, forced to deal with identities so recently constructed that we've never had to examine them before in such searing light" (226). Arjie's sexual identity, which earns him the ascription "funny," is doubly conflicted in that he not only does not have the language to access what his desires might mean, but he does not appear to have a local model of "the homosexual" upon which to draw.[7]

Selvadurai suggests, in his use of Canada, the country that both bookends Arjie's stories and serves as a diasporic reference, that the ability to possess mobile sexualities and gender shadings denotes the luxury of living in a nation where such identities might be freely established and contested. Sri Lanka, despite its cultural Westernization, does not favour the liberating sexual alternates. Arjie, as the novel's queer, witnesses subjugation not only of Tamils to the majority Sinhalese but of various other groups, notably homosexuals, who barely register except as a joke to *Funny Boy*'s adults, and women, who despite advancement in Sri Lankan society, are still largely subordinate to men.[8]

Given that these three dominated groups, as well as the largely, rural economic underclass, are disadvantaged, it may seem natural to want to link

their oppressions. R. Raj Rao, in his recent reading of the book, endeavours to "show that a subaltern identification exists between minorities in the three groups, who constitute the 'other' of the male fanatical self" (117), whereby such a male is the "self as empowered, the other as disempowered" (117-18). Rao's aim is to map "sexuality rather than nationality, race, or gender as the determinants of identity, so that if a writer is gay it does not matter that he comes from the developed or developing world, or is white or black" (118).

Perhaps it is accidental that Rao uses "he" to refer to the genderless antecedent of "a writer," or it may be that Rao is referring to Selvadurai. Yet if either is the case, the female or lesbian writer is still implicitly excluded. Though I do not believe that Selvadurai (or even Rao) means to exclude women, Arjie, in his aspirations to be able to make concrete choices which might benefit him, inadvertently does so. His own map is drawn from that very "male fanatical self," those male predecessors who by passive or active example help him to locate himself, specifically, as a man.

Arguably, the women in Arjie's life might be more influential; indeed, the novel begins with Arjie's fascination with female habiliments and ritual. But as the novel progresses, Arjie shifts from gender play and the romantic fascination with Rhada Aunty's nuptials, to a more abiding (libidinal) interest in men and their domain. Liberation for him is not envisioned through self-exposure as a homosexual or alliance with dominated minority groupings in Sri Lanka. He realizes that securing his world has more to do with a deft manipulation of his male prerogatives than anything else.

As the island state exists in the flux of post-colonial self-determination, it wars constantly between "the integration of tradition, an already existing viable alternative to imperialism, and the liberation of modernity, in which a person can be who he or she is, including homosexual" (Goldie 192). The latter sense of Western modernity and its attendant emancipatory trappings, is, of the three groups Rao identifies, most underdeveloped, and so it remains difficult to imagine how subaltern cross-identifications might work. While parallels may exist, correspondence does not.

Clearly such sympathetic relationships, in re-forming an existing post-colonial body politic, would be welcome—if the expression of homosexuality *as homosexuality* could even exist publicly in 1980s Sri Lanka as a recent identity construction. As Goldie notes, kinship plays an important role in a culture "in which a default assumption of heterosexuality shapes all paradigms possible in that culture. 'Same kind' is inevitably a statement of

ethnicity: there is no possibility of even thinking gender in that apparently wise aphorism" (190). Or sexuality.

Arjie is not without his sympathies. His stories of Radha Aunty's inability to marry a man of another race and of Jegan's association with combative Tamils are strikingly insightful. Selvadurai implicitly draws a parallel between the disempowered—women, the Tamil race/nation, homosexuality—when Arjie, in pondering his feelings for the Sinhalese Shehan, wonders,

> For how could loving Shehan be bad? Yet if my parents or anybody else discovered this love, I would be in terrible trouble. I thought of how unfair this was and I was reminded of things I had seen happen to other people, like Jegan, or even Radha Aunty, who, in their own way, had experienced injustice. How was it that some people got to decide what was correct or not, just or unjust? (267)

But in the next sentence, Arjie reveals the cause: "It had to do with who was in charge; everything had to do with who held power and who didn't" (267). While it may be that Arjie understands that if exposed he risks censure, he knows too that silence and compliance will allow him, an economically privileged male, latitudes unavailable to others. And though Arjie appears to be detached from his observation about power, he goes on to prove that he is not beyond using the machinations of power that male privilege accords him.

Selvadurai is careful not to form alliances where none can exist. In writing about a land where homosexuality rarely registers publicly, Selvadurai cautions that although inequalities there are rampant, it is important first to describe how such inequalities play out in relation of one identity to another. There may be affinities among subordinate classes, yet the author hints that we need to understand how Arjie is pressed by competing ideologies which may all lay claim to him. We might then better understand the marginalization that one group may (inadvertently) impose upon others. Selvadurai uses Arjie to map this territory but does not suggest how disparate groups may come together to reform the nation.

These disparate groups play out against Arjie's "male fanatical self." The novel begins with a smaller territory within the nation, Arjie's grandparents' yard. Arjie, eager to be in charge, is a very young boy playing at being a bride. The boys and girls in Arjie's familial circle are each assigned their own gendered spaces, though Arjie and his female cousin Meena, transgress these boundaries by playing with the opposite sex. Arjie describes his youthful but certain understanding of how the children's world reflects and is influenced by adult notions of governance: "Two things formed the framework of this

system: territoriality and leadership" (3). He says that he "gravitated naturally" (3) to the back garden world of girls, since that is where his earliest memories found the most comfortable belonging.

For Arjie, the girl's territory is attractive not in that it is female but that it affords him the greatest scope and sovereignty: "For me, the primary attraction of the girls' territory was the potential for the free play of fantasy. Because of the force of my imagination, I was selected as leader" (4). He defines the seduction of the games he plays there, particularly his role of "bride-bride" (4), as concomitant with his ability "to leave the constraints of my self and ascend into another, more beautiful self. . . . It was a self magnified" (5). Being among girls is enabling, perhaps, in that he is easily able to take advantage of their social demarcated passivity; and he says he does not like the boys' games of cricket because of the discomforts involved. Yet Arjie's concern with claim to creation is central. In the regimented world of male athletics, he can neither lead nor play; his rejection of sports expresses its lack of creative margins.

One wonders, though, what might have happened if other assertive boys had been at play in the girls' territory. Would Arjie have so easily ascended to the lead role? He knows that his hold on power is conditional upon easy acquiescence. The girls, he senses, know their formative roles as supplicants to aggression, and it is Arjie who so nimbly adopts a coercive male attitude in order to get his way. His displacement from a leading role is enacted by his equally intimidating cousin, Tanuja, who has recently returned from abroad. She is, in the narrative, referred to most often as "Her Fatness," a pitiless salute which Arjie acknowledges belongs to that "cruelly direct way children have" (6). The irony in this tag, though, lies in Tanuja's pending challenge to Arjie's leadership, moving from "Her Fatness" to, perhaps, Her Highness. Her contest with Arjie, Selvadurai suggests, derives from her extended Western education in which she has learned powerful, accusatory terms foreign, literally and figuratively, to young Sri Lankans.

Versed as she apparently is in adult matters, she conceives of Arjie's play at being female as an unstated or not fully formed idea of transgression. Unable to seduce her playmates with dolls, Tanuja reverts to dressing up as male, a ploy which Arjie tacitly acknowledges to be a threat to his play as female. Tanuja subsequently usurps Arjie's role by an appeal to an essentialist logic which leaves him "defenseless" (11). But when that ploy also fails, Tanuja rests a forceful gaze on Arjie, and calls him, by turn, "pansy," "faggot," and "sissy" (11), insults that Arjie neither comprehends nor, in his

retrospective account, explains. And when this tactic also fails to dislodge Arjie, Tanuja brings out her mother, who immediately recognizes Arjie's transgression and hauls him before the other adults, one of whom says to his father, "looks like you have a funny one here" (14).

Selvadurai never reveals that Arjie might understand what it means to be "funny." Such absence is fitting in that Arjie's conception of his homosexuality does not develop until he is older. The separation of gender from sexuality allows Selvadurai to reveal how the adept, persuasive attitudes of male progeny are more than child's play. To achieve leadership, Arjie's "natural" gravitation towards the girls' territory comes to be more a rhetorical guise whereby Arjie can assert hegemony. Thus, he learns at an early age that it is male control, not cross-gender affiliation or alliance, that will allow him the freedom he so desires.

Gopinath argues that Arjie's performance in bride-bride "radically reconfigures hegemonic nationalist and diasporic logic, which depends on the figure of the 'woman' as a stable signifier of 'tradition'" (269). But Arjie is not attempting a reterritorialization of female space. As a boy, and as a future man, Arjie already enjoins the privilege of transcending territory. True, the adults will perceive his play as insubordination, yet this limitation will not lead to the state of exile with which Arjie mistakenly comes to identify. Indeed, Arjie will eventually disavow his earlier gender play, since its promise has run its course.

Arjie's frustration with Tanuja's plans to usurp him inevitably leads to realization: "I saw Her Fatness seizing my place as leader of the girls, claiming for herself the rituals I had so carefully invented and planned" (21). That he has not yet perhaps realized that such prerogatives might be understood (unfairly or otherwise) as male is understandable. Yet even at this age, when he is hauled before his parents, he knows that something is wrong and feels "dread" (13). His persistence, however, in circumventing his mother's decree that he play with the boys, is nevertheless undaunted: apparently Arjie understands that his desire to transgress matches his cunning and his ability to own the symbols which would ensure his place as leader, and that he must be more visibly male. The game of bride-bride shifts from mere role-playing to questions around ownership of the sari; not that he ever wears it again, but that he *has* it: "Without me and my sari she [Tanuja] would not be able to play bride-bride properly" (21).

In trying to insinuate his presence once again among the girls, Arjie assumes the role of groom, and like Tanuja before him, uses his wiles to

disrupt the proceedings. The game quickly falls away when the true battle shifts to possession of the sari. The symbolic weight of the sari increases when its rending results in a "stunned silence" and a subsequent attack on Tanuja (35). Arjie's aspirations to leadership are undone. He rips Tanuja's sleeve, and at this point the adult world intrudes. His grandmother dismisses the sari's destruction—she sees the dress as merely a plaything—and is angered instead by the ripped sleeve. Arjie, then, transfers his anger at Tanuja—Her Fatness—to his grandmother, an undeniable figure of authority, crying out, "I hate you, you old fatty" (37).

Arjie's rebelling at authority leaves him, he thinks, "caught between the boys' and the girls' worlds, not belonging or wanted in either" (39). Yet it is, rather, his temporary disempowerment that he mourns; he *will* belong to the boys' world, whether he likes it or not.[9] John C. Hawley, in his study of the role of sexuality in the novel, says of Arjie's exile that Arjie has been "effectively sidelined, rendered a clownish cipher in his society; categorized as something *less* than a man, he is not one from whom a serious role in the building up of the nations would be expected" (121). Arjie's imaginings, however, come from a sense (and it may be retrospectively endowed, at that) that he is *at that time* disempowered. An emboldening manliness, as Hawley argues, is vaunted in the construction of nationhood, and so Arjie is a somewhat in-between citizen. Yet having learned this lesson, in the rest of the novel Arjie gives no suggestion that he openly engages in female dress-up or in evident behaviours that would again marginalize him. Selvadurai continues to project Arjie in his role as a more careful male.

Arjie continues to transgress in courting the favour of his Rhada Aunty, but not because she is oppressed by racism and is herself marginalized, but because Arjie finds that he "had never imagined that I would actually have a hand in deciding what the bridal party would look like" (51). He goes from "bride-bride" to wedding planner, now brushing aside Tanuja's commandeering of bride-bride: "I had better things to worry about than her silly game." (52) Arjie shifts from mere child's play to the real thing; he wishes no longer to be the gender-confused master and mistress of the game but, rather, leader of the pageant. And despite Arjie's sympathy for Rhada, in that she loves the Sinhalese Anil, whom she cannot have, he worries that this illicit relationship might doom his own plans. Arjie does not care about race—he cares more about ceremony.

Whether Rhada marries a Tamil or a Sinhalese, she will invariably marry a man, and Arjie never doubts the propriety of this. Arjie sadly realizes,

upon Rhada's marriage to the Tamil Rajan, that marriage, so often imbued with romantic love, sometimes involves practical arrangements. His education in adult ceremony arises from a sympathy with Rhada; but such resistance to romance is invariable and normal. However, Rao argues that Arjie turns away from the wedding ceremony because "his identification with Rhada is complete" (120). Rao suggests, in his reading of this relation, that Selvadurai builds an alliance between marginalized (homo) sexuality and (female) gender.

This allegiance furthermore revolves around Rao's curious attributing to Arjie the desire to marry. He writes that, "Ironically, Arjie would later find happiness if this"—that "people marry their own kind"—"were a universal truth" (120), implying that Arjie is like Radha because neither she nor he can (or could) marry whom they truly wished. But this development is not a part of the novel: we never know what Arjie plans to do about marrying. Rao, to consolidate his argument, conflates marginal race (being Tamil) with marginal sexual orientation (being homosexual), but this equation is quite arguable. Rhada does marry her own kind, that is, another Tamil, though this person is not, figuratively perhaps, the right kind of person for her. Arjie cannot marry his own kind, to be sure, but this reality has no play in the novel, especially since Arjie is not at this point self-identifying as homosexual. While certain cross-gender identifications come into play that might imply homosexual predilection, such as Arjie's veneration of *Little Women*, his awareness of his queer nature is a later development. At any rate, Arjie's sadness is that the wedding is not "magical" and that "if two people loved each other everything was possible" (96-97). He appears to embrace Radha's unhappiness, yet hers is clearly an experience from which he is meant to derive edification.

Certainly the marriage of Sinhalese and Tamil is possible—as evinced by Arjie's parents—though the societal proscription against such unions is powerful. Therefore, Arjie comes to understand the social overlay as the force to be reckoned with: in order to make his way in the world, he must relinquish mere fantasy. In the end, his sympathy for Rahda has little to do with women being often disempowered in Sri Lankan society. In the same way that Arjie abandons the girl's territory, he abandons Rhada and the promises of Janaki's love comics because they do not feed his quest for (self) creation.

That Arjie does not understand, yet, what words like "pansy" and "funny" might mean in reference to sexual orientation is not explored until

the penultimate chapter. Arjie's encounters with Daryl Uncle and Jegan are suggestive in that both men appeal to him because they take an unfettered interest in him and come to his defense. Significantly, both men want to expose the government's oppression of the Tamil minority, and Arjie becomes versed in this struggle. He seemingly rejects his father's values, that it is important to cozy up to the Sinhalese in order to prosper, at least financially.[10] Yet he remains indifferent. And although his most important transgressions will extend to the political arena in the chapter concerning his transfer to the Victoria Academy and his budding relationship with Shehan, he will nevertheless end up reflecting on how he might come through the turmoil without losing his much-vaunted ability to choose.

At the end Arjie, seemingly under the auspices of self-liberation, most formidably engages the machinations and distortions of male power. He determines to disorder the world of Black Tie, the school principal, since this man has unjustly caused Shehan much pain. As S.W. Perera notes, Arjie is sent to the Academy to "become a man" (read: heterosexual) but ends up affirming his status as "funny boy" (81). Yet for this statement to be ironic, as Perera says it is, the terms must be incongruent. While certainly "becoming a man" is understood by Arjie's father as "being heterosexual," Arjie nevertheless becomes "funny." But he does not stop being a boy, despite his "tendencies."

Is it Arjie's love of Shehan that parallels injustices suffered by Rhada and Jegan? Arjie wonders, "Was it not possible for people like Shehan and me to be powerful too?" (268). Perera writes that "Arjie engineers matters in such a way that the embattled principal is dependent on him for his own survival —rather like the Empire relying on the colonies for support in the great wars" (83). To that end, Arjie garbles his recitation of British poems, suggesting that they have always been incoherent and have no place in modern Sri Lanka. Arjie does, again, find a way to power that is concrete and not merely symbolic, like a sari so easily torn. But what does he really achieve? Black Tie, as an emblem, is truly outdated, yet he supports a secular educational atmosphere, unlike his opponent, Lokubandara, who wants to turn the Academy into a Buddhist institution that would exclude people like Arjie.

Furthermore, he is not freer than before to demonstrate his affection for Shehan; and indeed, he abandons Shehan, when he both observes that Shehan is Sinhalese and realizes that he (Arjie) must emigrate. Arjie's true sadness is in having to leave behind the house that has burned down; he sees

a beggar woman and wonders if "this would be our plight in Canada" (302). His concerns with class and status, though perhaps understandable when he is under siege, suggest more the maintaining of male transcendence than the transgressing of boundaries concerning gender or sexual orientation, of being a "bride-bride" or a "girlie-boy" (25). He has done little, in the end, to change the political state of things through what are seen to be sexual transgressions. Selvadurai, in having Arjie flee Sri Lanka because he is not wanted there as a Tamil, implies that the self-assertion of queerness contradicts the masculine task of negotiating and contesting the nationhood of Sri Lanka. It is not that homosexuals should not have a say or stake in Sri Lanka's public debates; it is just simply a fact that they, as openly homosexual, cannot.

Minoli Salgado sees this exclusion as Selvadurai's presenting emerging homosexuality through Arjie's sexual desires, which criss-cross clearly demarcated territories. He writes that Selvadurai positions desire as "an unpredictable force-field which threatens to disrupt the established order of an ethnically divided society while simultaneously offering it its only means of redemption" (8). This unwitting promotion of queer desire as healthy insurgency does not result in contesting ethnic identities but in revealing "the emergence of the decentered, 'queer' subjectivity of his central character" (11). In other words, Arjie's failure to use homosexuality as an ethnic category by which to establish a beachhead is subordinate to his interest in the male prerogatives that might give him greater means to transcendence.

As important as gender play has been to Arjie's development, his eventual dismissal of his childhood symbols ironically serves to reaffirm (heteronormative) maleness as the predominant factor in the governing of nations. Sri Lanka's abandonment of Arjie is similar to Arjie's forsaking of the possible queering of gender play, to the detriment of a greater understanding of the interrelated social constructions of gender and sexuality. His aspirations to self-actualization which have dispensed with such awareness cannot trump or in any way subvert the overriding national project of self-harmonization, even in its most violent formations. It is false to assume that Arjie's sexual and gender transgressions either suggest or give rise to an energetic refashioning of the nation state, one that might be more inclusive and welcoming of contravention.

It may be that Arjie serves as a warning as to the limits of what can be accomplished in post-postcolonial Sri Lanka. Certainly, given Ajrie's social and ethnic context, not to mention his age, it is perhaps inevitable that his position at the end reinforces the perpetration of the current political order.

But *Funny Boy* is not an emancipatory project or a fantasy of cultural and political progress. It serves, if anything, as Selvadurai's cautioning that attempts to change greater structures without attendant heightened self-awareness of one's position simply leads to a perpetration of the existing regulatory political and social order—and the loss of home.

NOTES

1 I am using the term queer to suggest both Arjie's (homo)sexual nature and its capacity to trouble heterosexuality's claims to nation building and the social strata.

2 For a brief but penetrating analysis of the international marketing of Westernized forms of queer logic and their mismatch with South Asian sexualities, see Gayatri Gopinath's essay "Funny Boys and Girls."

3 "Queer" and "homosexual" are often used interchangeably but I consider them quite distinct. While the queer draws upon sexual transgression that is homosexuality, its impetus is a politics of contravening sexual difference. Homosexuality, on the other hand, refers to how same-sex desires form the basis for social (and political) identities. Queer, however, outside its theoretical manifestations, often serves as shorthand for homosexuality.

4 Hema Chari says that sexual desire of men in colonies is indicative of "colonialist masculine erotics, which is simultaneously a promise and a threat," one that underscores how "discursive practices of deferred and displaced homoeroticism underwrite colonial rule, and in fact continue to dominate the politics of postcoloniality" (279).

5 I refer to Eve Sedgwick's familiar concept of homosociality. She writes that male homosociality is "the affective or social force, the glue, even when its manifestation is hostility or hatred or something less emotively charged, that shapes an important relationship" (2).

6 Krisantha Sri Bhaggiyadatta sums up the island's recent past as the production and dissemination of racism among children and through the schools, the state-organized pogroms from 1977-83, disappearance, torture and the Prevention of Terrorism Act, the 1982 Jayawardene referendum to thwart elections, and the dispersal of thousands of people across the globe. (224)

7 Selvadurai, in an interview with the *Lambda Book Review*, does note, however, that the Sri Lanka he knew (and the one in which he places Arjie) is not so distant from certain Western ideals and values. He says that the people in the novel "are in a place that has been colonized by Western powers for 400 years. A lot of Western ideas—bourgeois respectability, Victorian morality—have become incorporated into the society, and are very much part of the Sri Lankan society" (Marks, 7). Indeed, there is a Sri Lankan equivalent for homosexual—it is "ponnaya"—but Arjie, strangely, never uses the word. See also Selvadurai's introductory essay in (the collection he edits), *Story-wallah! A Celebration of South Asian Fiction*.

8 Malathi de Alwis argues that

> [w]hile the formulation and content of many of these debates and discourses on the role of women may have differed significantly at various historical moments, and due to different political, economic, or social catalysts, . . . the primary premise of such debates and discourses have not changed; Sri Lankan women, be they Sinhala, Tamil, or Muslim, continue to be constructed as the reproducers, nurturers, and disseminators of "tradition," "culture," "community," and "nation." (675-76)

9 I do not wish to imply that Arjie, if considered queer, enjoys the same sense of subjectivity that other boys his age do. Yet certainly Arjie censures himself or is prevented and dissuaded from actively displaying a different subjectivity.

10 Arjie's father, in one of the novel's more telling moments, displays an awareness of homosexual goings-on in Sri Lankan society, but implies that these are good *if* they uphold commercial aims. Of men renting his hotel rooms to have sexual congress with Sri Lankan youths, he says, to Jegan: "It's not just our luscious beaches that keep the tourist industry going, you know. We have other natural resources as well" (166-67).

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Eric Miller

November rain and song

Bluster and barrenness of November. Yet the robins are
singing,
voice over voice, voice into voice coalescing and diverging
in a light cut with rain, rain cut with light, a hard sun's
light,
light as solid as a thrown stone
or like the fractured columns of the rain.

And the dim dire water as it plunges hits the birds' song,
driving
those sounds like struck insects aside, yet letting them
resume their course
as a drop slams a stiff leaf and the leaf bounces
brightened coldly and coldly resilient,
deflected though returning flexibly to its first inclination.
The flocks sing, and the listener's cold hands
feel through the sculptural power of the warm song
the width and warmth of a single robin's breast
clasped between them—the muscular, hot breast from
which
musical steam and streaming music issue, despite
interfering weather.

And how was it, anyway, that blood could warm itself
in the first brave, separate secession and instance,
circulating darkly, brightly to warm the breath and warmly
impart the music
from so many lonely, sociable stations
scattered by austere estrangements of animate fate?

The pillars of water are as cold as the universe
and the sun is cold for all its catapulted rays.

But in chill branches and in sky that chokes on its own cold
blood,
self-warmed life spills note after note

onto an earth
that largely denies life's heat and praise
and embraces it always with the imminence of a negation.

Susan Fisher

History, Memory, Home
An Exchange with M.G. Vassanji

M.G. Vassanji was in Vancouver in the summer of 2004 to address the International Association of University Professors of English. After his public reading at the conference, he came to the offices of *Canadian Literature* to talk with Susan Fisher about his recent fiction and its connections to Africa, North America, and South Asia.

SUSAN FISHER (SF): I want to begin by talking about your 1999 novel *Amriika*, which certainly seemed like a departure from your other published work. Even though your central character Ramji is from Dar es Salaam, the focus of the book is not East Africa but the United States during the Vietnam War. Why were you drawn to this particular social landscape?

M.G. VASSANJI (MGV): That period—the early seventies, which I spent in the US—was extremely important in my life. I felt that I grew up again, or attained a second maturity. I discovered freedom and choice, and that your views on an issue can matter. For me, that period was a huge awakening. I remember in 1972 in New Haven sitting up all night to watch the Democratic National Convention—democracy and choice in action. People chose with a passion that year. I came from a society where this just didn't happen. Secondly, *Amriika* was a book that continued the voyage of people emigrating from India to the west. *The Gunny Sack* began with the story of a man who went to East Africa in the early part of the twentieth century; *Amriika* looks at a young man who goes to the United States, which represents the ultimate West—

metaphorically if nothing else. Going west began by going to Africa, then going to America and to Los Angeles as the farthest west that you could go, next to stepping off into the ocean and going back to India.

SF: I love the way you start *Amriika* with an epigraph from Whitman, who is looking west across the Pacific to what he sees as eastern origins.[1]

MGV: Yes . . . a lot of people see *Amriika* as a departure but I didn't. I always wanted to explore the political aspects of emigration and exile, the contradictions and dangers of activism, because this is a question for many of us who come from those parts of the world that are now riven by strife. At what point does activism turn rotten? For me even now it's a question that is important.

SF: In *Amriika*, you seem to be creating parallels between the Weatherman-style violence that the protagonist gets involved with in the early 1970s and the Islamic fundamentalist violence that Ramji encounters in the 1990s.

MGV: Some parallels—you could say both happen in the US and involve American policies in the world. But if you were an American, unless you actually committed murder, there was a chance to rejoin society, and all was forgiven. But if you are from the outside, you're always an outsider because part of you belongs there; part of your loyalties, part of your concerns are about history in other parts of the world. I was also exploring the fact that when you lose community, when you lose the faith that held you so close to it, and you lose home, then what replaces all that? Political ideology, in the case of the character Ramji. But where does that take him? Basically to a no man's land.

SF: I was very touched by how Ramji at first is so secure in his religious faith. He is certain that this is the right way to live, and yet it falls away quite quickly once he is exposed to new ideas and new opportunities.

MGV: Yes, this was what all the excitement of the sixties and seventies was, to me at least. You come with the certainty that you know the secret of the universe, and that you are the chosen people, no matter how many of you there are. And then you find that there are many other sects and groups with that same certainty. Or they are offering you other ways of looking at things. There's the thrill of liberation and the agony of letting go. It's not easy to let go of a faith, which is not just a religious faith, but also involves your ethnic identity and the people you have grown up with, whom you saw every day, in school and in prayer houses and so on. It took a very, very long time to detach myself from

that. I would detach myself and then come back a little bit, move further away, and then come back—because you are drawn into it even by a song, by a hymn. I have a religious sensibility, but I don't believe in God. The sensibility doesn't go away. I understand the need for a faith and its comfort.

SF: When you talk about the Ismailis, you call them Shamsis. Is that simply an alternate word for Ismaili?

MGV: I made the Shamsis up, because part of my growing up in the US involved studying and reflecting upon the history of the Khoja Ismailis and the history of India, and the cultures and philosophies of India, and how they pertained to me. I realized that my tradition was very local—it was made up of very local Indian traditions and stories that come from a particular region.

SF: Gujarat?

MGV: Yes, a particular part of Gujarat—Cutch and Kathiawad in the northwest of Gujarat. So I started with what I had: Gujarati hymns, what we call ginans; I began to study them. They were our strongest emotional and psychological tie to India; they had that power because they are poetry. I also studied Sanskrit; I was interested in this ancient—to me, mythic—language. I wanted to see where I fitted in. And gradually I realized that in India there are many communities and sects. So, instead of the Khoja Ismaili community, I decided to use a slightly more generic one in my books, at least in terms of its history. I'm a fiction writer, not a historian. When I'm doing the research, I'm a historian, but when I'm writing I'm free to change details to suit my purpose. The real history of any community can be very complex, veiled in uncertainty, and filled with contradictions. A novel has no space for all of that. I called my community the Shamsis because it was a fictional community.

SF: One point you make, even in describing the very devout people in your novels, is that there is a lot of Hinduism mixed in with their faith.

MGV: That is their faith. This is because the sect is syncretistic, fusing Hindu (or traditional Indian) beliefs and customs with Muslim beliefs, and this is not so unknown in India. When I went to India recently, I visited [Hindu] temples where there were portraits of the Prophet Muhammad. To the people who worshipped there, the Prophet shared a common mythical lineage with Rama and Krishna. The people were a bit scared because the nationalists were trying to weed them out, purify them.

SF: It seems to me this idea of syncretism is a very powerful theme in what you write, almost in resistance to the exclusionary aspects of nationhood.

MGV: Nationhood, and also academic departments. South Asian departments can be very orthodox—this is Hinduism, this is Islam; this is India, this is Pakistan—when in fact the reality has been very complex, dynamic, and fluid, with wonderful contradictions. In Pakistan there are still writers who write about the gods and goddesses. I'm Indian by origin, but I've all these mixtures of faiths that have gone into my upbringing.

SF: The central character in *Amriika*, Ramji, has a friend named Sona, who is very interested in the history of his faith and in medieval Indian literature.

MGV: Yes, he represents my interests. I've used him in three books. He does similar things in *The Gunny Sack*, and then I have him writing letters to his teacher Mr. Fernandes in *The Book of Secrets*.

SF: So, it seems that Ramji and Sona represent a kind of composite auto-biographical figure?

MGV: Yes, though in the *The Gunny Sack* I had two brothers who did that. One was Sona and the other was the narrator Kala. They represented both my sides: the Indian and the African. One was called dark or Kala, the other was called Sona, which means gold. But Sona then goes crazy and loses balance in his own way, and I suppose he represents the frustration that I sometimes feel when I see history being rewritten before my eyes as it were. Ideas that aren't comforting and are in the syncretistic tradition are erased in the interests of purification even by my own people. I had Sona vent some of my feelings about that.

SF: Is Sona the one who writes those letters in *Amriika*?

MGV: Yes.

SF: You're not absolutely explicit about this in *Amriika*. It's just a fear on Ramji's part. But you felt this same frustration?

MGV: Yes. The hate I focused on in the novel was very extreme. I took the manuscript of *Amriika* to some people and asked them, "Is this okay or not?" This was after the Rushdie affair, and I thought I sensed a nervousness in the publishers to use the word Islam on the book jacket. In the book I attempted to explore the diversity within Islam. The book is about being an Indian first and then a Muslim, and about being partly Hindu and partly Muslim—if one were to use these labels. My

own community were never called Muslims historically; when I was a child, a "Muslim" meant an orthodox Sunni. We were called Khojas.

SF: After 9/11 did you feel that there had been something uncannily prophetic about your own book?

MGV: I met people in India who thought definitely it was. The irony is that in Canada that side of the book was never even mentioned; all that the reviewers saw was an immigrant, and why was he griping when he was doing so well? The idea of dissent somehow being connected to terrorism or fundamentalism—the Indian reviewers saw that immediately. But here, it was either the sixties or the immigrant thing.

SF: It somehow suggests that an immigrant writer should deal only with themes of exile or diaspora and not with other big social themes, like what the 1960s meant to North American culture, or the instability of a world where terrorism seems a rational option to some people. But these are big themes. Why not tackle them?

MGV: Yes, it's so easy simply to pick on the immigrant theme and make a comment on it, or to pick on the sixties and say it's been done, instead of actually dealing with the whole book. It's lazy or opportunistic reviewing.

SF: Of course, the 1960s have been written about by many authors, but I think *Amriika* is unique in that it shows how someone from another culture was affected.

MGV: Exactly, yes. How someone who is from outside copes with the sixties and what it means to him. The Third World is still there, so the sixties doesn't go away for us—the dissent, the whole thing about Vietnam, it is still present.

SF: Especially with the disturbing parallels between American involvement in Vietnam and American involvement in other parts of the world now?

MGV: It never went away. But the sixties radicals seem to have all become either right-wing or professors.

SF: It seems to me that *Amriika* and *The In-Between World of Vikram Lall* share a structure. You might call it a confessional memoir; another term that comes to mind is the recuperative elegy. But in both novels there's someone who is talking to us about his past. How do you see this parallel between the two novels?

MGV: When I write about the past, the present always matters—who's telling the story, from what perspective, how much can you really know about the past, the ambiguity and contradictions and the subjectivity

of history and memory. The idea of someone telling you a story about the past and being conscious of that, that he's remembering and gathering and giving shape—it's not someone standing outside it, an omniscient narrator—that is very important for me.

SF: It seems that in both books there is an element of confession. Both people feel that they have done wrong in their past, and that one way of expiating this wrong is to tell their story.

MGV: Yes, although in *Amriika* I didn't see Ramji as doing too great a wrong; he simply had no choice at the end. He followed his conscience, was not an extremist, hated no one—but he met people who were all of these. And he was caught. He found himself harbouring a bomber, a killer. The alternative for him was to follow the middle-class way; but he was a man of the sixties with Africa in his heart.

SF: Just to go back to this question of guilt—you are saying in a way that Ramji has no choice. At times I felt that Vikram Lall had no choice about the things that he does. They are wrong. He participates in bribery, corruption, all sorts of things, but. . .

MGV: He had no choice in a different way. He does what is expected of him, or what most men would have done—go along with the corruption. For Ramji, part of his problem is that he doesn't belong anywhere. He doesn't have moral or ethical certainty. Vikram Lall at least knows that something is wrong. For Ramji, the question of right and wrong is not simple. After all, yesterday's terrorists are today's heroes, they even win Nobel Prizes.

SF: Exactly. Not only at the personal level are they confused about, say, their faith or what a moral act ought to be, but also they live in a world in which monsters become heroes.

MGV: And you feel you have to take a stand or support something, except when it comes to murder, but by then it's too late. So where do you stop?

SF: I'd like to talk about the character Njoroge in *Vikram Lall* who is a Kikuyu and he, in a way, seems to support the Mau Mau. For him, the Mau Mau are not the terrible murderers of the Bruce family; they are brave freedom fighters.

MGV: But I don't think he supports the murders as much as understands them. He knows where they come from and he will explain one murder with another murder. So Vikram Lall in that sense has a greater moral certainty. He can say these were my friends and they were killed and

that's all he knows. But Njoroge—he thinks more like Ramji. It was war, the Bruce family was killed; but look at the thousands of Africans who died, including children in the same circumstances, butchered or hacked to death. It's Vikram, the unethical or corrupt man, who actually feels the pain of murder.

SF: Some critics have commented that there is an absence of black Africans in your fiction, but black Africans are very prominent and significant characters in *The In-Between World of Vikram Lall*. Did you deliberately foreground the black characters in that novel?

MGV: No. *The Gunny Sack* also has important African characters. But you know, the whole thing between black and white is quite superficial because Africa is not just black; it's many different peoples. And Ngugi's [Ngugi wa Thiongo] novels deal with black Africans, many of them Kikuyu. You could say there is an absence of non-Kikuyu people in his novels. But that's not fair. As a writer you work with your own understanding and your own world, however you define it. Think of Hardy or Joyce. How local they were. Think of Robertson Davies . . .

SF: Sometimes you identify yourself as an African writer. Your books are actually catalogued in the African section of the library here. Is there some useful significance in that label? Are there African qualities in your work that distinguish it from, say, the work of a Caribbean writer who might also share Indian ancestry?

MGV: I come from there, I have vivid memories of there, I have a visceral response to the sounds of Africa; I speak the language of there. I am drawn to write about it because I know the place. I care about what happens there. I have Swahili rhythms in my language. I feel instinctively that the way I speak my Indian language is the not the same way it is spoken in Gujarat. Whether there's an Africanness to my work, or Canadianness or Indianness, and what percentage, or whether it's Hindu or Muslim, or Shiah or Sunni, or Tanzanian or Kenyan, I leave for academic census-takers to determine.

SF: You speak Cutchi?

MGV: Cutchi and Gujarati. I also speak Swahili and English, and some Hindi.

SF: Was there ever any question that you might write in one of these other languages?

MGV: No. I was not trained formally in those languages; I spoke Swahili as a child but studied it at a formal level rather late. Now, of course, the people who go through the school system in Tanzania know it much

better, the literary Swahili. Recently I have translated a story of mine into Swahili. This gave me a lot of pleasure, although it took a lot of time. I don't know how good the translation is, but I did feel that I could capture the voice, and for me the first thing in a translation is that the voice should be there.

SF: I noticed how easily your characters move from Swahili into one of the Indian languages and then into English. I assume you work very hard to find ways to introduce these other languages without ever having to translate, so that your readers feel that they understand it?

MGV: I use the words and phrases in a way that I can understand myself, so the language feels natural, but I'm not translating. There's a technique to it—saying something another way, using repetition, or giving half the sense in one language and half the sense in another language; but basically maintaining the rhythm and continuity is essential.

SF: I didn't discover until I got to the end of *No New Land* that there was a glossary. I think *Book of Secrets* has a glossary too. Was having a glossary your idea or the editor's?

MGV: It was my idea because I'm interested in languages and I like to know the origins of words. There's an overlap between Swahili and some Indian words, because they have a common origin in Arabic. Take, for example, *safari*, the Swahili word. In Gujarati it would be *safar*, and in Arabic I think it is similar. And *safari* is now also an English word. It is all so fascinating. Language travels as people do.

SF: The Punjabi Canadian-American writer Shauna Singh Baldwin has refused to have any glossaries in her books.

MGV: Initially, you were *compelled* to have a glossary and to italicize, and then Rushdie came along and he didn't do it. So everybody said, "We don't have to do it!" But I enjoy doing it sometimes, and I feel the need because I like to explore words and their relationships to peoples and places, and their histories. I think that at this stage, in the literary world we are living in, it is a matter of choice whether to use italics or not, whether to have a glossary at the end or not. It's not really an argument any more, we all are much more secure. There are no metropolitan censors any more.

SF: How do you think your studies in Sanskrit and Indian literature have affected your writing in English? Do you think that it has entered stylistically and thematically into what you do?

MGV: I'm not conscious of that. The study of Sanskrit and medieval Gujarati gave me a sense of the flexibility and fluidity of language over regions and over time. It helped me to place myself in the historical Indian culture. Obviously there are certain ways of saying things which would be Indian. Often I forget whether it's Indian or Swahili idiom I am using. Sometimes it's both at the same time. So, instead of saying "Do you think that. . ." we would say, "So you think. . ." in Swahili and in Cutchi.

SF: You have said elsewhere, in your piece in the book *Passages,* that you don't see yourself as "afflicted by nostalgia," but it seems to me that there are strong nostalgic elements in *The In-Between World of Vikram Lall.*

MGV: I think nostalgia is a very strong permanent sense of loss and longing devoid of any reality about time past. I don't have that. But every time summer comes along, for example, I recall the times when I was a teenager in Dar es Salaam—the Beatles songs and the Bee Gees and the excitement and nervousness about the future. But that doesn't mean I want to go back there and not be what I am now. I don't want to return and live in a two-room flat with eight other people, though those times had extremely happy moments, made me into what I am. You can indulge in nostalgia if you want to, or you can make a character feel it or simply see it. Or you can bring alive the past to show how historical time and historical events affect personal lives. It may be that in the West one is used to reading about unhappy childhoods—the influence of Freud perhaps—and we read all the time about gruesome crimes against children. But childhood has very happy moments even in the most constrained circumstances. My childhood had some very terrifying moments, in terms of insecurity in my home; my mother was a single mother. But I would not trade that childhood with the stable but boring middle-class experiences that I often see here.

SF: The evocation of Vikram Lall's childhood friendship with the two Bruce children in some ways is a very harmonious, appealing picture of a childhood Eden even though there is this very dark shadow of violence.

MGV: There is the conflict between Mahesh Uncle and the other uncles. There is the unhappiness of the Partition—the shadow of Partition on the family. So the unhappiness is there, but it's not all-consuming,

especially for a child. Even now, if you go to India or you go to Africa, at eight o' clock in the morning you see children happily, innocently traipsing off to school; they play games; marriages take place with full ceremonial processions; young men tease old codgers in the market . . . it's not all hunger and AIDS.

SF: When Vikram is a young man, it is just after independence, and there is a lot in the book about the optimism in Kenya and about what a great country it could be, and that this could be Africa's century. It seems so poignant because that's not what happened.

MGV: Yes, I feel strongly about that—the dream of Africa, to build a United States of Africa, an East African Federation. And it all disappeared in a really miserable fashion, was stolen away.

SF: Do you have any sense of why those dreams didn't materialize?

MGV: Well, I think the countries, especially Tanzania, were not prepared. The university had just been started after independence, you didn't have a trained civil service. The sense of citizenship, of the public good, had not developed. The British left the country in a bankrupt state. And then there were the historical forces—tribal rivalries, which came into play in Kenya, and the Cold War, when the smaller countries were manipulated, bribed, blackmailed. I think that with internal instabilities, and unpreparedness, and external pressures, the countries simply had no hope.

SF: In *The In-Between World of Vikram Lall*, there are quite a few interracial relationships. The central one between Njoroge and Deepa ends very badly. You sense from the outset that it is an impossible relationship. But there are other relationships that do endure. I'm thinking of the odd relationship between Janice and Mungai. Is there an allegorical dimension to their relationship?

MGV: I don't know. I just imagined this out-of-the-way place where a person might forget the world. It is a sanctuary where I thought Vikram Lall might actually like to be, where he could hide away. It is a kind of Eden, although it's a very uncomfortable place, physically. But it's also in a sense Africa, the forest, and the animals, and the night, so I suppose I was trying to capture that. There was another relationship in the book between an Indian and a Masai woman. There were many more of those relationships than we were told about, especially between the Punjabi railroad workers and women of the Masai and the Nandi tribes.

SF: It seems at some point there really was a potential for an integrated, multicultural society.

MGV: In the early part of the century, yes, even on the coast of East Africa. There were lots of intermarriages or second wives because a Muslim society allowed that. But after the thirties and forties, social taboos started coming into place, and then we saw the new generation as "chotaras" or half-castes. They were looked down upon. They were the poorest among the Asians.

SF: At the end of *Vikram Lall* we learn that his father, who's now a widower, is living with an African woman who provides him with comfort and company at the end of his life. I saw that as hopeful. Is that how you meant it?

MGV: Yes, because I think at this stage in Kenya those taboos don't really exist. If they exist, they do so only in the memories of some people. There's resentment against the Asians by some Africans, especially the educated ones, because colonial memories have not died completely. But among the Asians that I saw, I didn't see that kind of racism; there was pride in being African, and even having Masai antecedents.

SF: Critics of Canadian writing are perhaps apt to put all the writers of South Asian extraction together, so you and Neil Bissoondath and Rohinton Mistry and Michael Ondaatje and so forth get viewed as a group. But is this just a misconception on the part of people who see that you all look Indian and assume that therefore you share certain things? Do you feel that you are part of a coherent group based on South Asian ancestry?

MGV: Well, I don't know. There is an awareness of each other because you are lumped together. Here the racial configurations are very different from where I came from. Blackness means something special. Because of that, a person who is black but who has never been to Africa in three hundred years is suddenly more African than I am. But I suppose if you are going to make those divisions, then South Asians would have a certain kind of ancestral affinity with each other. I feel closer to people in India than to South Asians from the Caribbean. When I go to India, I can speak the language. We were more in contact—East Africa and India—than the Caribbean and India were.

SF: The contacts between East Africa and India go back a long way, don't they?

MGV: Yes, plus they've also been constant. I had an uncle who was born in Africa. He might even have been part African, his features seemed to indicate that. But he worked in the customs, and because this was a government job, he received paid "home leave" every four years, and he would go to India. Because that was "home"!

SF: You yourself have been to India?

MGV: I've been there many times now. When I first visited in 1993, I really had the shock of my life because I thought I was going to a very alien place, and it turned out to be not as alien as I had expected. It seemed familiar! People treated me like I was one of them; I would walk down the streets and understand the goings-on. No one asked me where I came from. At Delhi railway stations the touts would assume that I must be from Bombay because I didn't speak like them! And I could speak to them with a familiarity that I found surprising. There was an ancestral memory and experience which I could now partake of. This brought a whole new dimension to my existence. That first trip was a mixture of shock at this discovery, and at the same time I was really touched by how familiarly I was treated, and then shocked again by the violence then in progress in several cities. I came in very close proximity to communal riots—people being butchered and women raped. A kind of violence and hatred that was out of my experience altogether. That visit was moving in every way—pleasure, at the same time shock at the violence, shock at my own response to it. That violence seemed to affect me personally.

SF: At one point I think you were planning to write a travel book about India.

MGV: I'm planning, but every time a novel takes me off in another direction. I have notes for it. I have done more travelling and research, but somehow a new novel comes along and I cannot get my head out of it.

SF: You are the only Canadian author to have won two Giller prizes, but perhaps people still regard you as exotic. Do you have any sense of how you are perceived by the wider reading audience in Canada?

MGV: I've been to readings recently in small towns in Ontario and treated extremely well in the sense of enthusiastic audiences—full houses—and people buying books. I cannot write about Ontario in a way that a person with roots in Ontario would identify with completely. But at the same time, to compensate for that, I have an audience in India and an international audience that has an interest in India and Africa. And

in Canada I've found that people are quite happy with the fact that I am a Canadian writing about different places. Canada has changed dramatically in the last fifteen or twenty years. It was unthinkable to write a book like *Vikram Lall* in 1984 and have it accepted. I don't feel an alien. It's not just me; people have changed. Canadians recognize that this is a country with people who come from different places, and they are happy with that. That's how I see it. I don't know if I'm growing old or perhaps, because I won two Giller prizes, I've become complacent. In the eighties, I was very militant, in a literary sense. I started an alternative literary magazine and I took shots at the mainstream. I don't think I've turned complacent. I do feel that Canadians are very different from what they were twenty years ago. Wherever you go, they seem to be happy with the diversity of the nation. That's what defines Canada for me.

SF: You have quite a wide readership in India?

MGV: I've given readings at universities there. Also I get reviewed there and I get published there by a major publisher. I've been interviewed—had some bad and some good interviews in India—so I think I'm recognized there as a writer of Indian origin.

SF: So you are not dependent solely on a Canadian readership?

MGV: No, but the Canadian readership is very important. It's the biggest, it's the most supportive, and it gives me the strength with which I can actually go overseas. So I'm really. . . well, grateful is an easy word to say, but I feel fortunate. I feel fortunate that I have the support in this country that actually allows me to go outside of Canada and therefore also represent it without denying my history or heritage.

NOTES

1 The epigraph of *Amriika* is taken from Walt Whitman's "Facing West from California's Shores":

> Facing west from California's shores,
> . . . .
> I, a child, very old, over waves, towards the house of
> maternity, the land of migrations, look afar,
> Look off the shores of my Western sea, the circle almost circled;
> . . . .
> Now I face home again, very pleas'd and joyous,
> (But where is what I started for so long ago?
> And why is it yet unfound?)

Sonja Greckol

The Mother Line

She'd looked out on woodland,
unclaimed,
she'd believed
though stippled strangers moved shoulder
to shoulder among river willows

where claims smoulder still.

Dark shapes moved through my grandmother.

I remember a flat woman
spined with sorrow

whose hands that once ploughed the north
ground and winter-fingered the thrum
ragged against blizzards,

hovered at her new teeth, much later.

From cloudy eyes furrowed round, her tears

that had flowed from the prairie *burdei*
back through Halifax, through Antwerp and back
to Sipintzi;

had runnelled her breast hollow for
orchards, wattled gardens in villages,
however grim,

wound her meander, red and yellow
and green and embroidered

our mother line in her grief,
congealed in these carved frames,

the unwant perseveres.

Manina Jones

Collaborative Auto/biography
and Aboriginal "Enfranchisement" in *Occupied Canada*

In a prose poem included in Métis writer Marilyn Dumont's 1996 volume *A Really Good Brown Girl*, the speaker, faced with a job application requiring an answer to the question "Are you a Canadian citizen?", reflects: "I sometimes think to answer, *yes, by coercion, yes, but no* . . . there's more, but no space provided To write my historical interpretation here, that *yes and but no*, really only means *yes* because there are no lines for the stories between *yes and no*." The title of Dumont's poem, "It Crosses My Mind," suggests the degree to which the speaker's very thought process is marked by her location at the nexus of competing discourses of citizenship. Her poetic response to the limited bureaucratic protocols of the application form implies that the supposedly "free" choice between checking the "yes" and "no" boxes is already prescribed both by the economic exigencies that lead her to apply for the job, and by the compulsory discourse of democracy, each of which demands that she be "qualified" for a position.

The collaborative auto/biography *Occupied Canada: a young white man discovers his unsuspected past*, written by Native activist Robert Calihoo and his friend white journalist Robert Hunter,[1] and published in 1991, was that year's controversial choice for the Governor General's Award for Non-Fiction.[2] *Occupied Canada* contributes to what Daiva Stasiulis describes as "the jostling for position and influence of diverse and competing paradigms or imaginaries of citizenship" that characterizes contemporary Canada (367). The particularly contentious state of affairs for Aboriginal communities is reflected in Dumont's poem, which asks, "Are we distinct 'survivors of

white noise,' or merely hostages in the enemy camp"? The question is more than rhetorical: the 1996 *Final Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples* recommends that Native Canadians should be recognized as having a "unique form of dual citizenship, as citizens of an Aboriginal nation and citizens of Canada" (Recommendations 2.3.8; cited in Henderson 421). The narrative of *Occupied Canada* is positioned within this conflicted space of possibility, where questions of coercion, democratic participation, and cultural belonging coincide.

In their adaptation of the conventions of autobiography and historiography, and their evocation of the traditions of collaborative ethnography, Calihoo and Hunter's work narrates "the stories between *yes and no*," to whose lack in narratives of Canadian citizenship Dumont attests. In so doing, their account occupies an ambivalent collaborative space, in the obvious sense that it is an auto/biography written by two individuals, but also because it both cooperates with and counters the oppressive—yet potentially empowering—"enemy," the dominant discourse of Canadian liberal democracy. This doubleness is a form of literary hostage-negotiation, in which Native identity itself—personal, cultural, and political survival in the face of the overwhelming interference of "white noise"—is at stake. In *Occupied Canada*, collaborative authorship raises doubts about autobiography's generic fiction of a "complete and responsible" self-articulating subject (Lejeune 192) and its mirror image, modern liberal democracy's legal fiction of the enfranchised citizen. Yet this narrative also risks a collaboration with these fictions in order to mobilize their literary and political power. In this regard, *Occupied Canada* is an "autoethnographic expression" as Mary Louise Pratt uses the term: an account that, rather than offering itself as an "authentic" self-representation, involves a "partial collaboration with and appropriation of" the dominant culture's idioms (7).

In her discussion of "as-told-to" life stories of Native American people written in collaboration with white co-authors, Susan Forsyth remarks in passing that historically, "the course of Native American lives has . . . in a metaphorical sense, been written for them: US 'Indian Policy' dictated where and how (and often for how long) they should live. Writing other lives," she concludes, "is both a literary *and an administrative* process" (145 emphasis mine). Cheryl Suzack has recently emphasized the importance of understanding "how legal texts inform and complicate our reading of the life stories of Aboriginal women, in order to claim legal texts as an overlooked discursive arena within which to recover the historical and cultural

formation of Aboriginal women's social subjectivity and agency in the Canadian nation state" (117). While Forsyth focuses her discussion on the literary elements of collaborative auto/biography, and Suzack reads legal texts as "an important material background against which to read Maria Campbell's *Halfbreed*" (117), I would argue that Calihoo and Hunter's account makes "the imbrication of identity politics with political and legislative discourse" (Suzack 127) an unavoidable element of the auto/biographical narrative: Calihoo's very identity is presented as the product of his interactions with Canadian government policy, and his legal, cultural, and bureaucratic interventions are the unavoidable motor force of his literary life story. So, while Calihoo is a fully literate, English-speaking subject, his is in a perverse and partial sense a "dictated" autobiography. This paradox is, perhaps, one reason why *Occupied Canada* is narrated in the third-person voice, a "stylistic awkwardness" (Mumford, "Wrighting History" 27) several of the book's reviewers found problematic (see Seaton, Maracle), but which I would suggest registers the degree to which Calihoo's subjectivity is legislated by outside authorities.[3]

Mohawk commentator Brian Maracle writes that, "If *Occupied Canada* were a human being, he/she would be a manic-depressive genius under psychiatric care for a multiple personality disorder. The book has been put together by two people—but that's just part of the problem behind the book's schizophrenic nature" (J1). Maracle's incisive comments acknowledge the degree to which *Occupied Canada*—not to mention the authorial team, or Calihoo's own status as both an autobiographical subject and Canadian Native citizen—is both collaborative and compromised. Calihoo's uneasy position as a person of mixed European and Native heritage is articulated in terms quite similar to Maracle's when he asks himself at one point in *Occupied Canada* whether his ability to "pass" as white means he is schizophrenic (67). The question for readers, perhaps, is whether to consider this condition as it manifests itself, both in Calihoo's character and in the formal entity of his auto/biography, as psychological and pathological, or to insist on reading the historical, social, and legal contexts that produce this "schizophrenia" in relation to a narrative of "normalized" Canadian citizenship.

The third person voice thus signals the book's persistent difficulty in presenting a singular, coherent, "authentic" authoring subjectivity. Indeed, it is hard to know by what name to call the autobiographical subject of *Occupied Canada*, so qualified is his identity by its geopolitical locations, cultural contexts and legislative fiats. While *Occupied Canada*, the volume's cover tells

us, is co-authored by its subject, Robert Calihoo, readers initially meet the child known as Robert *Royer*, who is subsequently represented in a succession of different ways:

> Among the prisons, the streets, the boys' school, the foster home, the reserve, and his original life with [his grandmother] Mama, Robert Royer had picked up several identities: Bob Calihoo, Robert Royer (*en français*), his nickname Rob Roy, a joke about his "Scottish" blood, then Rob Royer—or just Royer—and finally plain Bob Royer.
>
> Each name suggested a style of self presentation (205).

As Betty Joseph puts it of another work, "The narrative continuity of the story is found . . . not in the continuity of an evolving consciousness" as in traditional autobiography, "but in the recording of positions that emerge through . . . struggle" (56-7). Phillippe Lejeune suggests that in autobiography, what the public consumes is "the full-fledged subject which we want to believe is true" (194), here presumably the authentic voice of a non-literate cultural "other" (196). In *Occupied Canada*, however, this desire for unqualified cultural "otherness" is persistently denied or inaccessible. The volume's narrative breaks what Lejeune calls the "autobiographical contract," in its collaborative composition, its third person voice, and its relentless qualification of its subject.

Calihoo's story is too complex to summarize in this essay, but I will indicate some key junctures where administrative and auto/biographical processes intersect: raised in Edmonton as a well-behaved suburban "white boy" by his Scots-Canadian grandmother, who harbours a pronounced antipathy for Indians, Robert is reunited on his grandmother's death with the runaway white mother he never knew and his French-Canadian stepfather, who eventually send him to a Jesuit school for delinquent boys. When he flees the school, Robert looks up his father's name—the only thing he knows about Albert Calihoo—in the phone book and contacts him. Robert learns, when his father takes him in, that the paternal-side members of his family are, to his great surprise, Crees from the nearby Michel Band Reserve. Robert is thus confronted by a family rendered unfamiliar by what he had been taught by his grandmother to think of as an alien race. His claim to whiteness is, for the resistant boy, "proven" by his fluency in the discourses of nationalism and Western religion: "This was all a mistake anyway. He wasn't one of these people. He didn't belong. He was white. He could sing 'O Canada' and 'God Save the Queen' and recite the Lord's Prayer" (23). On his arrival at the Michel Band Reserve, Robert surveys the

appalling living conditions of his new home with horror, and his imposing grandfather, seeing the look on his face, responds: "The enormous Indian's mouth twisted and the words grated out of him: 'This's what it means to be Indian'" (21). In keeping with the *bildung* tradition of the autobiographical genre, Calihoo's life narrative has an educational impetus: it is driven by his course of instruction in what "it means to be Indian" in Canada, in the economic, cultural, and bureaucratic narratives that situate his subjectivity and emplot his biography in complicated and contradictory ways.

Calihoo's claim to this distinction is both intermittent and unstable: he discovers retrospectively that he retained legal Indian status for much of his young life as a "white boy" living with his grandmother and kept ignorant of his paternal origins, but was automatically "enfranchised" when his mother's second marriage, to a white man, endowed Robert with legally-recognized status as white—though it turns out this automatic re-designation results from the application of an outdated statute, and Calihoo eventually has it reversed, actively staking legal claim to his Aboriginal cultural inheritance. As a young man, Calihoo witnesses the break up and sale of his family's reserve, a process "called 'enfranchisement' in reference to the fact that, until 1960, Indians could only gain the vote by giving up their status" (Henderson and Ground 202).[4] For the Michel Band members, enfranchisement offered both a way out of desperate economic conditions—the possibility of "a New Life" (41)—and the prospect of democratic representation.[5] However, as Darlene Johnston puts it, enfranchisement "was a constant reminder to First Nations people that continued membership in their own communities was inconsistent with participation in Canadian society; that they could only have a place in Canada if they renounced their heritage and denied their identity" in a gesture of "self-alienation" (363, 361). Indeed, in this case, the continued existence of the Michel Band as a community was inconsistent with participation in Canadian society. As a result of the enfranchisement, effective on 31 March 1958, "the Michel Band ceased to exist" (Indian and Northern Affairs Canada 39) and its constituency was declared, as Caren Buss put it, "to no longer be Indians" (Government of Canada). The matter of representation is further developed in *Occupied Canada*'s account of the events leading up to the enfranchisement, when a local priest points out that non-resident band members had no say in the discussion, having already lost their status by leaving the reserve, without having acquired any compensatory voting rights off-reserve: "They were non-status Indians now," the Indian Agent responds, "Non-status

Canadians, too, the priest countered" (39), calling attention to the position of civic negation occupied by members of the Calihoo family.

Paid $22,000 for his share of the reserve, Calihoo's father is promptly asked to hand over his green treaty card: "he wasn't an Indian any more. 'Congratulations,'" the Indian Agent says (41). Albert's enfranchisement ostensibly allows him prerogatives of citizenship denied to Indians in 1958, which included the right to vote and purchase alcohol. He discovers, however, that the recognition of such privileges is another matter: "To his dismay, he discovered that, when he marched into a bar and ordered a drink, the bartender and other customers still considered him an Indian. To them, he looked like an Indian, therefore he must be an Indian—and it was illegal for an Indian to drink. He was bounced" (42). Belonging, Albert's experience with this expulsion from the pub/public place demonstrates, is authorized by both official and unofficial measures. Indeed, the informal territorialization and policing of civic space is pointedly established in the opening of *Occupied Canada*, in which the Royer family's quiet white suburban neighbourhood in Edmonton is invaded by a "battered green Hudson" loaded with "long-haired, pigtailed, dark-skinned" Native people, an event to which Robert's Mama responds by snapping at Robert's uncle, "'Indians! Get your gun, Andy!'" (3-4). Robert's father, significantly, later meets him driving "a battered old green Hudson" (17), suggesting that "Mama" effectively polices both civic and domestic space.

While technically enfranchised, the former Michel Band members find themselves both without literal territory and occupying a cultural and bureaucratic no-man's land. Calihoo, significantly, launches his autobiographical quest at the very moment he discovers the contradiction in the terms of his official identity: "although [the Michel Band members] weren't officially Indians any more, because they had been born on the reserve, they weren't registered as Canadian citizens either. *Taking his first halting steps in search of his official identity*, Rob Royer discovered he didn't have one. He existed in a kind of legal limbo, neither Canadian nor Indian" (69, my emphasis). A possibility suggested in comments by Robert Smith is thus realized: the phenomenological conceptualization of the autobiographical subject as constituted by "reason and cogitation" shades "'into a more pragmatically political one, where 'self-*constitution*' in the political sense can indeed be managed through 'self-representation'" (cited in Joseph 57). This "self-*constitution*" is performed, not simply with the claim to voting rights, but with the autobiographical narrative's address to the ways in

which "Indianness" is controlled in Canada through the legislation of identity.[6]

Calihoo's subsequent life on the streets leads to a number of criminal convictions, and he lobbies from prison to restore his status as an Indian, discovering that while the Province of Alberta is willing to concede his claim, "there was another Canadian catch:" the rules insisted that to claim Indian status, you had to belong to a specific reserve, and the Michel Band Reserve no longer existed. "Bob," the narration observes, "spent quite a few nights laughing raggedly alone in his cell over this one" (69); his narrative both highlights and ironizes the connection between citizenship and territorial/communal claims because the insight comes while Calihoo is incarcerated. In response to Calihoo's inquiries, the province creates a special category for members of the former Michel Band: "The Alberta General Indian List," with five Calihoos its only registrants. Calihoo, while technically restored to his status as an Indian, cannot regain his Band membership, since his Band was not and could not legally be reconstituted. Indeed, the Michel community could not represent themselves to the Canadian government in order to make claims for the reconstitution of or recompense for the reserve, since, as Henderson and Ground point out, "If there are claims which can be advanced on behalf of those Bands [that were enfranchised], there is, under the current specific claims policy, no one with standing to advance them" (202).[7] This legal nicety is surely typical of what Neal Ferris would call the ongoing legacy of "catastrophic bureaucracy" in Canada's relations with Native people (164). *Occupied Canada* tells us that "Bob now began to joke that he was 'Chief of the General Indians'" (69), adopting a mock-legal title to authority, read as more broadly representative of what it means to claim Indian status, and as a literary rendering of the democratic "representation" of which Calihoo's band is deprived.

This tactic addresses a question Susan K. Bernardin sees as a continuing challenge to Native American literary studies, a question that invokes the language of democracy: "Namely, what kinds of discourses 'count' as culturally authoritative and persuasive and according to whose cultural authority?" (487). Several reviewers of *Occupied Canada* seemed particularly offended at Calihoo and Hunter's claim in a historical section that modern European democratic concepts might have roots in the traditions of the Iroquois Confederacy (see Brett and Byfield). These reviewers seem anxious about maintaining the concept of democracy as solely authored by western European culture (presumably making it European culture's prerogative to

bestow on others as it sees fit). A central irony of *Occupied Canada* surely rests on its characterization of undeniably influential democratic principles and practices as "the great gift of the Iroquois" (190) to European culture, precisely the principles and practices whose rhetoric frames the colonial government's regulation of Aboriginal citizenship and agency, as is borne out in Calihoo's life story.

Certainly Calihoo learns the kinds of discourses that "count" in Canadian society and in government bureaucracies. In prison, he crosses another key autobiographical threshold: "Bob Royer went to the prison library, got out a copy of the Indian Act, and began to take charge of his destiny" (66). Royer's agency at this point is thus defined by his collaboration with and resistance to the document that legislates not just his personal autobiographical subjectivity, but which governs the collective claims of Native people to representation in Canadian democracy: "Having hauled himself on board as an Indian, he knew he had to play henceforth by the rules of the Indian Act" (70).

In prison he compensates for his curtailed formal education by reading Canadian history. The middle 13 chapters of *Occupied Canada* are offered as the record of Calihoo's research, an unearthing of his cultural and familial heritage—which turns out to be not just Cree but Iroquois, the "Karhiio" family having originated in a small group of Mohawks who emigrated to the West from Caughnawaga Quebec in the nineteenth century. Calihoo's research forms the basis of efforts to reconstitute the Michel Band Reserve and reclaim the Band's historical territory. The middle section of *Occupied Canada* is also, more generally, the account of 500 years of Native-white relations in Canada.[8] Reviewers were uncomfortable with the book's generic "two-headedness," the "stapling of a history onto a biography" (Mumford "Wrighting History" 28), but as Lenore Keeshig-Tobias perceives, the history book within the biographical narrative offers a "radically revised view of Canadian history through Native eyes;" Calihoo's auto/biography is focused through the lens of a pan-Indian cultural biography.

Occupied Canada's structure intimates that the version of Canadian history embedded in the central portion of the book is the result of reading from "the inside" out, of research initiated while Calihoo was incarcerated. Part I thus ends with Calihoo's discovery of Canada's "unsuspected past," a discovery that runs parallel to auto/biographical revelations. This version of Canadian history counters narratives of national progress, reading from the standpoint of Calihoo's personal, familial, and communal stories: "Knowing

as he did how his family had ended up, he went back into the history of his people without any distracting illusions about how fairly or democratically they had been treated. And he began to read . . . [sic] (72). The historical section follows, beginning in Part II. However, Calihoo's co-author Robert Hunter claims that the idea for this aspect of the book came to *him* when, after representing Calihoo (who was ill) at a meeting of the Native Council of Canada in Ottawa in a bid to have the Michel Band reserve granted recognition, Hunter discovered the Calihoo family's Iroquoian history of migration to the West: "The book I had intended to write, telling Bob Royer's dramatic story of self-discovery, suddenly exploded in my mind into something far more staggeringly ambitious, never mind a mere TV series or a movie: a revised history of Canada, no less! From the *Native* point of view!" (Hunter 68). Hunter's own flamboyant claims to authorship here certainly complicate the notion that the historical portion of *Occupied Canada* is told "from a Native point of view;" they also signal a troubling nexus in the collaborative relationship.

The fact that Hunter makes the claim in his own autobiographical narrative, *Red Blood: One (Mostly) White Guy's Encounters with the Native World*, in which he asserts special spiritual connections with Aboriginal people, based in part on the discovery that his great-grandfather married a Huron woman, makes the matter more perplexing. This gesture represents what Bonita Lawrence calls an attempt at "border crossing" by "*virtually* white people" who invoke a distant Native ancestor, "usually for some form of personal gratification—including claiming (with dominant culture authority) the right to speak with a Native voice" (13). In *Red Blood*, Hunter, apparently aware of his compromised posture, characterizes his difficulties in accommodating his work strategies to the concepts of democracy and consensus used by his Native employers: "Not knowing at the time that I had any Native blood in me at all, I started to see myself as that most pathetic of creatures, a failed wannabe Indian" (65). As Warren Cariou recognizes, Hunter's discovery of his distant Native connection becomes a mystical validation for him, and he takes "a rabid and disproportionate glee in the prospect of having a blood connection to Native people. . . . He wears his Nativeness as a badge of authenticity, a guarantee of political and spiritual rightness." We must, I would contend, see Hunter's description of his act of political representation at the Council meeting (which is not included in the narrative of *Occupied Canada*) as confounded in Hunter's own perceptions with his later claim to represent himself in his autobiographical text as

(mostly) white, but—obviously much more important to Hunter—as partly Native. This mix of motives participates in a process Cariou identifies in which the racial other in Hunter's ancestral "woodpile" becomes a site of projection, a process anticipated in the collaborative dynamics of *Occupied Canada*. *Red Blood*, which could easily be subtitled "A middle-aged white man discovers his unsuspected—but much desired—past," might well be considered Hunter's attempt to appropriate the narrative of discovery initiated in *Occupied Canada* for his own autobiography. The account is revealing not just because of the ways it hints at the troubled dynamics of authorship in cross-cultural collaboration—which are never overtly referenced in *Occupied Canada* itself[9]—but also because it sets in relief the differences between Hunter's and Calihoo's claims as citizens: for Hunter, the claim to Native lineage is akin to honorary citizenship; it presents no risk to his privileged status in Canadian democracy, and in fact further "enfranchises" him to speak for Native issues.

Calihoo's auto/biography is thus a record of how the auto/biographical subject is both regulated and administered *collaboratively*, by its inextricable involvement with the dynamics of collaborative composition and with varieties of public discourse. When he is released from prison, Calihoo achieves his Bachelor's degree in Social Work and, by a strange set of circumstances, following his participation in an occupation of the Department of Indian Affairs offices in Calgary, is offered a job in the government Department itself, where he is eventually charged with a Native affirmative-action program, whose aim is the *collective* representation of Native people within the matrices of power. Calihoo's employment with Indian Affairs is a development *Occupied Canada* narrates as a kind of penetration of the "alien camp" (as Dumont puts it): "Steady. Get that degree. Infiltrate. Bore from within" (216); he collaborates with the "enemy" with the goal of reconstituting it. His efforts to convince bureaucrats to give place to Native people in the administration of Indian Affairs meet relentless indifference and resistance. This section of the auto/biography reads as an account of the breakdown of the potential for "cultural participation," with its "extension of Aboriginal citizenship into Canadian affairs" (Borrows 75-6). Indeed, *Occupied Canada* eventually characterizes Calihoo's journey into the bowels of bureaucracy in terms that echo Joseph Conrad's classic fiction of imperialist administration, describing Calihoo's career in Ottawa as an exploration of "the heart of darkness . . . at the centre of the Canadian system" (218), a "dark region" suppressed by the enlightened rhetoric of Canadian liberal

democracy (225). There is also a dark appropriative side to the cross-cultural collaborative effort Calihoo and Hunter undertake.

By using the form of historiography and auto/biography, Calihoo and Hunter both evoke and resist a related set of public discourses: the mythology of the dying Indian race, linked with the history of the Department of Indian Affairs, and mobilized through the bureaucratic rhetoric of assimilation: in effect, *Occupied Canada* reverses this rhetoric by beginning with a Scots-Canadian "white boy," and following the process of acculturation *into* his status a Native person. The doctrine of assimilation is also associated with a corresponding anthropological discourse of salvage ethnography, which, as Cynthia Wentz suggests, is traditionally "aimed at preserving the essence of 'disappearing cultures'" (16) and is often accomplished through the form of the collaborative or dictated auto/biography, since the participation of the authoritative ethnographer implies that the documented culture is "too weak or unsophisticated to recognize or preserve the significant elements of its own identity" (Wentz 2-3). Calihoo and Hunter attempt to resist—and, indeed, reverse—the implications of the rhetoric of assimilation and salvage ethnography, even as their collaborative work registers the continuing power of the ideologies that fuel them. Early in its narrative, *Occupied Canada*, for example, offers an account of Robert's trip to the hospital with his grandmother, where he glimpses Native tuberculosis sufferers: "Mama said they were dying off anyway" (17). The young "white" boy can barely bring himself to look at the faces of these patients: they serve as the uncanny reminder of a cultural past and potential future of which Robert is not at this point aware: "Robert did not like being watched by dying people. It was almost like being watched by ghosts" (17).

At his grandmother's funeral, a threshold between his "white" and "Native" identities, Calihoo is aware of a space opening up between him and his white relatives: "It was as though a plug had been yanked and his world was suddenly swirling down a drain, following her into darkness. . . . Now that she was in the pale blue coffin with its little clasps clipped shut, lowered into that doorway-sized hole in the ground, with clay thrown in on top, he was just that much more removed than the rest of them, as though he was locked in some sort of invisible box of his own" (10-11). The young Robert later views his new home on the reserve as a kind of "purgatory": "Maybe he had died, halfway died" (23). We might begin to wonder whether this is a life story or the story of Robert's symbolic death into Native culture. *Occupied Canada* lays the responsibility for this ironic, elegiac narrative trajectory at

the feet of the Indian Affairs bureaucracy, whose "red tape" binds Calihoo to the past "like a mummy": "The Indian Act contained within it, as if in a jar of formaldehyde, the body of the captive Indian. It was meant to keep him in a state of rigor mortis" (70). The figure of traumatic mortification also occurs in the person of Nelson Small Legs, Jr., an activist friend of Calihoo's who, in response to the defeat of his passionate attempts to counter the Indian Affairs bureaucracy, commits suicide; his body is found dressed in full ritual regalia (215): with great respect to Calihoo's friend, the narrative states that "In a very real sense, Nelson had merely done what Bob felt Ottawa wanted all Indians to do – to cease existing" (216).

Thus an anecdote that reverses such scenes of mortification is allied with Calihoo's engagement in the active pursuit of Native cultural practices, specifically hunting and, perhaps even more important, storytelling. Calihoo conveys a story told to him by his normally taciturn father Albert while hunting, a story about another hunting expedition Albert undertook with a friend. Hearing a shot, and seeing a moose lying on the ground, Albert assumes his partner has left the dead animal to pursue another: "Albert went over, laid his rifle against the moose's flank, and sat down on top of it to start rolling a cigarette. Suddenly, the moose was up on its feet, dumping Albert, the gun, and the cigarette makings, and charging away into the bush." The lesson, his father tells him, is that "sometimes moose will lie down when their horns are drying. Albert had been quite wrong to assume it was dead" (26-7). Calihoo and Hunter, significantly, describe Calihoo's reclamation of Native status as coming back from "legal death" (246). In the final section of *Occupied Canada*, he anticipates the legal battle to reconstitute his family's reserve, compelled in part by his discovery that the Department of Indian Affairs has, in a back room from which he has been deliberately restricted, a number of file boxes pertaining to the Michel Band Reserve, boxes labelled with the word "EXTINCT:"

> [T]hey were technically known as a 'vanished people.' It had been outrageous enough to have had his personal Indian identity snatched when he was a kid, but this was taking it away from everybody at once, kids included, breaking them off from their own history, denying their inherent worth. Dead. Buried by bureaucrats. Buried in legal-sized cardboard boxes, locked away in Ottawa. Worse, swallowed by bureaucrats—Canadian bureaucrats. The Calihoos. The dead, extinct, lost band of Calihoos (243).

The autobiographical narrative of *Occupied Canada*, conflicted as it is, stakes a claim to the *life* story, running counter to this narrative of extinction. It is,

significantly, an auto/biography that ventures a future claim based on legal and extra-legal responses to issues of representation and identity.

A reciprocal component of *Occupied Canada*'s resistance to the narrative of the tragically doomed Indian, is its contradiction of the corresponding notion of the "extinguished" land claim. This response is in the book's final section allied with a model of citizenship based on the treaty rights negotiated by First Nations *as* First Nations, and with the notion of the activist "Native occupation." Legal theorist Sakej Henderson asserts that the normalized narrative of democratic participation "masks the oppressive legacies of colonialism and racism" while fostering "a sense of unity, shared civic purpose, and a basic sense of belonging among a diverse population" (417). Henderson argues that First Nations people might refuse the "invitation" to federal citizenship in favour of maintaining their *sui generis* and treaty rights as *First Nations* citizens. While *Occupied Canada* does not explicitly develop such an argument, it opens up the space for imagining it. Lawrence insists that addressing the question "Who is an Indian?" in Canada must begin "with the colonial project of land theft and regulation of Native identity" (16). From his childhood, when his grandmother obsessively policed the racial boundaries of her Edmonton suburb, to Calihoo's early life in prison, when he worked to institute the Bail Reform Act, a law that redressed the existing terms of bail which prevented most Native people from release, because reserve land, held in trust by the Crown, could not be used as surety (62), to its very title which, of course, evokes the problem of *legal* title and the nation-state, *Occupied Canada* asks readers to consider the link between territorial claims and the fraught relationship to citizenship for Aboriginal people in Canada. *Occupied Canada*'s conclusion gestures toward the potential of Native acts of resistance to the "Canadian Empire" (263) in working for legal restoration of treaty rights, and the recognition that collaboration has its limits, as demonstrated in present-day occupations and stand-offs, like Oka, that marked Canada's "Indian summer of 1990," and to which the epilogue of the book refers (262). *Occupied Canada* stakes a claim to the auto/biographical subject position in order to assert the privileges of citizenship and to identify and recognize its deficiencies. Henderson submits that "Canadian citizenship . . . is a narrative confidently plotted from the colonial 'insiders' perspective." Calihoo and Hunter's story undermines that confidence, revealing in the process that narrative's—and its own—"inconsistencies and incoherences" and the "prismatic existence" they construct for Native people (Henderson 417).

NOTES

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1 Hunter (best known as founder of Greenpeace) and Calihoo met in 1973 at an environmental cleanup after a freighter accident at the mouth of Johnstone Strait. They later worked together when Calihoo was employed as band manager for the Kwakiutl Nation, which hired Hunter to help with public relations in its fight against a development project in Port McNeill (Hunter 58-60).

2 See Byfield; Marchand; Mumford, "Beyond writers' bloc;" and Ross on the controversy, and Jones, "Slash Marks the Spot" on critical difficulties in interpreting activist aesthetics.

3 The actual dynamics of the collaboration and, indeed, the outcome of Calihoo's story are difficult to ascertain, since Hunter died in 2005 and I have been unable to locate Calihoo. Cass Sadek of McClelland & Stewart writes that "We too have been searching for Robert Calihoo for quite some time, but it seems he has disappeared. Our royalties department has done an exhaustive search . . . but nothing has turned up."

4 "Until 1985, the various *Indian Acts* have made provision for an entire Band to voluntarily give up their Indian status, divide their collective assets and take ordinary fee simple title to their former reserve lands." The Michel Band was one of only two communities that ever took this step (Henderson and Ground 202).

5 Gilbert Anderson, Chief and President of the Michel Band, observed that the latter was one motivation for the Michel Band enfranchisement: "My ancestors had no MP to talk to about their grievances, as we did not have a vote in those days. . . .Therefore, enfranchisement was the only alternative in order to obtain some independence from Indian Affairs" (Government of Canada).

6 See Lawrence's *"Real" Indians and Others* for a theorization and case study of the ways in which Native identity is produced as a "highly contested set of realities" (6).

7 Anderson testified in 1999 that "The Michel Band consists of approximately 703 people who have [now] regained Indian status under Bill C-31. We are currently housed on the general list. There is only one general list in Canada and I think we are the only people who are on it. We are actually descendants of the original Michel Band. . . . When we were first dealing with governments on the issue of trying to get re-established, we were considered to be a 'non-entity' by those governments. Therefore, we had to develop the Friends of the Michel Society. We represent solely the 703 persons who have status and are descendants of the Michel Band" (Government of Canada).

8 *Occupied Canada* was published the year before Ronald Wright's *Stolen Continents: the "New World" through Indian Eyes since 1492*.

9 These dynamics are explored in Griffiths and Campbell's *The Book of Jessica* (see, for example, York 157-82) and Wiebe and Johnson's *Stolen Life* (see Egan, Jones "Stolen Life?").

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Dave Margoshes

Summer night

The moon shows
a bit of leg
through curtains
of cloud,
ankle, knee,
thigh

nylons sighing
like cicadas

shameless

Trips to the West Coast

Michael Dawson
Selling British Columbia: Tourism and Consumer Culture, 1890-1970. UBC Press $35.95

Alan Twigg
First Invaders: The Literary Origins of British Columbia. Ronsdale $21.95

Reviewed by Lindsey McMaster

In *Selling British Columbia*, Michael Dawson describes the development of tourism promotion and consumerism in British Columbia and its transformation from the civic boosterism of its early days to a sophisticated economic strategy catering to an emerging consumer culture.

To counterbalance recent critical works that foreground the role of the consumer or audience of cultural discourses, Dawson chooses to focus not on the experience of tourists themselves, but on the cultural producers who played an active part in creating British Columbia as a consumer product. His subjects are the local businessmen in Vancouver and Victoria who created tourism organizations to bring people to the province, and his texts include the promotional pamphlets, newspaper articles, and advertisements they used to do so. Dawson uncovers an important conceptual shift: early promoters of British Columbia saw tourism as a way to lure potential settlers to the province, thereby fostering agricultural and industrial development through increased population; but in the postwar era, with the shift to a consumer culture, tourism became an end in itself, with tourists expected merely to visit, spend their money, and contribute to the wealth of the province.

Though Dawson's approach is primarily historical, he does some nice literary analysis of promotional material. Early travel accounts of BC frequently touched on the sublime appeal of the province's natural splendour, and painted it as a welcome escape from the trials of modern life. But at the same time, promoters and visitors alike "were not averse to contemplating ways to capitalize and profit from the natural world to which they were temporarily retreating," and so "the province's vast forests, for example, were not simply awe-inspiring natural cathedrals; they were also raw materials awaiting industrial production."

One feature of the early promotional efforts that regarded tourists as potential settlers and industrialists was that they primarily targeted men. But in the postwar era, as consumer culture emerged, promoters began to recognize the role of women as individual consumers and as the spending decision makers in the family. Given this new realization, tourism promoters were instructed, "it might be well to begin revamping your literature and your promotions plans with an eye to the feminine trade. Cut out some of those bathing beauties and put a few men on your front cover for a change."

The representational politics of tourism promotion also took a turn mid-century as the province's native history became an instrument in advertising. Promoters felt

that the totem pole was the perfect symbol for BC—something visitors could recognize as a logo. The province's native heritage was thus appropriated as an attractive, but decontextualized spectacle, the history of conflict and exploitation put neatly out of mind.

Dawson's study is well-researched and highly readable, and he narrates the development of tourism promotion from local boosterism to fully fledged industry with careful attention to the simultaneous development of consumer culture. Readers interested in the history, representation, and promotion of BC as a tourist destination will find much to engage them in Dawson's book.

First Invaders by Alan Twigg also deals with travellers to British Columbia, but in this case it is the early explorers rather than today's tourists who enter the field. Twigg looks for BC's "literary origins" by which he means the words of "those who described Canada's West Coast in published writing resulting from visits made prior to 1800." He thus seeks out all the earliest sources that mention BC, and his texts are mainly the writings of explorers and seamen like Juan Perez, James Cook, and George Vancouver. To these familiar names, though, he adds a wonderful variety of lesser-known explorers from across the globe.

Drawing on the journals of sea captains and mapmakers, Twigg describes their early contact with native inhabitants and their encounters with one another. In fact, one occasionally wants to hear more from these fascinating sources, and Twigg might have added more direct quotes to his account so we could hear the actual voices of his subjects. But there is also a virtue in the brevity of his entries, allowing him to cover 65 different writers across a large time period.

Readers interested in the European contest to lay claim to North America's West Coast will appreciate Twigg's able narration of the competing interests and prominent figures. The short chapters each focus on one major figure and his experience of BC, and while the sections do build on each other if read in sequence, the individual pieces also stand well on their own, making the volume work nicely as a collection of snapshots in exploration history.

Twigg has a good sense of narrative and renders all his subjects as interesting characters each engaged in his own quest. There is a certain whimsy to his style as well; Jonathan Swift, for instance, proves to be the first writer on BC, for in *Gulliver's Travels*, the description of where Brobdingnag—the land of giants—is, locates it roughly in the area of BC. The following entries are certainly more verifiable, but Twigg takes a pleasure in the storytelling throughout.

Of Words and Waginas

Rishma Dunlop and Priscilla Uppal, eds. *Red Silk: An Anthology of South Asian Canadian Women Poets.* Mansfield $19.95

The Masala Trois Collective *Desilicious: Sexy. Subversive. South Asian.* Arsenal Pulp $21.95

Reviewed by Mridula Nath Chakraborty

Like all work that dabbles in identity, these two anthologies of South Asian writing explore the central contradiction of professing identity and denying, in the same breath, its essentialism. The editors of *Red Silk* admit that their impulse in coming out with this anthology was to shed some much-needed, and belated, light on poetry by "South Asian Canadian women writers," even as they work with the "full knowledge" of the "reductive, constrictive and false categorization" of the label "South Asian woman." The anthology draws a nuanced map of immigrant and diasporic South Asian poetry, its invention and reinvention, with all the associated themes of "tradition, transplantation, stereotype, oppression, submission." But what emerges most strongly and poignantly in this truly

remarkable collection is the sense of South Asianness as *loss*; the implication is that this nomenclature is, at the same time, an "unfinished thing" as well as an "intangible hope" (Rishma Dunlop, "The Poet Contemplates Her Art"). All eleven poets celebrate an "astonishment that depends on loss" while acknowledging that "there is tenderness in every geography" (Dunlop, "Naramata Road"). The loss is most immanent in the case of Priscilla Uppal, whose poems for "a runaway mother" acknowledge and anticipate the many more geographies she will have and "continue to lose." The sorrow for a lost mother/land expresses itself through the "uninvited guests" (Shauna Singh Baldwin) of "collective memory" (Kuldip Gill, "Bachma's Musings") and in "all the departures I must take / everyday" (Proma Tagore, "when places leave"). But if the lingua franca of diaspora is in the "leaving / all that marks the beginning" (Sandeep Sanghera, "The Women in this Village"), Sonnet L'Abbé spiritedly cautions against any such "dwelling on / the dangerous pore / of the origin" ("Bi-Polarity"). Danielle Lagah nevertheless tries to "Find India in its Poets," but discovers that "they are too busy / finding themselves" or "they are too busy finding Canada / in me." It is left to Sharanpal Ruprai, the absolute jewel in this collection, to pin down "the insistence of the body" (L'Abbé, "Theory, My Natural Brown Ass") in the five Ks of religious Sikh iconography—the kesh, kangha, kirpan, kara, and kachera—within "a Canadian cultural hegemony." Even as Soraya Peerbaye tries to provide the last word that "a South Asian woman is, in a way, a sixth sense," Hiro Boga sums up lyrically all the claims, denials, and seductions of identity: "Every no bears in its belly the sibilant / yes: a pomegranate seed white in its / sheath of translucent red" ("Sarva Mangalam: Left Handed Poems").

Desilicious, too, works with this yes/no ambiguity, making sex/desire the pivot of identity, and attempts to give its readers "*sans* shame . . . a generous dose of much needed desi lovin'." Desi here, the blurb tells us, is a Punjabi term referring to "of one's own people," and as the anthology tries to penetrate the heart of South Asian desire, it throws up for examination the entire shebang of "geography, weather, voices, fabric and foods" that are its essential baggage. This anthology too argues for a quintessentially "South Asian" sensibility, a nuance that profoundly influences the shape and sound of sexuality, and yet all that it can do is gesture or gesticulate toward it. The collection promises to be sexy and subversive, but what it delivers is guilt and transgression. The emotional landscape of most of the pieces is one of longing, the "what if" of love and lust (Milan Bose, "Sex, Lies, and Hash Pakoras"), the "achy breaky heart" that wants, ultimately, a "fabulous indo wedding," same-sex notwithstanding (Sunil Narayan, "In Search Of"). This is not to deny that the material presented is difficult, but delivered with astonishing panache. The prose pieces are incisive, mature, confident, and savvy in their awareness of the multiple contradictions of South Asian desire; the list of contributors is an impressive lineup to watch out for. But even though they are polished and thought-provoking, they do not allow for much raunch or romp. They are too full of the angst of identity, even the deft pieces by Navneet Alang, Roohi Choudhry, Tanuja Desai Hidier, Sharmeen Khan, and Siddharth. It is the poems that find a sensuous inroad into the heart, that make the pulse beat, that make the blood rush to the groin. In fact, if one aspect emerges clearly from this anthology, a primer groping for the definition of South Asianness, it is that sex and desire, in the case of these writers at least, are mediated far too much by "the desi tight cunt syndrome that prevents you from laughing during sex" (Aziza Ahmed, "Metal Pleasure"). Plenty of self-conscious

giggly laughter emerges when one sees one's image all too clearly in the mirror, but the nudge-nudge wink-wink shock of recognition certainly prevents one from pleasuring oneself. And this critic would have certainly liked some of that.

Cartoon Chronicles and Lightweight Verse

Aislin
Oh, Oh! . . . And Other Recent Cartoons by Aislin. MacArthur $24.95

Gordon Snell and Aislin
Further Fabulous Canadians! Hysterically Historical Rhymes. MacArthur $19.95

Reviewed by Robyn Fowler

Barbed and affectionate by turns, this recent compilation of cartoons by Aislin, *Oh, Oh!*, is an audacious and colourful volume chronicling the years 2001-04 in politics, sports, and culture. Aislin, aka Terry Mosher, is a sharp wit and incisive critic of both international and domestic public affairs. While the collection runs heavily to Montreal civic and Quebec provincial politics, of greater interest to audiences in those respective regions, it contains a requisite and predictable number of caricatures of George W. Bush, Donald Rumsfeld, Saddam Hussein, and many other international figures, both infamous and acclaimed.

Some images are stark reminders of horrific events such as the 9/11 hijackings, where Aislin pares graphic details down to a partial image of the Statue of Liberty, shrouded in ominous clouds of smoke. Another chilling rendering is that of a spectral figure clad in a hooded American flag; the caption needs no more than "Abu Ghraib prison, Iraq," to broadcast its point about human rights abuses. That said, Aislin more often strikes with wit and humour in his signature bold style. Strong colour blocks and dramatic shading give the text a fine visual appeal. In a self-referential tradition going back as far as J.W. Bengough's collections of his own cartoons in the 1880s, Aislin offers an accessible, useful source for those who study cartoons as primary texts, or for a general audience of cartoon fanciers.

By comparison, Gordon Snell's *Further Fabulous Canadians! Hysterically Historical Rhymes* is a mix of Aislin's illustrations and Snell's short, rhymed biographies that I would deem mildly amusing but decidedly not *hysterical.* There is, however, something about Canadians and sarcastic verse; Bengough himself often waxed lyrical about sordid Canadian politics. I recall my own near hysteria the first time I read *Sarah Binks, Sweet Songstress of Saskatchewan*, by Paul Hiebert.

Arranged chronologically by date of birth, the historical figures come across as somewhat randomly chosen. Still, lesser-known characters are given equal treatment alongside iconic figures: Tom Three Persons, of rodeo renown, follows Lawren Harris, for instance. The rhymes can be dogged, but the abundance of historical detail is economical. Snell does not spare us nefarious particulars, even though he does deliver them safely and euphemistically. Aislin's accompanying drawings are clever, if more tame than his usual caricature. Of little interest to an academic audience, the book might be a boon for teachers wishing to entice reluctant students to Canadian history, or for those who like their Canadian biography served up in efficient, frivolous verse.

Drab Little Nothings

Susan Crean
The Laughing One: A Journey to Emily Carr. HarperCollins $32.00

Reviewed by Michelle Ariss

In *Growing Pains,* Emily Carr calls the particulars of her life "drab little nothings." *The Laughing One* shows the folly of Carr's modesty. Susan Crean's book on Carr is

several things at once, none of them drab: a fictionalized biography, a history textbook, a travelogue, a feminist tract, an ecological treatise, a plea for Aboriginal rights, and a reporter's notebook. Crean resembles a well-informed, enthusiastic travel guide who believes that arriving at the destination is no more important than all that one can learn along the way. The subtitle of the book is, after all, "A Journey *to* Emily Carr."

While managing, for the most part, to keep Carr central to the narrative, Crean examines three rather disparate areas of interest: the lives of several people who had an impact on Carr's development as an artist, Francis Hodgkins and Lawren Harris for instance; the European and Canadian societies in which Carr lived; and Aboriginal issues in early and contemporary British Columbia. Undoubtedly, all of the data Crean deals with is noteworthy. Nevertheless, long passages of the text have little to do with Carr. Much of the microscopic study of Hodgkins' life, for instance, seems like superfluous baggage on this multi-faceted "journey" to Carr.

In contrast, the research that shapes the first section of the fifth and final chapter is invaluable for its relevance and originality. Here, Crean creates a monologue for Carr in which she recalls the personality and life experiences of Sophie Frank and reminisces about the nature and development of their 30-year friendship.

Crean's decision "to introduce the present in a journalistic voice" takes getting used to, primarily because her "journalistic voice" in this book is highly uneven and at times downright lazy. For instance, how can the author of an image as memorable as, "Looking up and around the little cove, I feel mist tickling my cheeks and wonder how something so delicate can muffle the din of the sea" be the same writer who attributes to Georgia O'Keefe "nerves to match Madonna's"? And, what to make of this clichéed, grammatically incorrect passage: "I notice that while her response to environmental issues is often evoked, her stand on things like the Nisga'a treaty or Oka, where the political rubber meets the road in our time, are never imagined." Fortunately, the writing style elsewhere in the book (aside from at least a dozen typographical errors) is consistently erudite and appropriate to the subject.

The chapter's "middle sections" offer insightful analyses of the colonialism and voice appropriation that Carr's (and now Crean's) work are part of, and of the relations between the First Nations and the white communities of Carr's day and of ours. Crean forcibly challenges long-held assumptions about the development of mainstream art in Canada, and of provincial and national policies with regard to First Nations people. And in the final section of the last chapter, she scrutinizes and explicates the legal and political battles, historical and current, over the protection of Aboriginal sites, heritage, and artefacts. The author's abilities to describe, interpret, and synthesize are most evident and most useful in these sections of the book. Her attempt in *The Laughing One* to do justice to Carr's "drab little nothings" is illuminating and substantial.

(Re)covering (Im)migrant Writing in Quebec

Clément Moisan and Renate Hildebrand
Ces étrangers du dedans. Une histoire de l'écriture migrante au Québec (1937-1997). Nota bene 25,95 $

Reviewed by Natasha Dagenais

As the face of Quebec society changed in the twentieth century, the face of its literature also changed, including an increasingly diverse society. A number of critical works on migrant writing in Quebec have been published in response to these changes. *Ces étrangers du dedans* stands out as both a comprehensive history and a full-length

critical study. Moisan and Hildebrand look at a wide selection of migrant writers to illustrate the extent to which migrant writing has contributed to broadening the scope of Quebec's literature. Working with the theoretical premise that migrant writers and migrant writing are part of a dynamic literary system, the authors look at how these "ethnoculturel" elements have formed and transformed "le système lui-même tout entier."

The authors focus on the years from 1937 to 1997, as indicated by the subtitle, in order to examine the evolution of migrant writing as an integral element within Québécois literature. They divide their study into four periods. The first period, *l'uniculturel* (1937–59), is characterized by writers who blend into the established literary institution of Quebec. These writers contribute to its literary tradition by using known forms, structures, and genres. They are, for the most part, from France, Belgium or Switzerland. The second period, *le pluriculturel* (1960–74), witnesses a growing diversity in the cultural heritage of its writers "mais sans toutefois se poser comme hétérogène." The majority of the writers during this period come from Eastern Europe, the Middle East, North Africa, and the Caribbean. The third period, *l'interculturel* (1976–85), however, is represented by immigrant writers who produce an increasingly heterogeneous literature. These writers experience, for example, loss, uprooting, exile, and alienation; these themes are emblematic of many immigrant works, which "expriment ce va-et-vient où les cultures se déplacent en direction opposée ou convergente." The fourth period, *le transculturel* (1986–97), refers to the cultural interactions, crossings, and transfers between "Néo-Québécois" and Québécois writers, who act as mediators of Néo-Québécois and Québécois cultures. While many migrant writers continue their identity quest, they nonetheless now adopt "des voies nouvelles" as they strive to maintain a balance between their country of birth and their country of adoption.

Moisan and Hildebrand also discuss various terms related to migrant writing, such as nationality, multiculturalism, ethnicity, and pluralism. Although they concede that "Néo-Québécois" is inadequate as a term, they address this issue only in their conclusion. After all, how long does an immigrant remain a Néo-Québécois? Labelling these writers as Néo-Québécois relegates them to a separate category within Québécois literature. Although the study contains at times rather oversimplified claims—e.g., "toute littérature peut être dite migrante," when the authors themselves associate "migrant" with writing by "immigrant" writers—and latent explanations of certain key terms, they present a structured, detailed analysis and do exactly what they set out to do: to provide a broad survey of migrant writing in Quebec. Interestingly, they recognize that most studies work from a "canon" of migrant writers, and while they too examine many of the same writers, they also consider, albeit briefly, lesser known ones. What becomes clear is how the once homogeneous literary system of Quebec has been changed significantly by the contribution of its (im)migrant writers.

Autour d'André Paiement

Gaston Tremblay
L'Écho de nos voix: Conférences. Prise de parole 15,00 $

Micheline Fournier-Thibault
André Paiement (1950-1978): Avant tout un homme de son temps. Prise de parole 22,00 $

Compte rendu par Johanne Melançon

Les ouvrages de Gaston Tremblay et Micheline Fournier-Thibault se penchent tous deux sur l'effervescence culturelle sudburoise du début des années 1970, l'un pour y ancrer l'apparition d'une institution littéraire proprement franco-ontarienne, en

partie autour d'André Paiement, l'autre pour tenter de comprendre l'importance de la figure, presque mythique, de Paiement. Mais là s'arrêtent les points communs.

L'Écho de nos voix est un recueil de quatre conférences déjà publiées et/ou prononcées en 2002 et 2003. Au coeur de la thèse de Tremblay, le concept de « littérature du vacuum », catégorie qu'il faut ajouter, selon lui, à celles de François Paré qui distinguait les « petites » et les « grandes » littératures dans *Les littératures de l'exiguïté*. Aussi, pour Tremblay, la littérature franco-ontarienne serait un « phénomène nouveau . . . qui date des années soixante-dix et dont nous ne pouvons retracer les origines au-delà de sa naissance, car elle se distingue de tout ce qui la précède ». Il pose que la littérature franco-ontarienne est née dans le vide institutionnel et idéologique, voire social du Nouvel-Ontario, créé par l'éclatement du Canada-Français (orthographe privilégié par G. Gervais) à la suite des états généraux de 1967-1969. De plus, cette littérature est identifiée au Nord, en particulier à Sudbury. Enfin, elle est devenue franco-ontarienne lorsque les autres régions, comme Ottawa, y ont adhéré. Cette mise en perspective de l'institution littéraire franco-ontarienne et de ses origines est l'objet de la première conférence. Les conférences subséquentes portent sur trois écrivains dont la trajectoire, selon Tremblay, illustre un aspect de cette littérature du vacuum : Jean Éthier-Blais, ou « L'homme qui venait du vacuum », qui aurait toujours été profondément un « Canadien-Français », toujours déchiré entre son appartenance à l'institution littéraire québécoise et ses origines franco-ontariennes, trop conscient du « vide » de l'Ontario français; André Paiement ou « Celui qui implose dans le vacuum », qui se serait épuisé à créer les nouvelles institutions franco-ontariennes, en particulier le TNO et Cano-musique; Robert Dickson, ou « Celui qui embrasse le vacuum », un anglophone qui s'est intégré à la communauté et à l'institution littéraire franco-ontariennes. Ce dernier exemple permet à Tremblay de s'interroger sur la définition du Franco-Ontarien et sur les limites du champ. Pour Tremblay, l'écrivain franco-ontarien est « une personne née en Ontario qui choisit d'écrire en français et dont les livres sont publiés par un éditeur quelconque ; une personne née ailleurs qui choisit de vivre et d'écrire en français en Ontario et dont les oeuvres sont publiées par une maison d'édition franco-ontarienne reconnue ».

Le concept de « littérature du vacuum », pour intéressant qu'il puisse être pour expliquer l'effervescence culturelle et créatrice sudburoise, doit certes être nuancé lorsqu'il s'agit de poser la « naissance » d'une institution littéraire franco-ontarienne. La thèse de l'historien Gaétan Gervais, l'éclatement du « Canada-Français » suite aux états généraux, est largement acceptée: il est évident que ce bouleversement entraîne des changements dans les institutions. De ce point de vue, au début des années soixante-dix, on peut certes parler de l'enclenchement, par la force des choses, d'une autonomisation de l'institution littéraire en Ontario français, qui ne sera plus canadienne-française mais franco-ontarienne; d'une institution qui doit se redéfinir, revoir, remodeler ou recréer ses instances. Mais peut-on véritablement parler d'une création *ex-nihilo*? L'espace est peut-être pauvre, mais est-il *vide*? Peut-on faire table rase, par exemple, des institutions d'enseignement ou même des lieux d'édition qui existent à ce moment en Ontario? Tremblay choisit d'étudier la littérature franco-ontarienne « dans un vacuum » qu'il crée « en isolant l'Ontario français du Canada-Français et surtout du Québec », et souligne la dynamique particulière où l'on doit créer les institutions tout en créant les oeuvres—André Paiement étant la figure exemplaire illustrant cela. Tremblay s'oppose ainsi à René Dionne (qu'il ne cite pas), dont les

travaux sur l'institution littéraire franco-ontarienne font autorité.

Pour tenter de comprendre l'institution littéraire franco-ontarienne et sa naissance, Micheline Fournier-Thibault a choisi, suite à un constat de François Paré, de « retracer les grandes étapes de la vie d'André Paiement ». Elle ne veut pas confirmer le « mythe », mais « comprendre ce moment charnière de l'institution littéraire et de l'évolution de la vie culturelle franco-ontarienne ». Son ouvrage n'est cependant pas une biographie, mais il contribue à reconstituer une époque proposant entre autres une chronologie fouillée qui met en perspective la vie artistique, la vie personnelle et le travail administratif de Paiement. Près de la moitié de l'ouvrage est en fait constitué d'annexes: inventaire de la correspondance reçue, des documents de Gaston Tremblay, de la correspondance d'affaires envoyée, photographies et chronologie. Contrairement à Tremblay, Fournier-Thibault affirme que « les résidents de l'Ontario français ne vivaient nullement dans les limbes culturelles » en 1970. Cependant, Paiement était un « meneur naturel »—mais pas le seul—et le moment était propice à la création de nouvelles institutions. Son ouvrage apporte donc des
éléments intéressants pour comprendre l'époque, malgré des maladresses stylistiques, des redondances, ou même des lacunes découlant du fait que l'auteur ne semble pas tenir compte des recherches universitaires récentes en littérature franco-ontarienne.

Esthétique du temps qui passe

Louise Warren
La lumière, l'arbre, le trait. L'Hexagone 14,95 $

Carle Coppens
Le grand livre des entorses. Noroît 24,95 $

Compte rendu par Sylvain Marois

La poésie est un genre qui interpelle souvent la jeunesse de cœur et de l'esprit. En effet, nombreux sont ceux et celles qui ont couché sur papier l'ambivalence et les troubles de l'adolescence, porte d'entrée vers la maturité. La poésie n'est pas, bien entendu, qu'un étalage spleenétique en noir sur blanc ou, encore moins, le partage thérapeutique de ses angoisses, de ses tourments, etc. Sans vouloir ici risquer une définition—même temporaire—de la poésie, elle est parfois un exutoire permettant l'expression de l'abstrait: du temps qui passe, par exemple. Comme dans les pages de *la lumière, l'arbre, le trait,* de Louise Warren et dans *Le grand livre des entorses*, de Carle Coppens. Si le premier a le recul du temps, qui permet l'introspection et le retour sur le passé, l'autre déborde du présent inhérent à une certaine jeunesse et, donc, d'une énergie toute différente.

Louise Warren, dont le premier recueil, *L'Amant gris* (Tryptique), a été publié en 1984, occupe une place enviable dans l'univers poétique québécois et étranger, grâce aux traductions de plusieurs de ses textes. Elle est l'auteure d'essais, d'ouvrages destinés au jeune public, d'un roman et de 13 recueils de poésie publiés entre 1984 et 2005, dont *Une collection de lumières, Poèmes choisis 1984-2004* (Typo), une sélection de textes publiée en 2005. On la retrouve d'ailleurs déjà présente en anthologie dès 1987 dans l'ouvrage de Jean Royer, *La Poésie québécoise contemporaine* (L'Hexagone). Et c'est à juste titre, car, comme en témoigne *la lumière, l'arbre, le trait*, Warren sait faire

vivre le verbe, en faire un personnage, « celui qui te fera écrire / celui par qui le livre arrive / et s'ouvre la nuit sur tes genoux ». Une poésie d'évocation, légère et délicate, sans références obscures, qui se remémore, dans l'universel, un passé où « [l]a bouche de ma mère est un lieu de gaieté / de berceuses, de framboises et de contes ».

Le grand livre des entorses, publié en 2002, surprend, dans un premier temps, par ses deux éditions distinctes: une version brève qui contient dix textes, de superbes dessins de Marwan Sahmarani, qui fait 40 pages et qui s'adresse, tel qu'exprimé dans la préface, à « l'étudiant abruti de lectures, [au] critique serré par l'heure de tombée, [et aux] amis invités au lancement . . . qui se sentiront obligés . . . d'émettre une opinion », mais qui n'auront, semble-t-il, pas le temps de lire l'ensemble du recueil. Ensuite, il y a la longueur de la *version longue* (à laquelle nous faisons référence). Près de 150 pages qui s'intéressent « au bon usage de la mauvaise foi dans la conduite des affaires courantes » (voir quatrième de couverture). Mais c'est surtout la facture même des textes poétiques—particulièrement le poème numéro 34—qui mérite qu'on s'attarde à ce recueil. Vous trouverez aussi matière à réflexion si, comme l'auteur, vous croyez que « l'obéissance est une ruse monotone » qui permet de « répéter scrupuleusement les mêmes erreurs » sans pour autant cesser « de vivre de façon cohérente ».

Le grand livre des entorses est le deuxième ouvrage de Carle Coppens. Son premier recueil, *Poèmes contre la montre* (Noroît, 1996), s'est mérité le Prix Émile-Nelligan la même année. On voit bien, à la lecture des références en fin de bouquin, que, malgré son jeune âge (il est né en 1972), Coppens a fait ses devoirs. Il est habité par une profonde passion pour la littérature d'ici et d'ailleurs, et ses lectures, sous forme de déclencheurs ou de rêveries bachelardiennes, liées à un sens de la formule indiscutable, supportent la quête de ce *grand livre des entorses* qui débute avec une mise en garde: « En sortant de la ville / mieux vaut se méfier / les paysages ont la manie de se glisser / dans la peau des hommes / curieux de savoir ce que c'est / que de rater sa vie ». Car c'est bien d'une quête qu'il s'agit. Une quête qui permettrait, entre autres, de découvrir « Ce que l'autre dissimule ».

Deux recueils de poèmes complètement différents, mais tous deux égaux dans leur suggestivité, dans les thèmes abordés, dans le fond comme dans la forme. Si Louise Warren nous convie à un retour vers le passé, là où parfois « La douleur me possède / fractionne le temps / décape mes os », Coppens nous exhorte à croire à un avenir meilleur, un monde où « . . . il existe des ventres si doux / des filles dont le prénom / débouche en trombe / sur votre faiblesse ».

The Need for Stories

Dan Yashinsky
Suddenly They Heard Footsteps: Storytelling for the Twenty-First Century. Knopf $21.00

Tantoo Cardinal, Tomson Highway, and Lee Maracle, et al.
Our Story: Aboriginal Voices On Canada's Past. Doubleday $32.95

Reviewed By Renate Eigenbrod

Suddenly They Heard Footsteps is an enticing book for anybody who likes to listen to and to tell stories and who, like the author Dan Yashinsky, may lament that we live in an age "when news replaces narrative." His book is divided into two sections: the first and largest one gives storytelling accounts of a wide range of situations and contexts in which stories are meaningful, while the second section contains examples of stories from the author's repertoire, "based on traditional patterns" but "rewoven with new yarn." The book ends with a useful appendix on storytelling resources and an annotated bibliography.

In the first part of the book, Yashinsky writes about storytelling performances which demonstrate how age-old stories like fables, fairy tales, and myths open up conversations about individual and societal problems as these narratives are non-intrusive, suggesting but never dictating answers or meaning. He also points to family lore, stories of memory and survival as told by his Jewish ancestors, for example. In the context of his work as a storyteller for UNICEF, Yashinsky notes, "Change begins when we listen to one another's stories." Reminiscent of Edward Chamberlin's concept of finding common ground through stories, Yashinsky's insights take him on a cross-cultural learning path from his own "crossroads family" to Native elders, Irish *shanachies*, African *griots*, and caravan travellers in the desert. Often, he refers to Aboriginal storytellers, in particular Basil Johnston (Anishinabe), Alexander Wolfe (Saulteaux), and Tagish elder Angela Sidney (also featured in Cruikshank's book *Life Lived Like a Story*) and elaborates on audience participation and on the qualities of listening so important in oral cultures.

Paradoxically, Yashinsky, like Aboriginal authors, praises a revival of the art of story*telling* in *writing*, and he admits: "I've hunted and gathered about a hundred and fifty stories over the years, some by listening, most by reading, and a few I've made up myself." It seems as if his allusion to the oral culture of hunting and gathering societies (which he repeats several times) is meant to make up, if only discursively, for the alleged loss of the oral in Western societies. The reference lends an Aboriginal voice to the author as does his adoption of the Mi'kmaq talking stick ceremony for his storytelling performances. While Yashinsky knows "that oral culture has its own decorum and unwritten principles," it seems that his universalizing approach to storytelling allows him to forget about power imbalances that make some cultures more vulnerable to exploitation than others.

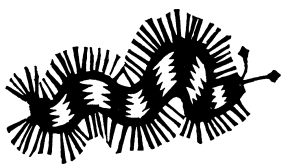
In spite of these concerns, however, I could not help being drawn into Yashinsky's telling of stories and their meanings for our lives. Maybe his book affected me in this way because I read most of it in a hospital at a time of my life when I was in desperate need of a story that would navigate me through a terrifying experience. As Yashinsky says, maybe "all storytelling is emergency storytelling."

Although there are many publications on the Aboriginal history of Canada, *Our Story*, written exclusively by Aboriginal people, not only delineates *what* constitutes Aboriginal history but also, to quote from the preface, "*how* our history is constituted" (emphasis added). The Royal Commission Report on Aboriginal Peoples emphasizes in its first volume different conceptualizations of history that illustrate their point about differences between Aboriginal and Western views with the inclusion of the Thanksgiving Address in their introduction. However, not many people from the Canadian general public read the Royal Commission Report. *Our Story*, on the other hand, is an accessible and very readable book in which one of the "defining moments" in history is considered the creation of all life. The spiritual connections embedded in the Thanksgiving Address therefore conclude the first narrative and set the tone for the subsequent accounts of "defining moments" in history.

The cultural and professional background as well as the individual tone and style vary greatly among the nine contributing Aboriginal authors from all over Canada, including the often marginalized regions of Quebec and Nunavut. This emphasis on diversity is counterbalanced by the unifying assertion of the title: the various strands of Aboriginal history are woven together into *one* story. Common to all is a world view that challenges the boundaries of reality construction and the linearity of conventional history books from pre-contact to modern times. As Inuk writer Qitsualik puts it, "the persistence of this land forbids

true time travel." With that sense of the present in the past, she imagines a meeting between the "Thule" and the "Dorset," progenitors of the Inuit. The trickster stories as told by Thomas King and Lee Maracle also undermine the pre/post binary, as it was and is those so-called tricksters that re-create the world. They represent the epitome of adaptation and transformation, but there is, as Lee Maracle says, still "horror in having had change foisted upon you from outside." This horror, another commonality among Aboriginal peoples, is expressed in several stories that explore the imposition of a hierarchical ideology (Basil Johnston), dispossession of the Métis (Tantoo Cardinal), the unjust treatment of Aboriginal war veterans (Jovette Marchessault), the impact of fascism (Thomas King), denial of Aboriginal peoples' humanity (Tomson Highway), forced relocations (Lee Maracle), and the Oka crisis (Drew Hayden Taylor). This is not a book about "Canada's Past," as the subtitle states, in the sense that the recounted events are behind us and no longer affect society; on the contrary, these stories draw readers in, maybe with an even greater urgency than the ones told by Yashinsky, because Aboriginal peoples are in a serious state of emergency that must be understood by non-Aboriginal people through Aboriginal perspectives. According to Qitsualik, stories help you to live another's life vicariously: "if the reader wants to understand a people, he or she has to live with those people for a while. And a story is the ultimate magic by which this may occur."

Canada needs stories, Aboriginal stories in particular.



Masterpiece of Nature

Paul Socken, ed.
Intimate Strangers: The Letters of Margaret Laurence & Gabrielle Roy. U of Manitoba P $16.95

Reviewed by Nora Foster Stovel

Intimate Strangers is the perfect title for Paul Socken's edition of the correspondence of Margaret Laurence and Gabrielle Roy, because these two authors—the premier writers, Anglophone and Francophone respectively, of the 1960s and 1970s in Canada—were intimate as correspondents, although they met only once. The meeting occurred at Malcolm Ross' 1978 conference on Canadian literature in Calgary, where Roy's *The Tin Flute* topped the list of the 100 best Canadian novels, and Laurence's *The Stone Angel* headed the list of the top ten Canadian novels.

The correspondence is slight but intense, comprising 32 letters—eighteen, typed, by Laurence, and fourteen, handwritten, by Roy (some of Roy's are lost) —stretching over seven years, from 1976 to 1983, the year of Roy's death. Although fifteen of Laurence's letters were published by J. A. Wainwright in *A Very Large Soul: Selected Letters from Margaret Laurence to Canadian Writers* (1995), and four of Roy's letters were printed in *Canadian Women's Studies/ Les Cahiers de la Femme* (1987), it is nevertheless good to have them all together.

Margaret Laurence, the more outgoing of the two, initiated the correspondence. These two writers who shared so many commonalities but were divided by the language barrier—Laurence did not read French, to her great chagrin—were brought together, ironically, through translation. Joyce Marshall—who translated some of Roy's texts (and won the Governor General's Medal for translating *Enchanted Summer* in 1976), worked with Laurence in the Writers' Union of Canada, for which Laurence served as Acting President during its formative years—helped initiate the relationship.

Socken's edition includes a brief introduction in which he delineates the parallels and affinities between these two kindred spirits: for instance, they both originated in Manitoba and felt an enduring love for the Canadian prairies. Both were also enduring a difficult period in their writing careers and personal lives. Socken states, "Both in failing health, beset by loss and problems, concerned about their legacy, and worried about the fate of their country and social justice, theirs were two worlds that touched." He adds, "this special, late-flowering friendship was meaningful because it was so firmly based on shared values and a shared heritage." Indeed, Roy speaks of "the incredible joy of feeling, at last, understood and seen soul to soul."

The epigraph from Ralph Waldo Emerson —"A friend may well be reckoned the masterpiece of Nature"—is also well chosen, for these two women confided in each other about painful problems in their professional and personal lives. Their letters address issues such as the 1976 Quebec election, their writer's block, the banning of *The Diviners* by religious groups in Peterborough County, and Laurence's unsuccessful attempts to write another novel. Their closings modulate from "Sincerely" to "God bless, and much love" in the course of their correspondence, as the epistolary relationship develops.

Each writer admired the other's work greatly, and they sent their books to each other. Laurence tells Roy, "There is something so crystal-clear and flowing and pure about your writing. . . . And it is the quality of gentleness and tenderness in it, combined with the knowledge of life's painfulness and sadness, that speak to me." Roy responds, "As always with your books, I right away felt immersed in a strong, sure element, and let myself be borne away with an acquiescence which comes only, I suppose, with perfect trust."

Intimate Strangers is an attractive little book with an elegant font, good paper, and a stylish dust cover. It also includes a few footnotes, a brief list of Laurence's books and a brief, selective list of books about Laurence. For admirers of Canadian writers in general and the work of Laurence and Roy in particular, this correspondence is invaluable.

Canadian Heroines

Merna Forster
100 Canadian Heroines. Dundurn $24.99

Stephen Hume
Raincoast Chronicles 20: Lilies and Fireweed: Frontier Women of British Columbia. Harbour $19.95

Reviewed by Catherine Carstairs

Canadian heroines have returned. In the heyday of second wave feminism, a spate of books feted Canadian women including Carlotta Hacker's *The Indomitable Lady Doctors*, Grant MacEwan's *And Mighty Women Too*, and *The Clear Spirit* by Mary Quayle Innis. Today, there is a resurgence of Canadian heroine books, including the two to be reviewed here, prompted perhaps by the rage for biography that is sweeping the book world, or the aging of the second-wave feminists. The heroine genre is not without its problems—there is a tendency to downplay the racist attitudes and the class privilege enjoyed by many of these "great" women. But there is a place for celebrating women's intelligence and courage, and drawing attention to the many obstacles they faced. And it is good to see Canadian women's history get so much attention.

Merna Forster's *100 Canadian Heroines* is formulaic, but it works. Each of the clearly written two- to three-page entries starts with a photograph, or image of the "heroine," and a catchy lead. They all conclude with a list of honours, such as the subject's being recognized as a National Historic Person, or appearing on a postage stamp. Where possible, the entry rounds off with a quotation from the woman in question.

Forster covers a broad range of heroines—scientists, teachers, photographers, artists, explorers, even a professional gardener (Isabella Preston). Familiar figures appear including Emily Stowe, Nellie McClung, Madeleine de Verchères, and Laura Secord, but they are joined by women who will be unfamiliar to many, including Marie Dressler (a comedic actress in Hollywood movies in the late 1920s and early 1930s), Helen Harrison (a World War II pilot), and Taqulittuq (an Inuit guide in the mid-nineteenth century).

The book provides some coverage of First Nations women, African Canadian women, and Asian Canadian women. Geographically balanced, the book is heavy on heroines from the first-wave of Canadian feminism, and the women of New France, while paying less attention to women from the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries, and very little to women whose accomplishments are more recent. (This absence occurs because Forster only included women who have died.)

One of my favourite stories was that of Anna Leonowens of the "King and I" musical fame. Who knew she had a Canadian connection? Leonowens was born in India of British parents in 1831. She married at 18, and lived in England, Australia and Malaysia, before her husband died. In her early thirties, she headed to Bangkok to work for five years as a governess for King Mongkut of Siam. Later, she moved to New York where she became a popular public speaker. When her daughter and son-in-law moved to Halifax, Leonowens followed and became an active suffragist, heading up the Women's Suffrage Association. She later moved to Montreal where she worked for the Baby and Foundling Hospital.

Stephen Hume's book is less successful, although it has beautiful photographs and some interesting quotations from primary sources—usually in sections blocked-off from the rest of the text. Hume starts with the story of Caril Chasens, a British Columbia artist and back-to-the-lander who settled near Hazelton, BC thirty years ago. She provides, in his view, one of the "elusive living connections between ourselves and the frontier experienced by pioneer women 150 years ago." This piece sets the romantic tone for the rest of the book as it goes on to provide thematic coverage of women's history in BC from the arrival of First Nations people to the start of World War II, pausing to pay special attention to more famous women such as Frances Barkley (the first female European to arrive in BC), Amelia Douglas (the wife of James Douglas, the Governor of the colony of British Columbia), and photographer Hannah Maynard. But Hume does not neglect working class women, although here he tends to focus on the "exotic." Two chapters deal, at least in part, with "hurdie-gurdie" girls; he talks about native women's work in the canneries, and there are sections on Chinese, Japanese, and Jewish women. Hume's language is flowery and dramatic, which may appeal to some readers, but I found it difficult to follow.

In both books, I occasionally wanted the authors to go a little further in their research, or do some deeper analysis. Forster includes James Miranda Barry as one of her Canadian heroines. Given that he lived his entire adult life as a man, does it really make sense to define Barry as a "heroine"? Forster lauds Helen MacMurchy for fighting for the "feeble-minded," which she did, but she also believed in institutionalizing them and preventing them from reproducing—attitudes deeply different from the norms today. Hume devotes two pages to the confusing tale of how he uncovered the story of Margaret Florence McNeil, the first white baby to be born in Vancouver, whose family moved to Portland, Oregon just six weeks after her birth. Given the numerous births in Vancouver before McNeil's, celebrating her accomplishment in being born seems little more than a paean to colonialism.

But these are the picky comments that one might expect from an academic

historian, and in my conclusion I will put them aside. These books have engaging stories, wonderful photographs, and provide a good introduction to Canadian women's history. They deserve to be read.

Rue Britannia

Phillip Buckner, ed.
Canada and the End of Empire. UBC Press $29.95

Reviewed by Christl Verduyn

In his introduction to this collection of essays, editor Phillip Buckner contends that most Canadian historians have espoused a nationalist view of Canada's relationship with Britain as an "outmoded, unnecessary, and distracting colonial relationship" of "mutual antagonism." A former President of the Canadian Historical Association, Buckner challenges this view. Canadian historians and academics in general, he suggests, should take a cue from Australia where "a major re-assessment" of the Anglo-Australian relationship is well underway. "In Canada," Buckner asserts, "we have yet to see even the beginning of a similar debate. The empire has come to be viewed as a complete irrelevance, and its significance to Canadians in the past is almost completely ignored." While this claim lacks resonance in the field of Canadian literary criticism and undoubtedly among some Canadian historians as well, Buckner is passionate about the need for greater recognition by Canadians of the end of the British Empire. "One does not have to believe that the empire was a 'good thing' to believe in its importance to generations of Canadians," he argues. His own memories of growing up in the 1950s, "born in Canada but with English parents," are positive. But not "everyone," in those years, was reading British novelists "unthinkingly absorbed [in] their idealistic view of empire," or became a Boy Scout and sat around camp fires "singing imperial songs." Not "everyone" viewed the Queen's coronation in 1953 "with great enthusiasm," and not all readers will be satisfied that Buckner "suspect[s] that [he] was not atypical of a majority of young English-speaking Canadians growing up in the 1950s." For those who are not, as much as for those who are, however, *Canada and the End of Empire* offers interest as a collection of essays that express and explain its editor's passion and argument for the centrality of Canada's relationship with Britain to understanding Canada and its (hi)story today.

The collection comprises eighteen essays, all but Buckner's presented at a symposium held in London, England, in 2001. The contributors cover such key topics as the 1956 Suez Crisis (essays by John Hilliker, Greg Donaghy, and José E. Igartua), the 1964 Canadian flag debate (Gregory A. Johnson and Lorraine Coops), Anglo-Canadian trade relations (Tim Rooth, Bruce Muirhead, Steve Koerner, Andrea Benvenuti, and Stuart Ward), and socio-cultural perspectives. George Richardson dissects the "fantasy structure of national identity" in the Ontario and Alberta educational systems after 1945. The provinces' history and social studies curricula in particular masked identity conflicts in favour of a fantasy of identity tied to Britain and empire. Paul Rutherford and Allan Smith trace the eclipse of British preeminence by post-war American ascendancy in the domain of culture. Concern about American influence led to support for British "reinforcements" in a number of cultural areas, such as theatre, for example, which saw the creation in 1953 of the Shakespearean Festival of Stratford, Ontario. Fears of Americanization extended to the fields of politics and economics, as a number of essays show, and to the rapidly changing world of technology. Douglas Francis skilfully presents the insights of Harold Innis and George Grant on the role of technology in the shift of empire from British to American soil and the implications

for Canadian autonomy. The end of British Empire held a different meaning for Canada's Aboriginal peoples, as Jim Miller emphasizes in his essay. A longstanding First Nations practice of taking causes directly to London (often without result) ended as well, requiring the search for new avenues of representation. Regrettably missing from the collection, notwithstanding the editor's efforts, is a view from Quebec on the end of empire as well as an essay on attitudes toward empire amongst the immigrant population that was changing Canadian society during the 1950s. These absences are particularly puzzling given the extent of scholarship on Canadian multiculturalism and immigration in recent decades and despite Buckner's explanation that "francophone historians are [only] beginning to realize that the empire did affect the evolution of Quebec in a variety of ways" —as a good deal of Quebec literary production has indeed shown.

Good scholarship challenges received wisdom, probes paradigms, revisits issues, and produces new perspectives. There is value in returning to the topic of the end of British Empire and its significance to Canada and, some generalizations and gaps in its presentation aside, *Canada and the End of Empire* makes a useful contribution to scholarly appreciation of the importance that the end of empire has signified to many, if not all, Canadians.

Freud Interrupted

Catherine Gildiner
Seduction. Knopf $34.95

Reviewed by Amy Leask

Seduction is an unexpected conglomeration: part murder mystery, part psychological drama, and part academic dissertation. A long-time student of Freud and Darwin, Catherine Gildiner has poured her academic passion into her fiction in a manner that makes it accessible to those not intimately acquainted with psychotherapy. This particular combination produces a compelling plot, a cast of characters in which Freud would revel, and a veritable feast of food for thought. However, it also results in a piece of fiction that is somewhat disjointed as several very different types of books struggle to coexist between two covers.

Kate Fitzgerald, a convicted murderer with a privileged but checkered past, finds her incarceration cut short. She bides her time in prison by reading the works of Freud and is released back into society with years of expertise, and a number of lingering questions concerning her own criminal inclinations. More refreshed than jaded, Kate speaks of her time in prison with a certain fondness, commenting, "Not many people share a cell for nearly a decade with one of the greatest geniuses of all time . . . Freud kept me sane." Her analyst negotiates her release by offering her services to another ex-con turned private investigator who is tracking a killer. Kate is dragged through a somewhat contrived international search for a ruthless killer and into her own murderous motivations.

The novel is, to say the very least, multifaceted. Interspersed with the protagonist's re-entry into society are snippets of both Freudian and Darwinian theory. Using both theories, Kate is able to confront her personal demons. The murder mystery aspect of the novel itself has all the elements of a psychological thriller, including its fair share of smoking guns, red herrings and a healthy, perhaps gratuitous, measure of blood and gore.

Gildiner juggles a vast and diverse group of characters, each of whom is a devout follower of Freud, and each of whom stands as a poster child for at least one Freudian neurosis. Among the suspects are a corrupt therapist, an unscrupulous womanizer, an aging Holocaust survivor, a basement-dwelling eccentric, and Freud's own daughter.

Each individual is amusing, if not somewhat of a caricature. Several are explored in sufficient depth to arouse the reader's curiosity, but others are presented as mere stereotypes.

The chief difficulty with *Seduction* is its attempt to be several types of narratives simultaneously. Kate's internal struggle, as well as her sexually-charged relationship with her fellow investigator are compelling, with believable dialogue and a realistic degree of humour. The inclusion of Freudian and Darwinian theory is also engaging. Gildiner's narrative style never ceases to be witty and informed, and she resists the temptation to allow the novel to become overly cerebral. Parallels between Freud's relationship with his family and Kate's strained relationship with her own are also intriguing from an academic and a humanistic perspective. The tone and pace used in the story of the actual murder investigation, however, are significantly more sensationalistic, as is the characterization of other suspects. Passages providing insight into Kate's motivation in murdering her own husband are often interrupted by somewhat incongruous events. *Seduction* could be an interesting psychological profile or a thrilling whodunit, but as a combination of the two, it seems inharmonious.

Crashing Illusion

Steven Hayward
The Secret Mitzvah of Lucio Burke. Knopf $34.95

Carole Giangrande
An Ordinary Star. Cormorant $29.95

Reviewed by Samara Walbohm

The recent novels of Steven Hayward and Carole Giangrande are both highly enjoyable. Both are set in the first part of the twentieth century before and during World War I, but while Hayward chronicles a very specific geographic locale within the burgeoning "melting pot" immigrant community in urban Toronto, Giangrande's story takes place in the Bronx and is very much focused on the interconnected lives within the extended family of Sofia Gentile. Although written in contrasting styles, both are tales of magic and love entwined within specific (often violent and disturbing) historical contexts.

Because of a personal taste for the pure story, my preference lies with Hayward's impressive first novel *The Secret Mitzvah of Lucio Burke*. An enchanting read, rippled with love, religion, sports, violence, and magic, Hayward's book is grounded within a very real, very important, if overlooked, moment in Canadian history. Perhaps particularly relevant to Torontonians, *Lucio Burke* relives and reimagines a time when Riverdale Farm was the city's zoo, when children played ball for keeps in the Christie Pits. Reminiscent of Ondaatje's *In the Skin of a Lion*, *Lucio Burke* remythologizes and adds magic to lost moments and forgotten (yet very real) places in Canada's urban past. Also like Ondaatje, Hayward brings to life, with humour, with illusion, and with some real history thrown in, the growing, new immigrant community which is the Toronto (and the Canada) of today. Christian miracles intertwined with glorious mitzvahs (performed by a Catholic no less) help to create what is essentially a conscious and well-calculated intellectualization of Canada's political, racial, and religious history in the 1930s. The end result is an intimate and appealing story set against various social tensions. With well-timed humour, the novel simultaneously discovers the lesser-known origins of Canada's leftist uprisings alongside the ubiquitous "knock-knock" joke. Through Hayward's effectively drawn characters, we learn that miracles, even fake ones, are usually a good thing and that in the end, even in the midst of simmering racial and political chaos, it is usually about a girl.

If Hayward's *Lucio Burke* is a story-driven novel that injects magic into a Depression-era Toronto landscape, Giangrande's *An*

Ordinary Star suspends literary realism with moments of destabilizing illusion. Both novels are set against historical events and within geographical locales (*An Ordinary Star* takes us back through the memory of a dying Sofia Gentile, to her coming of age in an Italian neighbourhood in the Bronx during the 1920s and through the war). However, while magic (or miracles) in *Lucio Burke* serves to root the characters and fiction to specific moments in history, and, certainly to propel the story itself, historical events in *An Ordinary Star* unsettle the narrative and, in effect, free the story from narrative expectation. Much of the novel, told through the words of Sofia, is about this very letting go, this freedom from gravity—or, as Sofia herself says, an imagining of herself in three dimensions. Characters, specifically Sofia's Aunt Julia and her blind cousin Christopher, Julia's son, continually float above ground: "Sofia could sense that her Aunt had the power to fly away. Not that she'd do such a thing—just that her relationship to gravity wasn't as secure as everyone else's." Love too is a type of letting go in the novel. When Uncle Paul asks Julia to marry him, "he held her hand tight as if love were in every sense a loss of gravity, as if one or the other of them might scuttle away, like scraps of paper in the wind." Sofia's observations about flight and disappearance are abstract, and particularly precocious as the musings of a young teenager. Readers are asked to suspend disbelief or at least to remind themselves that they are inside memory where connections to reality can be temporarily released. Such illusions are strengthened when they are set against reality, the impending solar eclipse, the haunting image of the very real Hindenburg disaster—Sofia's Aunt and Uncle mysteriously vanish from the crash. This mystery, this disappearance of characters so central to Sofia's own life story, propels the final third of the novel. Here the tone changes somewhat—and it is more powerful for it. While so much of the preceding story takes place as a memory, as an illusion, the mysterious disappearance of Julia and Paul presupposes a truth, a rational reason for their escape which can be uncovered. The answer to the mystery lies somewhere buried in the papers of Julia's own father, a found business card, and a long-forgotten German bond. What makes this mystery such an appealing one is its inextricable link to magic, coincidence, flying, and a bleak period in history—the rise of Nazism.

Both *The Secret Mitzvah of Lucio Burke* and *An Ordinary Star* are worth reading. Both novels embellish less-than-glorious historical moments with entertaining story, magic, and a sense of literary history. (I particularly like Hayward's young Dubie selling a set of knives to "a reporter from the *Star* who said his name was Callaghan"—one can almost see this transaction as it occurred.) But while Hayward's novel is a more conventional story (and I think, stronger for this), which pulls close lovers of Canadian history, *An Ordinary Star* challenges narrative expectation and is more fraught with elements of illusion. The novel is, like Aunt Julia, alternately floating in air and crushed under its weight.

A Deep Pocket Read

Thomas Wharton
The Logogryph: A Bibliography of Imaginary Books. Gaspereau $27.95

Reviewed by Duffy Roberts

To talk about the physical presence of Thomas Wharton's *The Logogryph: A Bibliography of Imaginary Books* is to talk about the book proper: or, as the text itself tells us, "it is the entrance itself, rather than the depths, that truly impresses upon a visitor the grandeur" of this read. *The Logogryph* has two removable dust jackets, each with embossed titles and line drawings. The type itself seems to hover subtly over the pages, the reader acutely aware of what

imaginative substance the text enacts—aware, that is, of the act of reading. If one listens to the narrative, it would seem that the text is set in Mythica, born of the mind of a master Atlantean engraver, but the folks at Gaspereau, Gary Dunfield and Andrew Steeves, apologize that they were unable to find Mythica and insist that it is set in Adobe Caslon. The suspended effect is produced by the stock the book is printed on: as the text would have it, paper borrowed from the nest of snow eagles made with "the tide of waste paper generated by [a] city's meticulous bureaucracy"; and as Gaspereau would have it, it's a result of Zephyr laid paper, Smyth-sewn. The whole book fits snugly in a pocket, being no more than approximately six inches wide, four inches tall, and an inch thick, which seems to make vocal its request to be carried around and thumbed through often. In short, the texture of this book, a texture that invites the reader to flip, feel, measure, and muse even before the words appear, heralds its purpose. A man in one of the stories stands "frozen between horror and admiration," rendered speechless by another character's response: "I … you …" he falters. The ellipses here communicate not only a silence, they also mute the separation between the "I" and the "you," or, and here we get to the *purpose* I alluded to, they mute the separation between "text" and "reader."

The Logogryph is a loose container for the following: three epigraphs (for example, "While the reader reads, the book dreams," anonymous seventeenth century Chinese critic); short stories, italicized poems (also possibly lists); a fragment from the lost journals of Leonardo da Vinci; musings on what Atlanteans' books might look like (Imagine swimming around and through squid ink instead of flipping and scanning in a conventional linear fashion); a line drawing of a pineapple; a fragment from an index of "A"s from "*Ab ovo*" to "Alberta" to "All"; a "wispy-bearded old hippy who had an annoying habit of shaking his head and sighing wearily whenever someone bought one of his books" and "who looked ready to weep" when someone bought a boxful; the "possibility" of other stories in other books; and finally, a "treatise," a "thesis," and a "wish."

The "treatise": Wharton assumes (and here I make an assumption about Wharton's assuming) that "a book comes into being *through* or by way of the reading, and not prior to it"; he allows an unusually, and wonderfully, large place in his texts for the minds of his readers. The "thesis": Wharton wants (and here I make an assumption about the desires of an author) to illuminate the power of story, to divulge a power he knows as a master craftsman of stories, "to count them, distinguish them, divulge them, inform against them . . . to tell their stories, to tell one's own, to tell nothing at all, which is the story hidden within all stories." The "wish": a boy (although it could be a girl, or anyone who learned his/her own mythologies by listening to the cadences of many interconnected stories) who becomes a writer and who "wishes not simply to remember a vanished time, to recreate a moment, but to restore *everything*."

While this text doesn't restore *everything*: some of the fragments are not as strong as the others and I wonder if this book is *for* everybody, or at least for readers who desire a stronger narrative thread. Part of its power is in its ability to send readers outward into their own imagination, memories, and the possibilities born of each. Paradoxically, this book "allows you to *not* read." I see much of Thomas Wharton's *Salamander* in *The Logogryph*, or, rather, I see Nicholas Flood's commissioned task of creating the "infinite" book. Ultimately, the infinite in *The Logogryph* is in its ability to draw me back to it, into it, and out of it into my own imagination and imaginative potential. For this alone, it's worth taking out of your pocket and reading.

Return of the Family Romance

Emma Richler
Feed My Dear Dogs. Knopf $35.95

David Gilmour
A Perfect Night to Go to China. Thomas Allen $26.95

Reviewed by Afra Kavanagh

It is widely recognized that modern western culture, unlike some eastern and traditional societies that emphasize social and community values, is obsessed with the individual, with personal identity, and the building blocks of identity formation, as well as with identity dissolution. In recent times, the postmoderns have also emphasized the self's shifting and fractured nature, and to some extent ignored the concept of an essential self, the consciousness that stays with us despite the shifting and the fracturing. Yet it is that self that holds us together and is the storyteller that reconstructs experience into narrative. Of course, narratives about the struggles of the self to assert itself or to fight off dissolution continue to attract us, and are especially compelling when told by first person narrators because then they have qualities of immediacy and other verisimilitudes that appeal to readers hungry for detailed descriptions of the thought patterns of others. Emma Richler's *Feed My Dear Dogs* and David Gilmour's *A Perfect Night to Go to China* are novels told by first person narrators that focus on the internal workings of a mind under pressure. Richler's novel is a daughter's detailed description of her youthful anguished anticipation of inevitable tragedy, and Gilmour's novel is a father's tale of the loss of his six-year-old son and his ensuing breakdown. These two novels, different in style and content, both have authors who, although they add coherence to the narrative, refuse to add coherence to the life. They both depict an individual's struggle and failure to comprehend and control life's vicissitudes. In Gilmour's novel Norman loses his son and all touch with reality, and in Richler's work Gemma's superstitious attempts do not prevent harm from befalling her family, and in both cases, the narrator's love and loss of a family member drives an intimate account of a fractured being. Both novels are similar in their ability to engage the reader in realistic representations of individuals with unique voices, narrative styles, and motives for telling the story.

Emma Richler aims to set straight anyone who still has illusions that a child's world is all fun and games. She presents us with lots of verbal and other play, but along with them she introduces the fear of mortality into her portrait of an idyllic family life. Her protagonist, Gemma, harbours an irrational belief that her responsibility is to protect her family from harm; thus anxieties multiply in the life of this hyperintelligent, sensitive, religiously confused narrator. As a *bildungsroman*, this life narrative creates the same problem as a "real" autobiography: the narrator is "writing" from a later perspective, and armed with knowledge of the future, casts the narrative trajectory toward an already known outcome. The novel shows Gemma developing over a period of years a sense of self that is intricately bound with her family. Her feelings are underscored by the narrative's circuitousness. She goes on for so long, and obsessively covers the same ground so many times, that the reader longs to escape, to stop reading. The claustrophobic effect she creates is different from the one created in Richler's first book, *Sister Crazy,* a short story collection that successfully manages similar materials and a similarly allusive style. Those stories were also written in the voice of Emma Weiss, the gifted and intense middle child of this large and loving family, whose patriarch is a charming but overwhelming sports writer, a Canadian Jew, and whose matriarch is a warm English

beauty who was once a model and a Christian.

But in this novel, Gemma's "family romance" builds up to the death of the youngest child and the mother's suicide. The build-up itself is quite engrossing because Gemma has a complex mind and an unusual way of thinking, which Richler creates through an intricate tapestry of images and references ranging from physics, fiction, film, and philosophy to Christian saints and the Jewish tradition. But the long awaited final catastrophe is anti-climactic in part because Gemma anticipates the tragedy so vocally, and foreshadows her brother's death and the loss of her mother frequently. The let-down is also a result of the lyrical and eulogistic style Richler uses to handle these events. The last pages recall the final scene of the final act of a Shakespearean tragedy; both contain an overview of the carnage and sentimental comments about the dead. However, in this novel there is no cathartic relief for the reader. The narrative instead provides the protagonist with a form of spoken therapy; her "telling" is repetitive, interpretive, and always reaches into the past for the clues to identity formation and family disintegration. Telling her story also serves this emotionally arrested child narrator as an elegy for the lost golden age of family love and its sufficiency.

On the other hand, Gilmour aims to explore a grown man's methods of dealing with the loss of family. His narrator, Norman, is a fifityish television show host who likes to drink. His narrative begins when he "pops down" to the local bar for three quick beers, leaving the door to his downtown Toronto apartment unlocked. He returns to find that the son he had left sleeping has disappeared. His slide into grief and delusion is the novel's preoccupation since the loss of his son is literally the end of his world. Once this cataclysmic event has taken place, nothing else matters to Norman, and the narrative becomes more dreamlike and surreal. The dream strategy is apt in a way, since the loss (and what a debilitating way to lose a child) is nightmarish—an uncomfortable experience for any parent to undergo, write, or read about. But carried along in the narrative present, we are fascinated by the smooth description of Norman's downward spiral. Gilmour's writing is hypnotic and seduces us into suspending our disbelief. We sympathize with Norman because of the enormity of his loss—that is, his "punishment" for breaking the rules of responsible parenting. Norman's pain and guilt at the boy's disappearance spin out of the realm of the rational, and he is unable to deal with his responsibility for his son's disappearance or to consider the possibility that his son may have been abused or murdered. Instead, he believes that his son speaks to him and that he will find and bring him back. Later, he finds comfort in another dream in which his son has joined his (Norman's) deceased mother on a Caribbean island, and he begins to prepare to join them. These ghosts and the world that he dreams they inhabit have such a pull on Norman that he is unable to be a husband or to operate in the everyday world; in a robotic state he holds up a bank to finance his trip to their island. His mental breakdown complete, he takes a quantity of pills as his method of access to the island where he thinks his son is, then "wakes up" and proceeds to a strange house where he expects to find his son watching a ball game on TV as he had foreseen in a dream. This blurring of the boundaries between Norman's dream and real worlds, and between the worlds of the living and the dead has a seductive ambiguity which is heightened by the continued use of the present tense in the closing paragraphs.

Norman loses his son, his wife, and his job, and is left as blind as Lear and equally as mad. However, he is not half as tragic; he enters the strange house on the strange island carried there by the unrealistic belief that he will find his son there. He never

"recovers" his senses. The author draws us into this dream/journey narrative, and creates for us an imaginative afterworld whose effect we do not shake off until we close the book. After the novel ends, we are left chafing that Norman's loss and journey have not taught him anything about life, love, and responsibility to others. Moreover, when we pull away from the tale, when we pause, we find that the attractive ambiguity of the ending in fact gives rise to important artistic questions. We are not sure if the narrator is a ghost or a madman, and either of these states creates doubt about his ability to narrate, for if he is dead, then he must have performed the unlikely feat of coming back from the dead "to tell us all," and if he is mad, then we want to know how he can tell such a coherent and engaging tale. In any case, Norman's motive for telling the story, although not expressed, seems to be to take us along on his journey and in the process to confess his transgressions, and so, in seeking to connect, perhaps he is soliciting absolution.

L'imaginaire collectif des Québécois

Gérard Bouchard

Raison et contradiction. Le mythe au secours de la pensée. Éditions Nota Bene/Cefan $9,95

Compte rendu par Robert Vigneault

Ce petit ouvrage est le texte d'une conférence prononcée par Gérard Bouchard à Québec, en mars 2003, « à l'invitation de la Chaire pour le développement de la recherche sur la culture d'expression française en Amérique du Nord (CEFAN) de l'Université Laval ». J'ai hésité toutefois à le qualifier de « petit » tellement le champ de recherche qu'il explore est immense: il s'agit, en fait, d'un ouvrage programmatique sur les imaginaires collectifs. C'est ce qui explique l'ampleur de la mise en situation théorique et une certaine schématisation du propos: ce ne sont pas des conclusions définitives que présente l'auteur, mais un programme de recherches susceptibles de mobiliser ses énergies pour le reste de sa carrière. Il y aurait beaucoup à dire sur la richesse de cette pensée; je n'en retiendrai que l'aspect le plus innovateur à mes yeux, à savoir que les constructions discursives des acteurs sociaux et politiques ne sont pas fondées uniquement en *raison* mais qu'elles assument en s'édifiant des *contradictions* de nature diverse, ce qui confirme l'à propos du sous-titre de cet ouvrage: *le mythe au secours de la pensée* ainsi que le recours à l'expression d' « imaginaires collectifs » pour désigner ces grandes pensées qui nous gouvernent.

À première vue, en effet, les pratiques discursives relèveraient de la seule raison, du moins selon certains scientifiques et philosophes rationalistes. Et pourtant, rappelle Bouchard, elles sont constamment traversées par l'imaginaire ou encore par le mythe. Soulignons toutefois que ces derniers concepts, aucunement péjoratifs ici, ne sauraient être assimilés à un dérapage de la pensée. Énoncé de sens invérifiable sur le plan logique, le mythe est motivé par des croyances, des rêveries, des émotions, des intérêts, et pourtant, l'auteur l'aborde « non pas comme produit de l'inconscient ou de la raison folle, mais en référence avec l'exercice ordinaire de la raison dans la pensée [...] dans son rapport fonctionnel, utilitaire même, avec la raison ». Pas question, donc, de considérer l'histoire de la culture comme une victoire de la pensée rationnelle sur la pensée mythique: ces deux instances se sont toujours comportées, et jusqu'à nos jours, comme un couple indissoluble, ce que Gérard Bouchard, du reste, a déjà copieusement démontré entre autres dans son admirable étude sur la *Genèse des nations et cultures du Nouveau Monde*.

À partir des études concrètes menées sur des nations, cultures et personnages représentatifs, l'auteur en est venu à pouvoir

proposer une typologie de la pensée productrice d'imaginaires collectifs. Il se produit toujours une confrontation entre la raison et la contradiction, mais les scénarios de ce complexe débat peuvent se ramener à trois. La pensée *radicale* règle le problème de l'aporie en supprimant l'un de ses termes et en érigeant l'autre en dogme, tout en recourant aussi à des mythes féconds. La pensée *organique* s'accommode de la contradiction en créant un système ouvert et dynamique, sustenté par des mythes efficaces. Enfin la pensée *équivoque* laisse aussi subsister le contradictoire, mais celui-ci, juxtaposé seulement, forme un ensemble composite et non un système, qui n'engendre au bout du compte qu'incertitude et impuissance.

Pour illustrer cette typologie, l'auteur avance un échantillon d'exemples variés, mais ce cadre théorique m'a paru tellement suggestif qu'on me permettra d'y aller de mes propres illustrations. Exemple éminent de pensée radicale, celui de l'Église catholique, forcément dogmatique et conservatrice. Il est absurde, en effet, d'accuser l'Église de conservatisme ou de reprocher au pape de s'opposer au relativisme moral de notre époque. Cette Église n'est-elle pas fondée sur l'Évangile de Celui qui aura énoncé la plus révolutionnaire affirmation de l'histoire: « Je suis la Voie, la Vérité et la Vie »? La pensée que commande l'Église—le *dogme*, littéralement—s'enracine dans le mythe tout-puissant de la foi en Jésus-Christ.

Remarquable exemple de pensée organique que celle de Bachelard, à la fois scientifique et épistémologue rigoureux, et poète de la rêverie sur les éléments. Chez lui, pas de dualisme ou de cloisonnement raison vs imagination, subjectivité vs objectivité, mais un seul projet de dépassement d'une apparente contradiction, sublimation dialectique qui se refuse à condamner l'imagination au nom de la raison. Bachelard a pratiqué cette dialectisation du psychisme, notamment dans *La psychanalyse du feu* où il réalise scripturalement l'union du propos scientifique et de l'expression subjective. Le *nous* savant ici n'est pas occultateur du *je*, c'est un *nous* psychanalysé (au sens bachelardien), l'instance cognitive d'un sujet qui se dialectise constamment entre ses pôles affectif et intellectuel, donc sans désaveu de l'imagination.

Enfin, un cas plutôt désolant de pensée équivoque (ou fragmentaire, syncrétique), celle des Québécois oscillant entre le Québec et le Canada, le paradoxal « Québec libre dans un Canada uni » d'Yvon Deschamps. En l'absence d'une véritable fierté française, voire du simple sens de la dignité humaine, le peuple québécois ne trouve pas la force et l'audace qu'il faudrait pour s'affirmer indépendant, et se contente, d'une saint-Jean Baptiste à l'autre, de la tacite reconduction du *statu quo* . . . Un sursaut, parfois, purement conjoncturel, une « condition gagnante » (comme celle du scandale des commandites); mais il s'agit d'une « fierté » éphémère, vite emportée par le confort et l'indifférence. Or il est évident que cette équivoque, cette ambiguïté, ne peut conduire, avec le déclin de la population francophone, qu'à l'assimilation ou l'anglicisation complète, à plus ou moins long terme, comme cela se produit de plus en plus chez les populations francophones des autres provinces.

Bref, un petit livre qui donne à réfléchir sur la complexité des imaginaires collectifs où le mythe se marie à la pensée.

Meticulous Displacements

John Metcalf
Standing Stones: The Best Stories of John Metcalf.
Thomas Allen $26.95

Reviewed by John Moss

John Metcalf is a veteran writer and the stories in *Standing Stones* are offered as his best work. Taken together, they offer sad portraits of failure and mediocrity. A single

protagonist moves through superseding narratives in a strange progression, enduring small metamorphoses as he erases earlier selves. Exposure to his self-conscious ruminations, in first person and third, displaces character development and plot. His name changes, the circumstances of his life achieve minor revision, and his metafictional amanuensis, the "author" mediating from the margins, sometimes obtrudes to declare frustration over the vagaries of language. The protagonist is usually a writer, sometimes a teacher, occasionally both; he is sexually clumsy and socially without grace, which is the fault of women and society; and he is always an Englishman, condemned by class limitations, a limiting education, and a cramped personality to live his adult life in exile—among Canadians, apparently. Although contemporary, he seems hardly aware of the second half of the twentieth century, most of which strikes him as irritating and trivial. He does not connect. He is presented by his author as a man lacking in empathy, for whom life is a great disappointment; he is placed as a righteous curmudgeon in a world perceived without irony or wit.

When a narrator observes, "I'm not all that interested in the kids. When they don't irritate me, they bore me," and then moves on to qualify his feelings for his daughter, "My considered desire is to flog the living daylights out of her," the reader is neither edified nor amused. Moral and social vacuity is enervating, griping personalities grating. When a subsequent narrator sneers, "Eskimo" carvings are "great nasty lumpy things," the reader recognizes the kind of person one generally avoids. In fiction, where cruelty and condescension can be intriguing and of vital concern, to find them merely expressions of the attitude that holds the stories of a collection together is unpleasant.

Metcalf is a very deliberate writer. Although his prose seems gelled in the aspic of memory, slurred, sometimes, like the recollections of a man desperate to capture in words what annoyed him in earlier life, it is meticulously wrought to express the displaced sensibility of his erstwhile hero. Image after image piles up, not as in Alice Munro to redeem the past, nor as in Clarke Blaise to absolve his petty condition, but simply to record the times and the place where in retrospect life seemed more vital, where a nasty childhood and sneering adolescence were somehow more authentic. Both diction and syntax in these stories are redolent of an England long since subsumed by the visions of writers like Martin Amis, Margaret Drabble, and the later V.S. Naipaul; an England at once comic and humourless, solipsistic but filled with self-loathing, absurdly heroic yet squalid and small. The dissociated quality of his language, while it is skilfully deployed, leaves Metcalf's polyphiloprogenerative protagonist in Canada a pitiable nonentity, and his Canadian context unknowable. Perhaps we are too provincial for words.

All This Sleuthing

Robert Majzels

Apikoros Sleuth. Mercury P $19.95

Reviewed by Ori Livneh

In his famous Meridian speech, Paul Celan spoke of art as forming the subject of a conversation (*Unterhaltung*, alternatively amusement, entertainment, or diversion) "that, we feel, could be endlessly prolonged" were it not always being interrupted. True to form, Robert Majzels' latest book, *Apikoros Sleuth*, is full of interruption: something or someone is always interjecting and "spoiling the fun." At the outset of the book, the unnamed narrator is comfortably uncomfortable in his shabby, room-and-a-half apartment and in his playfully dejected conversations with himself, when a newspaper obituary interrupts the sauntering 12-point narrative with large, bold uppercase,

announcing the death of an old associate: one Antonio Pigafetta, a "once-upon-a-time revolutionary" turned dentist.

This is a familiar setup for detective fiction, which traditionally begins with the vulgar interruption of a murder upon a complacent (shall we say) "*Unterhaltung.*" This "interruption" is covert, but it leaves traces, and the task of the sleuth is to "retrace" the intruder. The more complex the interruption, the more numerous are the crime scenes and phantom traces, and the fewer are the certainties. So far, so good. But what happens when the narrative itself plays a cat-and-mouse game with the reader, anticipating every move, yielding only so far and then disappearing into the text? What happens when the reader is no longer sure whether he or she is "pursuing a story. Or fleeing from it. Crablike and bleeding?"

Where is the scene of the crime in *Apikoros Sleuth*? Is it the room-and-a-half apartment, where a body and a head are found, irreconcilably apart? Yes. And yet. Is it the text itself, which is always being interrupted and interpreted in the margins? Yes. And yet. Is it western philosophy, that endlessly prolonged monologue? Certainly the clever sleuth would do well to scrutinize it for traces of blood. And yet. Language? Is it our trust in language and narrative that is rudely interrupted? The narrative itself, which deftly eludes a line or a centre? Yes, and yes. And yet.

You might wonder what sort of sleuth can be expected to interpret so many interruptions. Certainly not anyone easily exasperated, for the crimes of the book are many. Nor anyone easily ulcerated by a surfeit of play. But anyone who feels comfortable walking in "the long hermeneutical boots of sleuthing" (to borrow one of Majzels' hilariously elegant phrases), or in other words, anyone willing to "practice exegesis on the street" (to borrow another), will find a surface very receptive to long and meandering walks and an author rich in conversation for company. The cautious, who forever postpone interpretation, are not welcome; nor are the overconfident, who have already read all the books. Interruptions create their own time, which is always now.

All this sleuthing would be so very cumbersome were it not sustained by stunning typographical layouts and Majzels' acerbic, hyperactive wit. The latter is often of the laugh-out-loud variety—take, for example, this description of one Mr. Booger Rooney: "The dictionary was the vessel of his rise to power. He was loquacious and sesquipedalian, he was lexiphanic and Gongoresque; I mean he apostrophized a revolutionary soteriology in Ciceronian tones. Must I go on like a peddler? Alright, he was a big gabber."

The graphical layout of each page mimics the Talmud, with two columns of interpretation cloistering a seed of text, like a pistachio, and margins that are further populated with small remarks and intertextual references. A sudden flash of colour upsets the monotony of black on white type. When a word or a phrase from the Hebrew interpolates the English text, it is done in such a way that calls attention to the potent graphical dimension of the Hebrew alphabet. The Hebrew becomes viral: as it infects the page, it interrogates the text, calls into question its authority.

Readers without an inkling of Hebrew, rabbinical Judaism, or critical theory are not barred entry to the book. The Talmudic layout and division of the text into numbered folios bring to mind the "Daf Yomi," a strategy of reading and interpreting one *daf* (folio) of the Talmud each *yom* (day), which takes seven-and-a-half years to complete. The figure of the Apikoros Sleuth, suggested by the title, represents the book as much as it does the reader it invites. "Apikoros" is a rabbinical word that refers to those unlearned or unorthodox in their relationship with the Talmud, those

"outside." An Apikoros sleuth, then, might be one who strategically retraces references, burrowing through them selectively, and so (dare I say it) interrupts the book with an interpretation.

Dreaming of Butterflies

Des Kennedy
Flame of Separation. Insomniac $21.95

Carol Malyon
The Migration of Butterflies. Mercury $18.50

T.C. Badcock
Honour Thy Mother. Breakwater $19.95

Reviewed by Margaret Steffler

Both *Flame of Separation* and *The Migration of Butterflies* contain epigraphs referring to the butterfly dream of Chuang Tsu: "I do not know whether I was then a man dreaming I was a butterfly, or whether I am now a butterfly, dreaming I am a man." These two novels successfully probe those moments in characters' lives when significant but elusive transformations take place. The strength of both books is characterization that is conveyed with considerable psychological depth and carefully paced discoveries and revelations. Dexter Cooke, the narrator of *Flame of Separation*, confesses enough about himself to capture the reader's attention, but does not know himself well enough to give too much away. Nancy, Sarah, and Fern, the three main characters in *The Migration of Butterflies,* use one another, as well as dreams and memory, to reveal to themselves and to the reader what is needed in order to "follow the butterflies."

Honour Thy Mother by T.C. Badcock also focuses on character, but lacks the psychological depth of Malyon's work and the narrative suspense of Kennedy's novel. Badcock's plot incorporates coincidence and mystery to link the lives of characters and families from various Canadian regions and generations. Unfortunately, the flat prose fails to produce credible characters and the novel does not succeed in engaging the reader. Badcock didactically includes historical background about the exploitation of fishing communities in Newfoundland, which, while informative, does not redeem the novel. Tedious and superficial details bog down the long narrative (345 pages), while textual errors and typos distract the reader. The emphasis on shocking connections across space and time leaves little room for depth or complexity beneath the web of obvious suspense on which the narrative depends.

The less transparent suspense employed by Kennedy is used to deepen the reader's emotional responses. The theme of lost children, for example, is wrapped in layers of dreamy mystery which intensify the reader's empathy as the layers are unravelled. *Flame of Separation*, using Charles Lamb's essay "Dream-Children" as a literary context, explores the pain of miscarriage and childlessness. Dexter struggles with the "pity over our childlessness" exhibited by those who pose "the question [which] would come at us suddenly, like an attack dog, at dinner parties, informal gatherings, chance meetings." The depth of his grief is conveyed as he compulsively follows a father in the Vancouver airport: "twin daughters held his hands and chatted with him gaily as we walked the long corridor to the terminal. I trailed after them like an astronaut in zero gravity, connected to a space station by tenuous lines." Children lost to others and by other means enter the narrative in ways that complicate and comment on the losses experienced by Dexter, providing a context for the dream children that hover over the text.

Carol Malyon's *The Migration of Butterflies* is also concerned with lost children. Sarah, the middle-aged character at 45, has lost two babies—one to adoption and the other to miscarriage. Less literal losses of children are associated with 19-year old Nancy and the elderly Fern. The motif of lost children

extends to lost childhoods; Fern, for example, "would go back to that old neighbourhood and wander one street after another, trying to relive her childhood, hoping to improve it, talking to ghosts." As the novel progresses, the reader is drawn into the thoughts and memories of Fern, which tend to dominate and overshadow those of Sarah and Nancy. Although all three characters are "searching for butterflies," Fern's search seems the most believable and familiar. At certain points, Fern sounds like Laurence's Hagar Shipley: "She dozes off for a while, then wakes up crying, 'Oh no! I've got to go to the bathroom! Right now!'" At other points, she echoes Daisy Goodwill Flett from Shields' *The Stone Diaries*: "All those years. Whatever happened during them? Not much. She did not change the world. . . . She invented nothing, never had an original thought . . . . She didn't dazzle like the stars, or even birthday candles. But sometimes she almost felt the darkness flicker. Perhaps that should be enough. It will have to be enough."

The Migration of Butterflies is firmly rooted in Toronto and within a Canadian literary context, as emphasized by the inclusion of Anna Jameson on Nancy's reading list. Fern's attraction to ferns, particularly their names—"Fern likes the double words best: *crested shield, dissected grape, hart's tongue, silvery glade*"—recalls Daisy's literal and symbolic relationships with plants and flowers, as well as Anna Jameson's interest in new world flora and naming. Fern's character is familiar, but familiar in a comfortable rather than a derivative manner. I know this woman well—even intimately. Her voice resounds in my head long after the book has been closed.

Three from the Peg

Liam Durcan
A Short Journey by Car. Véhicule $16.95

Chandra Mayor
Cherry. Conundrum $14.95

Alison Preston
Cherry Bites. Signature Editions $16.95

Reviewed by Melissa Steele

Winnipeg-born and Montreal-based Liam Durcan's first book, *A Short Journey By Car*, is a collection of 16 disparate stories linked by major and minor obsessions with the paradoxical freedom and confinement of being behind the wheel.

The title story is an eerie, dreamy tale about a dentist dragged from his bed in the middle of the night by Stalin's henchmen and driven away to work on the Comrade Leader's teeth. "Kick," one of the few stories that does not include a steering wheel, is about two grown sisters and their memories of learning to swim (the younger one by being "thrown in") and about the experience of pregnancy as driving forward without quite being in control. ("Besides, in a moment a kick will come without anyone's urging.") Other fatalistic trips include a son driving his father to hospital, a truck driver running illegal toilets across the border to the US, and a Montreal metro driver whose train attracts suicide jumpers the way a North Ontario's trucker's grill attracts black flies.

Some of Durcan's stories feel stagnant because too much of the action takes place in the narrators' heads and because Durcan is attracted to characters whose sense of isolation is their defining feature. Durcan is searching for his voice in this debut collection. In places, the stories are overwritten, the metaphors straining too hard to be deep, but other times, the writing is deft and the images feel effortless. The tenderness woven into the loneliness in many of these stories makes it clear that Durcan is a talented writer beginning to find his way.

Chandra Mayor's first novel, *Cherry,* is a grim series of snapshots of the life of desperate, drugged Winnipeg street kids. Each vignette is packed with imagery, most of it fresh, some of it overkill. The author appears desperate to get all the words out that she can before the end of the world comes. The end may come in the form of paralyzing personal despair, random acts of violence, or the acceptance of suicide as the only possible escape from pain and loneliness.

The male-female dichotomy in the book, set up early, is always shouting that men rape and kill. Women survive by getting high, attempting suicide, eating "froot loops," sleeping with each other, and otherwise being supportive while the men are out face-stomping and spreading hate. Though the pages are packed with descriptive detail, the streets and shabby apartments where Cherry lives run together. One slum is as good and as bad as another. In the dully mean, frozen-dog streets of Winnipeg's rotting core, no forward or backward motion, or any kind of motion is possible because everyone worth caring about is a nameless victim.

Mayor's decision to switch between the first and the second person makes the book impersonal. Who is the "you" who appears randomly, just when we thought we were getting to know "I"? To add to the malaise, the vignettes are carelessly linked. Carly has moved to Vancouver we are told in one section. In the next section, Carly is still in Winnipeg, and pages later appears a goodbye scene in which she does move to Vancouver. The newspaper clippings that appear throughout the text to explain various social issues such as gay-bashing are clumsily written and preachy.

Alison Preston's mystery novel, *Cherry Bites*, shares little with Mayor's *Cherry* beyond the similar title and the Winnipeg setting. Both *Cherry a*nd *Cherry Bites* imply setting by naming familiar streets, river bank sites and businesses, but neither does a satisfying job of evoking the city beyond its landmarks. Where *Cherry* is throbbing with self-absorbed misery, *Cherry Bites* is a mercifully light and sometimes humorous mystery about a woman, Cherry, who is haunted by her creepy younger brother, Pete. *Cherry Bites* is also a casual philosophical exploration of the nature of evil, guilt, and familial loyalty. Not quite enough happens in *Cherry Bites*, and for a mystery, it lacks surprises, but this lack gives the story a prairie feel and makes it less formulaic than it might have been. Preston takes the reader on an enjoyable stroll through Winnipeg's Norwood neighbourhood, stopping to look at the Red River, watching the Canada geese head south, pausing for refreshments at the Norwood Hotel and a soft ice cream at the Dari-Whip, all the while musing intelligently on the question of what makes a bad boy bad.

Sheila Watson's Life

F.T. Flahiff

Always Someone to Kill the Doves: A Life of Sheila Watson. NeWest $34.95

Reviewed by George Melnyk

Before she died, Sheila Watson informed her friend Toronto academic Fred Flahiff that she wanted her story told, and he has fulfilled her wish. But whether what she meant by her story is what he has provided will surely be the subject of debate for some time to come. Sheila Watson, née Doherty, was born in New Westminster BC in 1909. She has held a place of honour in the pantheon of Canadian literary greats with her 1959 novel *The Double Hook*. A second, but earlier written novel, *Deep Hollow Creek*, came out in 1992, and was shortlisted for the Governor General's Award.

How did Flahiff come to write Watson's biography? They had been students together in a University of Toronto graduate class taught by Marshall McLuhan and had kept

up a correspondence and occasional meetings over a number of decades. It was to Flahiff that Watson sent her archive in the 1990s, including 27 personal notebooks that chronicled her life (except for the earlier years). By this act she provided Flahiff with both a great opportunity and a serious responsibility to present to the public a life and a literary consciousness that, like the oracle of Delphi, often spoke and wrote enigmatically. Flahiff did not have an easy task and the shortcomings as well as successes of his book are tied directly to Watson's own conflicted and self-effacing attitude toward a writer's public identity.

The most fascinating part of the biography is Flahiff's exposé of her marriage to Wilfred Watson, the Governor General's award-winning poet, avant-garde dramatist, and unfaithful husband. Flahiff explores for the reading public what Sheila herself considered to be a complicated marriage. The book is written with affectionate familiarity, albeit tinged with discomfort, as if Flahiff found his task disquieting. Watson was a person who hid many things both as a woman and a writer, and Flahiff seems hesitant to make dramatic statements or draw obvious conclusions. His language leaves such matters to the reader's imagination. In the preface he confesses "my indebtedness to her [has] made impartiality impossible."

The book has a modest selection of photographs but sufficient to give the reader a clear sense of Watson's petite stature and the piercing look for which she was famous. Less positive is a style of attribution that involves an introductory sentence to locate the quotation, which then has to be coordinated with a general list of sources at the back of the book. The absence of specific page or footnote citations will make it difficult for others to confirm the context and hence validity of the quotations. It is also unclear where Watson's papers are at present and if they are accessible to scholars.

Equally peculiar is a large section (70 pages) of material directly from her Paris notebooks from the mid-1950s which is plunked down in the midst of a more conventional biographical narrative. Flahiff, when he acquired the notebooks, took up the task of transcribing them, and, apparently, was initially interested in having them published as diaries rather than in publishing a biography. The decision to opt for biography has yielded mixed results.

Sheila married Wilfred in 1941, while she was pursuing a career as a school teacher, including a stint in the Cariboo country of British Columbia. Their marriage got off to a rocky start when Wilfred had to stay in Vancouver to complete his studies and then went off to serve in World War II. When he returned, they settled in Toronto, where Wilfred took graduate studies. "Sheila's attempts to understand their marriage," writes Flahiff, "and to accommodate to less than a perfect symbiosis of faith and love are central to her story." For those who knew them, as I did, their partnership seemed front and centre in their lives, a palpable presence, but not necessarily a positive one.

The Watsons spent a short time in Calgary, where Sheila completed *The Double Hook*. These were "[h]er most productive years as a writer," Flahiff states, based on her own account. The year (1955-56) she and Wilfred spent in Paris is covered in the notebook excerpts: its frank emotions are both fascinating and painful. On their return to Canada, they separated. She went to Vancouver and he to his academic job in Edmonton. She then moved to Toronto to work on her doctorate. They were apart for five years until 1961 when she moved to Edmonton to live with him and teach at the University of Alberta. It would seem that she decided to remain in the marriage platonically, while Wilfred pursued other relations.

In spite of this peculiar arrangement, Flahiff makes much of "their intense

intellectual compatibility." Sheila worked hard to make Wilfred's avant-garde poetry available to the public. In describing these efforts, Flahiff is not always accurate. Nevertheless, his recollections of his personal meetings and conversations with her are filled with laudatory descriptions, based on warmth and admiration for a woman with a very powerful presence. They do capture her personality—its feisty spirit, deep-seated courage, and generosity.

Because "her central literary relationship" was the one she had with her husband, Wilfred's perspective on their relationship needs further exploration. Was it one of professional jealousy over her status? Was it necessitated by his social shyness? Was it a kind of mothering on her part? Or was it something else? His actions toward her seem to be petty and self-serving. That Sheila served as Wilfred's "audience . . . teacher . . . editor . . . and agent" cannot be denied, but why she assumed these roles provokes mostly speculation. Why he acted toward her the way he did also merits further research and analysis. Flahiff mentions their 8,000-volume library as an example of their literary and intellectual union. Yet Wilfred, in particular, constricted and manipulated Sheila's external life and relationships. He comes across as a malevolent sort and Sheila as a victimized spouse and, whatever her recognition as a novelist, as a writer with too little space for herself.

Flahiff provides valuable understanding of both *The Double Hook* and *Deep Hollow Creek*, as well as clarifying the timelines of their production. Yet, despite insightful personal recollections, the gaps that he has to leave in his account and his uncertainty about how to interpret Watson's life are drawbacks. When I last saw Wilfred and Sheila shortly before they died—I was interviewing them for *The Literary History of Alberta*—Sheila presented me with a single copy of *Deep Hollow Creek*, while Wilfred presented me with a number of his works. I value that one volume of hers very much. Her reputation is assured. Now all that is required is a biography of Wilfred so that we may draw our own conclusions about one of the most important Canadian literary marriages of the second half of the twentieth century. Flahiff has provided tempting glimpses that make us desire a complete picture, whether one is possible or not.

Gendered Power

Melanie Dugan
Revising Romance. Sumach $16.95

Don Coles
Doctor Bloom's Story. Vintage Canada $19.95

Reviewed by Suzanne Rintoul

On the surface it seems that the only commonality between Melanie Dugan's *Revising Romance* and Don Coles' *Doctor Bloom's Story* is that both concern the ways in which literary production bears on individual notions of reality. Indeed, both novels reflect with ingenuity on the truth in fiction, the former by poking fun at a novelist's lechery and self-indulgence, and the latter by foregrounding a blossoming writer's obsession with the ways in which creative writing might provide a portal to unsettlingly real cruelty. Less obvious, however, is that both novels examine the relation between fiction and reality as they present specifically feminized positions. Albeit in vastly different ways, both raise important questions about the complex relationship between women and fiction.

Revising Romance follows a week in the life of a frazzled single mother assigned to edit the sprawling manuscript of a critically acclaimed and yet untalented writer and womanizer. Over the course of this week Elaine not only successfully manipulates Spencer Stone into severely amending his unfortunate novel, but she also considers a romance with used bookseller Nathan Marks. Elaine realizes that Spencer's unlikable

protagonist is based on the author himself, and that the imitation is bereft of any redeeming ironic subtext. This realization gestures toward the ironic self-reflexivity of gendered narration in Dugan's novel. Elaine's work— like Spencer's—exists in relation to particular constructions of gender and power. Ultimately, although the private lives of both characters seep into their narratives, Dugan writes Spencer as a power-abusing, intellectual man who is apparently ignorant of the relation between his privileged status and his craft, and Elaine as a woman whose literary work is often hindered by reminders of her status as mother, ex-wife, friend, and daughter.

Elaine predictably decides to take a chance on romance—but only on her own terms, not according to some conventional fantasy. Ultimately, then, as Elaine has been revising Spencer's particularly unromantic romance scenes she has, in effect, been revising her own attitude toward love. If all of this seems just a bit on the sentimental side, Dugan's attention to the position of the woman in the literary marketplace makes this book about much more than falling in love. The text places equal importance on women's careers, families, bodies, and hearts, implying with clever self-awareness that no literary work is created in a vacuum, and that this fictional woman writer, anyway, still has no adequate room of her own.

Billed as a mystery, Coles' novel is about an outsider's perspective on domestic violence and the responsibility to intervene. Ostensibly, however, since the book is so much concerned with writing, it is really about the responsibility of the writer and public intellectual. Dr. Bloom is a heart surgeon on the verge of giving up medicine in favour of literature. He joins a creative writing workshop, and meets the mysterious Sophie, a young woman he fears is being beaten by her literally heart-sick husband. This novel raises fascinating questions about men writing about domestic violence, insisting that the reader focus on the Gothic nature of the abuse of women. As Dr. Bloom and his lover realize the complexities of Sophie's situation—she is a sadist whose intellectualization of martyrdom and violence threatens to redeem her position and her husband's—the reader straddles the boundary between the fictions and realities of domestic abuse. Ultimately, this novel foregrounds the ways in which writing and representing violence shape our responses to it.

The characterization in this novel is admirable, with the notable exception of Sophie. This gap in complex characterization effaces the female victim of violence, an ironic reflection of the invisibility of domestic cruelty. Similarly ironic is the novel's position on the role of women in literary production. The fact that masculine authorities repeatedly interpret Sophie's writing as mediocre parallels the text's undermining of the woman's justification of the violence she experiences. The novel thus illustrates the tendentious nature of women's narratives of violence, mirroring social ambivalence about female autonomy in abusive situations. Accordingly, Sophie's story is consumed and adapted by Dr. Bloom's more authoritative story as the narrator struggles with his decision to protect her from her husband and from herself.

Although Dugan's novel concerns modern women, literature, and love, and Coles' novel thematizes creative writing and academia to examine problematic modes of representing violence against women, both texts explore feminized literary spaces with insight. Both Dugan and Coles therefore offer much needed forays into questions of legitimacy, authorship, power, and gender politics.

Candid and Curious

Pauline Butling and Susan Rudy, eds. *Poets Talk: Conversations with Robert Kroetsch, Daphne Marlatt, Erin Mouré, Dionne Brand, Marie Annharte Baker, Jeff Derksen, and Fred Wah.* U of Alberta P $34.95

Reviewed by Tanis MacDonald

The press release for *Poets Talk* calls the book " a provocative compilation of candid interviews" that "reiterates the value of inspiration, imagination and poetic re-invention." This is a tall order indeed, especially considering how often collections of interviews with writers fall prey to a sense of self-importance, and how often editors assert that their book contains statements that are significantly more candid or more insightful than those in other collections. However, *Poets Talk* has the courage of its convictions, and perhaps more importantly, its interviewers/editors have the curiosity to pursue the slippery matters of poetics and politics in Canadian literature. Asserting that the volume "address[es] the challenges of reading 'difficult' poetry," Pauline Butling and Susan Rudy have produced a book that satisfies with its wide-ranging interest in all poetic concerns, not the least because as editors and interviewers they ask the questions that need to be asked about Canadian poetics and its future. The poets included in *Poets Talk* have been chosen with an eye to providing a certain amount of coverage vis-à-vis generation, race, gender, and sexuality, but it is equally clear that the poets were chosen for inclusion based upon the combination of canonicity and challenge that their poetry represents to readers within and beyond the academy.

A book of conversations with Robert Kroetsch, Daphne Marlatt, Erin Mouré, Dionne Brand, and Fred Wah seems to offer a line-up of the "usual suspects," that is Canadian poets who are known for a certain degree of difficulty, encompassing demanding poetics and similarly rigorous politics of race, gender, and language. But *Poets Talk* offers a good deal of thoughtful rethinking, beginning with the inclusion of a three- to four-page biography for each poet, much longer than is usually included in a collection of interviews. Mapping out each poet's career, publications, and political or literary concerns, Butling and Rudy create a comprehensive look at the poets' formation and aesthetics. When the interviewers move into close readings of the poems, the foundational work on the poets' background and aesthetics textures the ensuing dialogue about the subversive use of language. The collection is aptly titled; the text supplies plenty of the poets' talk, often displayed in great, chunky, voluble paragraphs.

And some illuminating talk it is, particularly as Butling and Rudy consistently use the biographical information as a catalyst to discuss the size and scope of the poetry, rather than render it autobiographically narrow. Dionne Brand's detailed iteration of the origins of her politics outlines the rich social history of Toronto's black communities in the 1970s. Erin Mouré, who is always eloquent, is given the chance to discuss the necessity of the synaptic leap in the role of perception and memory. To read Daphne Marlatt musing (in mothertongue) about the development of her prose poem style is to read the style in process. Fred Wah links the continuing lure of "father" material to his project of "racing the lyric poetic." And all the talk is not agreement. Butling and Rudy challenge Robert Kroetsch on his use of gender paradigms, and Kroetsch replies with a discussion of the problems of parody and ethics in poetry that shows his willingness to reconsider his old positions. In all cases, the poets' joy at having their work intelligently read and closely considered is evident.

The inclusion of conversations with Marie Annharte Baker and Jeff Derksen, two less studied and less canonical poets, is worth

noting. Like her poems, Baker is witty and playful, though her subject matter (indigeneity, poverty, Aboriginal rights) is often dire; her conversation about the uses of humour and wordplay in First Nations cultures is one of the highlights of the book. Derksen's account of the formation of the often controversial and always intriguing Kootenay School of Writing provides a contemporary history of the genesis of this influential branch of poetics in Canadian literature. Though Derksen constructs himself as an international poet, his inclusion in this very Canadian collection is less ironic than he suggests, and more indicative of the need to think beyond rigid national and regional designations in poetry written by people with a Canadian passport.

The respect and attention that the poems receive in close readings will make *Poets Talk* of interest to those who are just beginning to explore the work of these poets, and renew the interest of those who are familiar with the work. By treating the poems as living texts and as canonical artifacts, Butling and Rudy do the poets the service of encouraging discussion about the material and cultural influences on the production of poetry in Canada.

Unhomely Terror

Nelofer Pazira

A Bed of Red Flowers. Random House Canada $34.95

Reviewed by Malcolm Woodland

The following passage appears early on in Nelofer Pazira's *A Bed of Red Flowers*:

> At the dinner table, one of my uncles gives us the news that Radio Afghanistan, the only radio station in the country that broadcasts from Kabul, has been announcing unbelievable reports of a revolution. All conversation stops. Our attention is turned to the small brown leather-covered radio that's been brought into the room. Low, ominous and sinister music replaces the laughter of our party. As if in a mystery movie, as if they want to prolong the suspense, Radio Afghanistan is playing one nationalist song after another. There is no information. We sit with our plates, quietly chewing our kebabs.

Here, Pazira portrays what Homi Bhabha might call an experience of "unhomeliness"—a moment when an often violent political and military world reveals its long-unnoticed presence within the supposedly safe and apolitical sphere of the home. *A Bed of Red Flowers* contains many such moments. It tells the tragic history of Afghanistan in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries as it impinges upon the private lives of a single household—that of Habibullah and Jamila Pazira; above all, it tells that story from the perspective of their daughter, the Afghan Canadian journalist Nelofer Pazira. That story takes us from the democratic agitation of the 1960s, through the Soviet-sponsored upheavals of the 1970s and 1980s, to the rise of the mujahidin and Taliban, and, finally, to the American-sponsored overthrow of that regime in 2001. In fact, the book moves in ever-expanding circles, since these stories in turn open onto others—onto a late stage of the Cold War that facilitated the rise of a violent form of Islamic fundamentalism (funded by the American government); onto the collapse of the Soviet Union; and, ultimately, onto the attacks on the World Trade Center and the world that emerged from its ruins.

That description indicates the subject and scope of Pazira's book; but I hope it also conveys something of Pazira's narrative method, which is one of the book's greatest strengths. For what impresses me most about *A Bed of Red Flowers* is the rigour, honesty, and intensity with which Pazira concentrates her gaze upon the small domestic events and objects that bear the imprint of vast political forces. The need to maintain a large stock of flour and rice; dust stirred up by

the Soviet tanks and trucks graying the flowers and foliage of the Pazira family garden; a poster of the narrator's favourite pop singer defaced by Afghan soldiers during a search of her home—these are the details by which Pazira helps her readers understand and feel how political violence infiltrates every aspect of daily life. Pazira shows us, too, how the everyday world pushes back against that violence, as when whole neighbourhoods spontaneously take to their rooftops to shout "Allahu Akbar!" (God is great) after the Soviet invasion; when children begin to hurl stones at Soviet soldiers and officials; or when boiling oil thrown out by a friend's aunt "accidentally" burns the soldiers who have just searched her house. And, of course, Pazira looks directly at the violence and oppression itself: a massacre and mass grave are described to her father by a dying soldier; her father himself is arrested and imprisoned; neighbours die in battle, or in bomb and missile attacks perpetrated by the mujahidin forces; and Pazira's own brother and uncle face enforced conscription in the ever-dwindling Afghan militia—the latter leading, ultimately, to the family's flight to Pakistan and then Canada. And although Pazira sometimes steps back from her narrative to explain the broader historical forces at work, these moves seem almost unnecessary; the big picture and the big themes emerge on their own from the steady accumulation of expertly selected and superbly organized detail.

Such implicit commentary is never more evident than in Pazira's approach to the plight of Afghanistan's women. Rather than announcing this concern directly and proselytizing on the subject, Pazira merely allows it to announce itself from the details of her own experience, and, above all, from the story of her friend, Dyana. Unable to leave Afghanistan, Dyana lapsed into depression under Taliban rule and committed suicide —a fact Pazira learned only during a second attempt to find her friend. Here the experience of "unhomeliness" acquires perhaps its greatest force, since under the Taliban rule the home itself became both the locus and means of gender-based political and religious oppression. This tragedy received a fictionalized treatment in the film *Kandahar*, in which Nelofer Pazira played the leading role. But the book's value extends far beyond its association with the film. *A Bed of Red Flowers* offers an exceptionally lucid, honest, and compelling account of a significant chapter in recent history.

Domestic Bliss & Other Lies

Richard B. Wright
Adultery. HarperCollins $32.95

Patricia Pearson
Believe Me. Random House Canada $29.95

Reviewed by Carrie Dawson

There is surprisingly little sex in *Adultery*. Although the title and the erotic cover image suggest otherwise, Wright's novel is largely concerned with the decidedly unsexy topics of culpability and remorse. The book's excellent opening sequence is set in a police station in the south of England, where Daniel Fielding, a successful middle-aged editor from Toronto, is questioned about the circumstances leading up to the murder of his colleague and lover, Denise Crowder. As Fielding sees himself reflected in the grim, wary gaze of the female police officer who interviews him, he senses that his life will never be the same. His futile attempt to win some small measure of understanding from the officers is evoked with precision and pathos: though he remembers the murder suspect as having the face "of a clenched fist," Fielding carefully characterizes the man as angry-looking because "he didn't want them to think that he was too fanciful or literary." But Fielding's literariness is evident throughout. For example, when a

colleague describes the media interest in Denise's demise as a "maelstrom," Fielding is inordinately pleased with her word choice. This moment matters because his erudition and his professional experience as a critic are such that the reader expects him to offer a more probing account of the reasons for his infidelity. Because Wright emphasizes that Fielding is happily married, and that the affair is not motivated by lust or sexual boredom, the absence of such an account is surprising and disappointing.

To be fair, Wright is clearly more interested in the consequences of Fielding's deception than its causes. Much of the novel is concerned with Denise's funeral and the abundant awkwardness of Fielding's attempts to comfort her family. Wright does excellent work with this material: where Fielding is out of his element—in the police station or in a tough bar with Denise's belligerent younger brother—the prose is taut and energetic, but where his protagonist is happiest, Wright is prone to platitudes: for example, whether or not it is self-consciously wry, Fielding's description of a sunlit fall day when he and his wife watched their daughter play field hockey as "a perfect little family tableau" is unlikely and grating. Because Fielding's first attempts to rebuild his relationship with his wife after the affair are rendered with unflinching honesty, Wright's idealization of the pre-adultery marriage is particularly regrettable.

Patricia Pearson's *Believe Me* doesn't cohere nearly as well as Wright's novel. But it is occasionally very funny, and is strong where *Adultery* is often weak—in the evocation of the daily rhythms of domestic life. *Believe Me* is the sequel to *Playing House*, wherein Frannie and Calvin struggle to cope with the arrival of their unplanned baby, Lester. Both books belong to the emerging genre of comic novels that set out to debunk the myths of motherhood and, true to its genre, *Believe Me* revolves around the amusing repartee between a perpetually nonplussed but hyperarticulate mother and her precocious, hyperarticulate child. But what makes *Believe Me* unique is that it is also about spirituality. When the impending death of her mother-in-law causes Frannie to confront the idea of religious faith, she takes four-year-old Lester to church and, as the service begins, he spies a large crucifix and hollers, "What happened to that guy?" Indeed. Frannie's attempts to explain "that guy['s]" condition and to do justice to questions such as "Is my soul in my brain?" are funny and smart, but I admired her more for her imaginative parenting than for her philosophy: when she looks at her sleeping child and thinks, "Without God, we are stranded in a spidery web of statistical probabilities, just windmilling our little legs in the air like stuck flies," I wished that Lester would waken and liven things up.

That said, Pearson is an experienced journalist whose great eye for salient, suggestive details is evident throughout. Here, for example, is her description of Frannie's memory of her first visit to New Waterford, Nova Scotia, where *Believe Me* is set: "I could barely comprehend how piles of Mexican bananas and John Grisham novels could wend their way so far into the wilderness. Geography ought to have cast the island culturally adrift. Perhaps in some ways it had. Certainly nowhere else in North America had I seen fire hydrants painted as Smurfs." If Pearson had been able to bring the incisiveness and wry humour that is evident in this passage to bear on her meditations about God, the book would have been as thoughtful as it is funny. But for the most part, she does not, and ultimately I was more captivated by the Smurfs in the street than the spirits in the sky.

Claiming Home, Missing Home

Rachna Gilmore
A Group of One. Fitzhenry & Whiteside $12.95

Tariq Malik
Rainsongs of Kotli. Tsar $18.95

Reviewed by Paulomi Chakraborty

Rachna Gilmore's novel for teenagers tells the story of 15-year-old Tara Mehta's negotiations with her identity as a Canadian of Indian origin. The strength of the novel is in its willingness to explore the difficult issue of race in a multicultural classroom or society without observing conventional pieties. Tara takes on her well-meaning white teacher's assumption that she, who looks "different," is not a regular Canadian; thus, she confronts the presumption that only white Canadians are regular Canadians. Tara catches the teacher offguard, exposing the tacit prejudices within Canadian multiculturalism.

Given the courage of the novel, its politics seems compromised by an assimilative impulse. Although it squarely challenges the notion that regular Canadians are white, the protagonist through whom the novel conveys the message, Tara, is a convenient candidate for "different but regular." Her difference is of the right degree: not too much. Tara cannot wait for Halloween but finds Diwali boring, has no connections to India, has a two-syllable user-friendly name (as do her sisters Nina and Maya), and English is her mother tongue. Tara is a regular Canadian all right, but what about her Somali peers in her school who speak English with accents? What about other Canadian children, who, unlike Tara, indeed have different mother tongues or inconveniently long, difficult-to-pronounce names? What about Canadians who miss another home? According to the novel they are regular Canadians as well, but somehow the novel does not seem as convinced of their claim to regularity. Nor does the novel ask the bigger questions: if Canada is truly a multicultural country, why must Tara need English as her mother tongue in order to be regular, why should she not get Diwali breaks, or have access to her family's history in the school curriculum? Furthermore, why must all models of collectives that Tara can access fail her individuality, so that she is destined to be a group of one? I am left with a sense of loss for Tara: do her white Canadian classmates ever have to feel this lonely?

A Group of One has great potential to raise important questions for its target audience. If read in multicultural classrooms, it will provide an excellent platform for necessary discussions. The biggest bonus of the book is that it is a delight to read. In spite of handling a difficult topic, it never turns dry or didactic. It is crisply written with both sensitivity and humour, captures a teenager's world ably, and has a captivating plot that alternates between family drama and school drama. Tara's story is compelling and sometimes surprisingly poignant. I think young readers will like to hear Tara's story; and if Tara is not really a group of one, then some young readers will find hers an enabling voice.

If Gilmore's novel is about claiming Canada as home, Vancouver resident Tariq Malik's collection of stories, *The Rainsongs of Kotli*, offers another narrative of home, that of homesickness. The home imagined and missed in Malik's book is not Canada but the home the author left behind, Kotli, a small town in Pakistani Punjab. Memory threads the stories together to form a short-story cycle. Loss and nostalgia inform each story: delirious homesickness, Partition trauma, lost childhoods, forced maturation, frustrated journeys back home, and obsessive quests for lost and forgotten objects are the subject matter of the stories. In the final story, "Malhaara Moving to the Sound of Water," the faqir Malhaara, named after the

soulful Monsoon-raaga Malhaar, roams through the streets, lamenting Kotli's "tragic diaspora" and the pain of losing the "loved ones" for those "left behind." The lament also echoes the author's own sense of loss and nostalgia.

In spite of the unifying mood, the stories are quite different from one another in plot and treatment. Both content and structure may challenge Western literary aesthetics and expectations. The writing style is more affiliated with Punjabi and Urdu literary traditions, and the language is rich and poignant, woven with evocative quotes from Punjabi folksongs and poetry. These long and episodic narratives are complex and personal. Although the stories betray a strong impulse to remember Kotli in minute detail, and while the world of Kotli is more male-focused, there is a refreshing restraint from fashioning the collection as a "third-world" work meant for a cosmopolitan audience. In this context, the rather selective policy of translating Punjabi words should be understood: sometimes the author translates the lines he quotes, sometimes not. He does not translate the Punjabi words that he uses himself, leaving the reader to guess the meaning from the context. Curiously, he provides a list of characters with some humorous cultural glossing at the end but not the usual glossary of non-English words. Finally, I must add that for a book so lovingly written and produced, the cover is unfortunate. The picture of a sari-clad South Asian woman has no resonance with the world of Kotli and damages the politics of the book by marketing the ethnic other as exotica.

L'intervenant considérable

Gaston Miron

Un long chemin. Proses 1953-1996. l'Hexagone $32.95

Compte rendu par Laurent Mailhot

Tous les genres de l'essai et de la prose d'idées, jusqu'à la prose tout court, la prose littéraire, sont présents et interactifs dans le recueil posthume de Gaston Miron. Des articles aux discours, hommages, préfaces, notes et « après-dire », rien ne sonne faux chez le compagnon, l'ami, l'intellectuel et l'artiste, le militant. Les « Circonstances » par rapport auxquelles il se situe en premier lieu sont riches, variées, nationales et internationales, d'ordre public et d'ordre privé. Elles n'ont rien d'anecdotique. Il y est question d'enseignement, de littérature québécoise, d'une langue à décoloniser.

Même les sections spécialisées – prospectus de l'Hexagone et autres textes sur l'édition et la diffusion du livre – ouvrent des perspectives plus larges que le présent immédiat. Les « Interventions politiques » sont hautement et précisément culturelles : contre la dilapidation des manuscrits, pour la « pleine humanisation de notre humanité ». Ces textes, datés et situés, sont pensés, imaginés et imagés : « Chu tanné », « L'époussette au lieu du coup de balai . . . »

Le sommet, ou le meilleur point de vue, d'*Un long chemin* se trouve dans deux conférences inédites, en partie improvisées, dont le caractère « oral » (signe d'urgence) n'empêche nullement, au contraire, l'intérêt textuel. Celle de l'Estérel, en 1974, lors d'une Rencontre internationale d'écrivains, fait un historique à la fois personnel, littéraire et politique de l'engagement d'un homme (Miron) qui, comme sa collectivité, souffre d'une « carence d'identité » et prendra les moyens d'y remédier. La conférence dite « au cahier noir », à l'Université de Montréal en 1990, fait le « Parcours et non-parcours » d'un autodidacte, poète « sur le terrain »,

« régionaliste » (pas provincialiste), à l'écoute de la langue qui se parle comme des livres qui s'écrivent : « Des souffrances me traversent de fond en comble, plus anciennes que moi, qui produisent un double héritage assez lourd, celui d'un passé pauvre de mots, et d'autre part, un héritage poétique, celui de tous les poètes québécois du XIXe siècle qui ont essayé de dire dans la misère de l'expression. »

Un court montage de traits acérés, ciblés (sur Trudeau, Pelletier, Pellerin, Claude Wagner…), répond à quelques « sophismes » et pose des « devinettes » socratiques. La plupart sont tirés de *Parti pris* et gardent leur actualité après quarante ans. Le trop court chemin se termine par un texte paru en 1951 dans *La Galette*, « Haro sur la facilité », qui témoigne « d'un volontarisme et d'un engagement communautaire » (Beaudet et Nepveu) typiques du jeune homme et que transformera l'homme mûr.

Comme avant lui Saint-Denys Garneau, comme ses contemporains Jacques Brault et Fernand Ouellette, Miron, ici ou dans sa correspondance avec Haeffely et d'autres textes, fait communiquer en profondeur (sous les ponts) les poèmes et les proses par sa présence personnelle et, pourrait-on dire, collective. Le massif de *L'Homme rapaillé* est exceptionnel, unique, mais les proses de 1953 à 1996 ne lui sont jamais étrangères. Elles le reconnaissent et il les reconnaît.

Crossing Boundaries

Cyril Dabydeen

Imaginary Origins: Selected Poems 1977-2002. Peepal Tree $23.95

Play a Song Somebody: New and Selected Stories. Mosaic $20.00

Reviewed by Pilar Somacarrera

The title of Cyril Dabydeen's latest collection of poetry inevitably evokes that of Salman Rushdie's seminal essay on migration, *Imaginary Homelands*. Whether Dabydeen thought of Rushdie or not, the collection definitely explores immigrant and diasporic experiences. Including poems from ten different collections ranging from 1977 to 1997, as well as a final section of "New Poems," the collection confirms him as a mature and established voice in the panorama of Caribbean Canadian literature. Many of his poems verge on the political, but his themes range from the history and myth of countries as far apart as Greece, Mexico, and Ireland, to a confessional vein recounting the joys and throes of love and family affairs.

Cyril Dabydeen's mixed East Indian, Caribbean, and Canadian "origins" make him a fascinating writer to explore. As a poet, he has drunk from various sources. He invokes Derek Walcott, whose mixture of cosmopolitanism and love for the Caribbean he shares. But Dabydeen is unique among Caribbean writers, as he himself states in some lines of "Amazonia," in "[his] interest / in all of South America," an interest revealed in poems like "Lenin Park, Havana" and "For Columbus." Connected to the American poetical tradition (of Latin America, the United States, and Canada), in his collections from the 1970s, we can perceive his admiration for such Canadian poets as Leonard Cohen, Irving Layton, and Margaret Atwood. However, reading through *Imaginary Origins*, the poet's own voice emerges with confidence.

The stories in *Play a Song Somebody* capture the same preoccupations of *Imaginary Origins*. In fact, some of his narrative passages have a definite poetic texture, and words and phrases from his poems reverberate in these stories. The references evoking the colonial world of the Spanish *conquistadores* Pizarrro and Cortez in the story "At Swim" also appear in the poem "For Columbus." As the author himself points out in his Afterword, this volume contains some revised early stories which

were unknown to the readers and some new stories whose themes and motifs, as Dabydeen himself remarks, "go back to his earlier work." What all the stories have in common is the theme of identity. In the story "Amerindians," the protagonist, like Dabydeen himself, is a descendant of indentured labourers brought from India to Guyana to work on the sugar plantations. In the first story, "Mammita's Garden Cove," the name of a cakeshop and meeting place on the protagonist's Caribbean Island, we cross from the urban landscape of multicultural Toronto, to the idyllic memories of his birthplace, as the plot becomes a pretext to approach the doublenness of the immigrant experience, as well as the reality of racism, as reflected in the eternal question "Where d'you come from?" placed at the beginning and at the end of the story. Inasmuch as they deal with this dialectic between the homeland and the country of immigration, one cannot avoid connecting them with Rohinton Mistry's *Tales from Firozsha Baag*. In Mistry's collection, as in Dabydeen's, memories from the homeland penetrate Canada, and the Canadian characters are reflections of those left behind in the native land. The motifs of swimming and the apartment building, central to Mistry's stories, are also present in *Play a Song Somebody*.

Having worked in race relations for some years, Dabydeen's writing illustrates his deep commitment to Canada's ideals of tolerance and cultural plurality as evinced in his most often anthologized poem "Multiculturalism." The story "Time To Get Out," about a taxi licence inspector from Trinidad who mistreats his fellow ethnic taxi drivers in Ottawa, is a parable about the ironies of official multiculturalism and could well be based on an actual anecdote of the author's work in race relations. Ottawa is also the setting of the title story, touching on the alienation of the indigenous people of Canada. Set in Ottawa or in New York, these narratives deal with triangles of love and friendship, human relationships at the personal level, but also with the coming together of countries and continents: "Asia, Africa, America—all one—with the stars moving above." They prove that Cyril Dabydeen is a writer of global concerns, permanently "crossing boundaries."

Radical Poetics

Pauline Butling and Susan Rudy
Writing in Our Time: Canada's Radical Poetries in English (1957-2003). Wilfrid Laurier UP $37.95

Reviewed by Kit Dobson

Reading Pauline Butling and Susan Rudy's *Writing in Our Time: Canada's Radical Poetries in English* quickly demonstrates that no single definition of radical poetics is possible. The book sets itself up as an investigation of radical poetries in English Canada, and ultimately concludes by significantly expanding "the definition of radical poetics at the end of the twentieth century." As a result, *Writing in Our Time* becomes as much an examination of how radicalism has shifted in English Canadian poetry between 1957 (the year in which the Canada Council was established) and 2003 as it remains an in-depth study of a series of poets, related conferences, and publishing houses.

Eschewing a single definition of the radical does not entail a lack of critical rigour. Butling and Rudy are deliberate in their strategies: the radical is chosen in preference to, for example, the avant-garde. The latter is for them a problematic term, one which Butling suggests "fits with capitalist economic agendas" that privilege narratives of teleological progress. The radical, instead, retains its power as a term tied to political contestation, one that can encompass a diversity of literary voices beyond those valorized for their perceived novelty. As such, *Writing in Our Time* tracks a concept of radicalism that shifts from the cultural nationalism concomitant with Canada's

centennial period, through the incorporation and co-opting of multicultural poetics in the 1980s and 1990s, and ultimately looking toward a self-conscious poetics that is deeply engaged in today's global, cultural, and political processes. This shifting perspective on radicalism allows Butling to acknowledge, for example, that while the poets of the *TISH* group were creating radical poetry in their time, the poetics that they espoused was a limited one, one that was liberating for "a mainstream male subject," while neglecting alternative subject positions.

This critique lends *Writing in Our Time* a strong credibility, as its criticisms are set alongside Butling's discussion of her marriage to Fred Wah, one of the *TISH* poets and the subject of a chapter by Susan Rudy. Both Butling and Rudy exist in close proximity to many of the authors under discussion, but rather than undermining their critique, their closeness to the subjects becomes the grounds for a direct and fair engagement in their materials. The composition of the book is particularly notable. It is divided into two sections by virtue of two chronologies that track the developments in Canadian poetry throughout the period under discussion (broken at 1979, the year of the "Writing in Our Time" conference in Vancouver, which signalled a series of shifts in Canadian poetry and gives the book its title). Rather than co-writing each chapter, Butling and Rudy divide up the materials, contributing chapters that cover writers, major conferences, and the publication market between 1957 and 2003. The poets discussed are those whom I might have expected: the *TISH* group, bp Nichol, Roy Kiyooka, Roy Miki, Nicole Brossard (specifically her engagements with English writing), Daphne Marlatt, Erin Mouré, Robert Kroetsch, and Claire Harris. Newer writers are also read, including Jeff Derksen, Lisa Robertson, and Rita Wong. All of these engagements are necessarily somewhat brief (the whole book comes in at 290 pages), but what is offered is compelling. I found the book to be an extremely useful preliminary engagement with each of the authors discussed and a solid narrative of how radical English Canadian poetics have shifted over time. The chronologies, which primarily detail shifts in publishing houses and the rise of the "little magazines" that underlie the poetry scene, are extremely useful as a means of making the information accessible and readable.

Perhaps most striking, however, is a chapter in which Butling analyzes her own engagements in English Canadian poetics over time, noting the manner in which she was systematically excluded from the predominantly male social relations, as well as the manner in which she contributed to her own marginalization through self-censorship. This chapter demonstrates, to a surprising extent, how personal English Canadian poetry can be, as Butling reveals her web of connections to poetic communities, beginning with her undergraduate education at the University of British Columbia. Reading through the archive of literary projects in which she was involved, Butling notes that she is virtually non-existent in the poetic record, despite her ongoing work. Rather than merely blaming the exclusions on the hierarchies of poetic circles, she balances her critique with an analysis of her own complicity in self-silencing as a result of her gendering. The chapter lends a welcome level of intimacy to the book, while giving readers a strong sense of what is often at stake in poetry.

Writing in Our Time emerges as a fine book that invites readers behind the scenes of the published record of Canadian poetry, drawing upon interviews and conversations with authors, while simultaneously engaging directly with their work. Necessarily idiosyncratic, Butling and Rudy's book does, indeed, expand what it might mean to compose radical poetries in English Canada, all the while tracking the key poets and works that have pushed the definition of the radical since 1957.

Chronicling Unheard Voices

Kamala Elizabeth Nayar
The Sikh Diaspora in Vancouver: Three Generations Amid Tradition, Modernity and Multiculturalism. U of Toronto P $26.95

Reviewed by Doris R. Jakobsh

This volume is a most welcome addition to previous studies of Sikhism in the Diaspora, particularly the Sikhs of Vancouver, who comprise the largest non-Christian group in the Lower Mainland. As such, the Sikhs of the region are an important site of study both for Canadian society and the Sikh Diaspora at large.

Nayar focuses extensively on the social interactions and tensions among three generations of Sikhs in light of larger issues of multiculturalism and modernity within Canadian society. While acknowledging Sikhs' shared features within the broader category of South Asians in Canada, Nayar steers clear of the weaknesses inherent in generalizations about the wider Indo-Canadian community by focusing on the issues specific to the Sikh community in Canada, namely, the process of moving beyond its traditional roots from within the peasant community of Punjab, to its encounter with urbanization and modernization (without having experienced the industrialization process of major Indian cities), as well as issues surrounding the apparent message of universalism inherent in Sikh scripture, the *Adi Granth*. This she contrasts with the more specifically regional, linguistic, and cultural milieu of Punjab.

Chapter 1 focuses on the historical immigration patterns of early Sikh pioneers in Canada, as well as outlining both the aims and methodology of her study. Chapter 2 moves on to transitional patterns of communication between and among three generations of Sikhs, the first categorized as "Orality," focusing on traditions of storytelling from within the interviewee's personal experiences, largely devoid of analysis. The second category, "Literacy," refers to Nayar's second generation Sikh contacts having the ability to read and write, yet still operating within the conditioning of the first category with some leeway in translation and analysis. "Analytics," the third category, refers to the "modern mentality" of the third generation of Sikhs in Canada, which moves beyond literacy to embrace self-reflection, with less of the cultural conditioning inherent within the previous two categories.

Once the framework of communication patterns used by the three generations is established, Nayer analyzes and places interviewee's comments within the contexts of family relations, religion, and community, the latter conceptualized through the lens of "community honour," highly appropriate given the cultural sensitivity and centrality of *izzat* or honour among Punjabi Sikhs. In discussing family relations, Nayar explores issues of family structure, values, intergenerational conflicts vis-à-vis notions of authority and communication barriers. Her chapter on religion focuses on issues of particularity versus the inherent universality of Sikhism, religion versus Punjabi-ness in customs, religious practices, and ideology, and the process of their redefinition by first, second and third generations of Sikhs in the Diaspora. Two chapters focusing on "community honour" delve into issues of social control, the community's attempts to preserve cultural and religious institutions and practices, and notions of ethnic insularity within the framework of Canadian multiculturalism. Through a well-balanced and highly analytical approach, Nayar examines what she considers to be the most important issues and responses facing the Sikh community in Canada, offering not only a valuable historical survey, but a unique contemporary perspective as well.

While the volume is without doubt an important and highly sophisticated

contribution in its unique approach to the study of Sikhs in Canada, Nayar's framework delineating communication patterns of the three generations of Canadian Sikhs tends to be rather too rigidly established, to the point of prototyping; communication patterns by their very nature are inherently fluid and non-conforming. The author attempts to fit individuals into the "blueprint" offered, but divergence from this blueprint by the three generations observed is not given enough attention by Nayar. Further, the centrality of Sikh women's role and status in Canadian society has not been given due consideration in the volume, despite these issues repeatedly coming to the fore in discussions concerning family, religion, and the community at large.

Nonetheless, despite these weaknesses, the volume articulates and chronicles important and, in many cases, heretofore unheard voices from within the Sikh community. The accounts are presented in a highly perceptive and convincing manner that will serve members of the Sikh community and scholars of Sikhism well in coming to a deeper understanding of the prevalent customs and approaches surrounding, and in many ways guiding, the practices and attitudes of this important minority group in Canada.

Quests of the Old and the Young: No Utopias

Rabindranath Maharaj
A Perfect Pledge. Knopf Canada $32.95

Neil Bissoondath
The Unyielding Clamour of the Night. Cormorant $32.95

Reviewed by Stella Algoo-Baksh

A Perfect Pledge confirms Rabindranath Maharaj, its Trinidadian-Canadian author, as a major post colonial writer and potentially a worthy successor to V.S. Naipaul. Strongly reminiscent of Naipaul's *A House for Mr. Biswas*, the novel is overtly and perhaps deliberately derivative, but it treats its East Indian subjects with a kindness and sensitivity lacking in Naipaul's distinctively acerbic work. Maharaj highlights the humanity of his characters, who inhabit an often perverse, cruel and mercurial world in which the odds appear to be always against them but in which "a perfect pledge," a pledge which prevents humans from giving up, inspires them to keep working toward their goals. *A Perfect Pledge* contains none of the scathing, corrosive satire endemic in Naipaul's novel, none of Naipaul's sweeping condemnation of Trinidad East Indians' practices and beliefs, and certainly none of the denigration of the people as living in a place of darkness and dereliction, in which none can achieve his or her potential. In contrast, Maharaj's engagement with similar issues assumes a playful and comic tone. This humorous element underscores the writer's empathy with his characters—the mirth accentuating the pathos which underlies characters' attempts to transcend the human condition.

Though thematically postmodern, the lengthy seven-part novel eschews the structural complexity of postmodern writing in favour of a more traditional approach to plot, structure, and chronology. In characterization, the influence of Dickens is obvious as the portrayal of many of the characters borders on caricature. *A Perfect Pledge* centres on Narpat and his family but zeroes in on what is wrong with everything, with the way people eat, drink, pray, and dress, and Maharaj adeptly captures, with his eye for detail and ear for dialect, a bleak, claustrophobic, and suffocating environment. Through gentle satire and humour, he exposes Narpat's eccentricities, especially his inflexible nature. Yet the character's hilarious commentaries regarding the shortcomings of his community often indicate that he is astute in laying the blame for their circumstances on alcoholism, ignorance,

and indolence. Yet reader empathy with and sympathy for the characters are secured through Maharaj's historical contextualizing, which he does with admirable subtlety. Colonialism and its dehumanizing effects, the author implies, are more than partly responsible for the present circumstances in which Narpat and his fellow characters find themselves. Their devastating effects have been both physical and psychological and the scars they have left will take generations to heal.

The novel posits that some of Narpat's daughters, and certainly his son Jeeves, are on the slow road to recovery, which augurs well for both the younger generation and the East Indian community as a whole. Narpat's construction of a sugar factory to give control over their crops and lives is a sensible idea but comes to no fruition because colonization has robbed him of the opportunities to fulfill himself. A useless windmill symbolizes Narpat's partial defeat, partial because his son has gained insight into his father's goals and will in turn strive towards his own goal—his own piece of land.

A Perfect Pledge is a valuable addition to literature, especially postcolonial literature, and well worth reading for its penetrating insights, its masterful marriage of dialect and standard English, and of course its scintillating humour.

Unlike Maharaj's novel, which is positioned in the author's native land, Neil Bissoondath's *Unyielding Clamour of the Night* explores events in the fictional setting of Omeara, which is distinctly reminiscent of Sri Lanka, a country the author has not visited. Drawing on a plethora of sources, Bissoondath centres on a small town bedevilled by political, religious, and ethnic conflicts which mirror the strife and antagonisms endemic in present-day Sri Lanka. Against this backdrop, Bissoondath follows the destiny of an idealistic young man, Arun Bannerji, who rejects the comforts and security of a wealthy family to dedicate himself to teaching the poor and illiterate Omearan children. Confronted by the townsfolk's lack of enthusiasm and support and by a dilapidated ill-equipped school, Arun finds his task initially formidable and ultimately impossible. Ever compounding his discomfort, too, is the insidious and pervasive threat of the nearby national army. Though Arun's well-intentioned quest is doomed from the outset, it triggers his awakening, his growth from naiveté to a most unlikely hero who makes the supreme sacrifice on behalf of those people whose cause he has not at first recognized.

Plumbing the psyche of Arun, the parvenu, Bissoondath effectively delineates the far-reaching ramifications of violence and brutality and of a reality in which even the innocent are entangled in a web of deceit, exploitation, and obscenity. He demonstrates, powerfully, how an innocent's awakening to the fact that he and his family have been implicated in this reality can prove personally devastating. In Arun's case, his personal redemption is secured through an act of morality reflected in his self-sacrifice for what he deems an ethical and just cause.

Bissoondath's writing is energetic and engaging though it is often blemished by an infelicitous usage of words, which renders his prose contrived and unnatural ("in the tenebrous light"; "wounds suppurating"; "obstreperous gushing"). Another problem —no doubt because Sri Lanka is not as familiar to him as Trinidad or Canada would be—is the relative absence of a sense of place, of flora and fauna; scents, sounds, colours and intimate details which writers such as Ondaatje (*Anil's Ghost*) and Selvadurai (*Cinnamon Gardens*) capture in their novels. In this connection, the novel is rife with broad, general descriptions (for example: "He looked focusing on clumps of grass and wild flowers that dotted the ground just behind the house: green grass, yellow flowers"). These flaws are counter balanced,

however, by several powerful and disturbing scenes involving the burial of corpses and the explosion of a bus.

While the novel commences at a leisurely pace, it does build up to a surprising and satisfying conclusion, though the revelation of the bombmaker's identity demands of the reader a "willing suspension of disbelief."

In this period of suspicion, distrust, and terrorism in Sri Lanka and elsewhere in the world, Bissoondath's novel is timely, especially since it privileges the idea that evil begets evil; violence begets violence. The author must be commended for exposing the suicide bomber's rationale in a truly objective manner and for having the courage to publish a novel on a controversial and perhaps dangerous issue.

Women's (Re)Production

Allison Berg
Mothering the Race: Women's Narratives of Reproduction, 1890-1930. U of Illinois P $35.00

Cecilia Macheski, ed.
Quilt Stories. U P of Kentucky $19.95

Kathryn Sullivan Kruger
Weaving the Word: The Metaphorics of Weaving and Female Textual Production. Susquehanna U P $35.00

Reviewed by Charmaine Eddy

Mothering the Race, *Quilt Stories*, and *Weaving the Word* are three recent critical studies placing women's writing within the context of other forms of women's cultural production.

Allison Berg's *Mothering the Race* is an ambitious cultural materialist analysis of discourses linking race and reproduction to understandings of national culture during the Progressive Era or Woman's Era (1890-1930). By far the most successful of the three books reviewed here, *Mothering the Race* offers a cross-racial, cross-class, and cross-disciplinary analysis of women's fiction in the context of political debates about women's duty to reproduce race. This cultural context complicates literary representations that denaturalize maternity in women's writing of the period by linking them to a political discourse of eugenics, in which advocates for female emancipation through reproductive control are seen to promote "white race suicide" or to deny "the imperative of black racial uplift." Although this was an era of imperialist ventures and massive immigration, reproductive narratives that echoed the nation's ideology of emancipation, like Margaret Sanger's argument that access to birth control information was a necessary prerequisite for the new century, are complicated by the definition of national progress in racial terms, which tied women's roles politically to a hereditary reproductive imperative. Berg's analysis exposes the political function of literary representations of maternity and their connection to the different political agendas for black and white women at the time. In doing so, she illustrates how representations of maternity in women's fiction were often linked with a problematic reproduction of racial ideologies.

Berg's first chapter traces the contradictory representations of motherhood that gained political ascendancy during this period. While motherhood was often viewed as experiential common ground for white and black women, white women's involvement with issues of class and the focus in the black women's club movement on working against disenfranchisement and Jim Crow violence meant that the trope of maternity in relation to social welfare took on radically different meanings. White feminists like Sanger, Emma Goldman, and Charlotte Perkins Gilman emphasized the "inverse relationship between the needs of the race and the emancipation of women," seeing women's reproductive role as politically submissive. Fannie Barrier Williams and Angelina Weld Grimké, on the other hand, advanced the concept of the "race mother" as an active social agent and "used

domesticity as the privileged sign of emancipation." Berg expands on these racial differences in her examination of women's role in the development of the nation at the World's Congress of Representative Women (WCRW), part of the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition, and the annual National Congresses of Mothers (beginning in 1897). Though May Wright Sewall's opening address to the WCRW called for racial unity, speeches by white women relied upon a racial distinction between white women and women of colour, and they tended to racialize suffrage as white. Black women like Frances E.W. Harper, Anna Julia Cooper, and Hallie Q. Brown for the most part emphasized racial solidarity through the motif of maternity so as to argue for black women's constructive role in the progress of the nation, thereby redressing the invisibility of black women's contributions to nation-building. These differences gain an ironic perspective when read against the exclusionary politics of the organizing committee for the Congress, where white women were not included on the exposition's organizing committee (though there was a Board of Lady Managers for the separate "Women's Building"), and where African Americans were so deliberately excluded that the World's Fair became known as the White City.

The other four chapters of Berg's *Mothering the Race* examine the racial implications of the political ideals of maternity in Pauline Hopkins' *Contending Forces*, Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* and Edith Wharton's *Summer*, Edith Summers Kelley's *Weeds*, and Nella Larsen's *Quicksand*. Berg illustrates how the idioms of race can undermine a solely gendered reading of Chopin and Wharton by linking linguistic agency to race in their works and by illustrating how the failed sexual liberation of their heroines is implicitly understood as sexual licentiousness through its link to women of colour. Berg examines Hopkins' aim in *Contending Forces* and as literary editor of the *Colored American Magazine* to question early twentieth-century definitions of the black "race mother," and to counteract the racial determinism of social Darwinist thinking by re-envisaging a theory of racial evolution based upon the family. Hopkins' editorial work links the implicit classist assumptions behind black racial progress to the problematic reliance of the "race mother" upon the nineteenth-century ideal of True Womanhood; whereas, *Contending Forces* explicitly addresses racially motivated sexual violence against black women and black women's historical oppression. The discussions of Kelley and Larsen position their representations of maternity in the context of a continued sexual and class subjugation. Kelley's novel supports Sanger's call for women's reproductive choice, by illustrating the debilitating effects of continual pregnancies as a gendered extension of the structure of capitalism, while Larsen's *Quicksand* "reveals the artistic and reproductive colonization of the black female body within an emerging black nationalism, explicitly gendered male."

Quilt Stories and *Weaving the Word* approach women's production, rather than reproduction, focusing in particular upon the history of textiles. Cecilia Macheski's *Quilt Stories* gathers together 28 nineteenth- and twentieth-century American short stories, poems, and plays about quilts and quilting. Many of the familiar quilting narratives are here, including Alice Walker's "Everyday Use" and Susan Glaspell's "Trifles," but these are supplemented by lesser-known stories that provide information about the social and cultural function of the quilting bee. The narratives are grouped into chapters based upon types of quilts indicative of narrative patterns Macheski has discovered: Memory Blocks (history), the Double Wedding Ring (community), or the Radical Rose (struggle). The volume lacks a sustained introduction attending to the theorizing

about textual production that feminist writers have been exploring for a couple of decades. Walker and Adrienne Rich are part of the volume as creative writers, for example, and yet their feminist and womanist theories do not appear as a context for their work. Thus, the book suffers from an inattention to the feminist analysis that would provide wider political and theoretical claims for the collection.

Kathryn Sullivan Kruger's *Weaving the Word* examines the history of women's textile production to make an argument for weaving as an early form of women's writing. Using a Kristevan theoretical context, Kruger focuses on scenes in literature where "weaving becomes, in the hands of women, a tool for signifying." Though textiles have long held cultural significance, Kruger argues we tend to misread their linguistic importance. Hence, her first chapter discusses mythic Creator figures (Spider Woman, Nummo) who illustrate a link between weaving and language. She also examines representations of weaving and textile production in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, Blake's *The Four Zoas*, and Tennyson's "The Lady of Shalott." The major limitation of Kruger's analysis is an unconvincing theoretical linking of Kristeva's notion of the Semiotic with the process of textile production and speech, and the Symbolic with the finished product (textile) as well as writing. Kruger's attempt to relate weaving to a kind of writing associated with the body might have benefited more from Cixous or Irigaray. The need to connect some form of textual production with the pre-Symbolic leads to a confusion between kinds of texts ("textual body," "actual text"), and threatens to undo her literary aim to interpret textile production as a form of signification.

Same-Sex Centrestage

Mark Brownell
Monsieur d'Eon. Playwrights Canada $14.95

Michael Lewis MacLennan
The Shooting Stage. Playwrights Canada $14.95

Mark Leiren-Young
Articles of Faith: The Battle of St. Alban's. Anvil $10.00

Reviewed by Len Falkenstein

Challenges to traditional definitions of gender and sexuality link these three plays. The subject of Mark Brownell's *Monsieur d'Eon*, which premiered at Toronto's Buddies in Bad Times Theatre in 1998, is the fascinating real-life story of Chevalier d'Eon de Beaumont (1728-1810), celebrated courtier to Louis XIV and XV of France and one of history's most famous cross-dressers. After initially gaining distinction as a soldier, d'Eon later confessed that he was a woman and was forced to adopt female attire. Postmortem examination of his body, however, determined that he was, in fact, male.

D'Eon led a life brimming with adventure and intrigue, and Brownell's play is largely faithful to the historical record in dramatizing the epic sweep of his hero's life, from his service to Louis XV as spy and ambassador to England, to the public scandal surrounding speculation about his sex, to his return to France as a woman (where he resisted attempted seductions by the Marquis de Sade and Benjamin Franklin and barely survived the Revolution), to his final days as an impoverished "female" fencing master in England. The play is crammed with incident, and while Brownell skillfully manages a huge cast of characters and multiple leaps through time and space, the unfortunate tradeoff is that he leaves mysteries at the heart of his protagonist virtually unexplored. Who was d'Eon? What prompted his lifelong series of masquerades? And what resonances does his story have for our own age's anxieties about

gender and sexuality? Although it is clear from early on that Brownell's primary aim is to offer a rollicking costume entertainment, his apparent reluctance to address these questions means that audiences are likely to leave the theatre amused, but unsatisfied.

Michael MacLennan's *The Shooting Stage* premiered at Vancouver's Firehall Theatre in 2001. Described by its author as a drama about the painful but transformational process of adolescent "initiation," the play features two linked plotlines. One is about an art photographer, Len, who is on trial on charges of child pornography. He is assisted in his defence by Malcolm, a lawyer who is Len's estranged friend and also the subject of one of the photos (taken 25 years earlier) that has prompted the obscenity charges. The other plotline centres on three teenaged boys struggling with their sexuality: Elliot, a tenuously-closeted aspiring drag performer; Ivan, the deeply conflicted and self-loathing object of Elliot's affections; and Derrick, a macho bully who torments both boys but is secretly a gay hustler servicing Malcolm, who halfway through the play is revealed to be Elliot's father.

The complicated chain of coincidences that brings the characters together seems strained; ensuing events are at times predictable or melodramatic, and some of the characters tend toward cliché (especially the three teens, who all seem readily identifiable "types"). MacLennan also wields a decidedly heavy hand with symbolism relating to cameras, guns, and a knife (all different forms of phallic weaponry), as well as to closets and swans. Although some reviewers have found fault with the play for all these reasons, others have been lavish in their praise, suggesting that MacLennan's exploration of the fraught transition to adulthood experienced by many gay youth can have an evocative power when experienced in performance.

Mark Leiren-Young's *Articles of Faith* was created in association with Vancouver's Savage God Theatre in 2001. Intended to "spark a dialogue" regarding the Anglican Church's internal battles over same-sex marriage, the play examines the case of a Port Alberni, BC parish that voted to "disaffiliate" from the church in 1996 in protest against its perceived openness toward blessing same-sex relationships. Taking a docudrama approach, Leiren-Young interviewed members of the Port Alberni congregation on both sides of the dispute, along with some interested outsiders, and assembled a play that consists entirely of a series of monologues culled verbatim from his interviews. Leiren-Young explains that his guiding impetus was to create a work that in presenting nothing but the real words of real people could not be dismissed as "biased" toward one side or the other. The result, if rarely dramatic or compelling, is a work that succinctly and earnestly voices a representative range of opinion on the issue. A short one-act performed with a public response forum as "Act Two," *Articles of Faith* undoubtedly succeeded in provoking discussion on an issue we will all likely be talking about for some time to come.

Romans d'immigration

Sylvain Meunier
Lovelie d'Haïti. La courte échelle 24,95 $

Émile Ollivier
Passages. Ekstasis 19,95 $

Émile Ollivier
Repérages. Leméac 17,95 $

Compte rendu par Joubert Satyre

Publié aux éditions La courte échelle en 2003, *Lovelie d'Haïti*, roman de Sylvain Meunier, présente deux visions opposées de l'immigration. Lovelie d'Haïti, héroïne éponyme, née en Haïti de parents démunis, rêve de devenir infirmière. Une suite de circonstances favorables lui donne la chance d'émigrer au Québec. Elle pourra enfin fréquenter une vraie école et, ainsi, réaliser

son rêve. Cependant, la famille Jolicoeur qui l'accueille fait d'elle une véritable esclave, une *restavèk*, pour reprendre le terme créole qui désigne les enfants domestiques. En plus d'être mal logée et mal nourrie, elle est battue. Charline, l'aînée des Jolicoeur, la force à se prostituer au profit d'un chef de gang du nom d'Andy Colon ; Charlot, le deuxième de la famille, la viole avec la complicité de sa soeur. Un jour une bagarre éclate entre Andy Colon et Chomsky, un de ses acolytes, qui refuse de conduire Lovelie chez le pédophile du coin. La police intervient et remonte jusqu'à la famille Jolicoeur. Lovelie échappe enfin à ses bourreaux. Elle est recueillie par une voisine. Elle n'est pas encore infirmière, mais elle est sur la bonne voie. Ce happy-end montre le côté positif de l'immigration. Elle est passage de l'ignorance à la connaissance, et offre au personnage la possibilité d'un mieux-être. Avec ses caractéristiques de roman d'apprentissage, *Lovelie d'Haïti* semble aussi dire que l'immigration est une course d'obstacles et que seuls quelques-uns réussissent. Ainsi, la famille Jolicoeur, dont presque chaque membre souffre d'une tare physique ou morale, représente ces immigrants qui sont plutôt une charge pour la société d'accueil. À l'image de ces jeunes qui, dans le roman, sont initiés au crime par des gangs, cette famille illustre l'échec de bon nombre d'immigrants. Et qu'est-ce qui explique cette violence sinon cet échec? La thèse implicite du roman est peut-être qu'il faut une immigration sélective.

L'histoire se déroule vers 1980 avec pour arrière-plans historiques, la dictature de Duvalier Fils en Haïti et le premier référendum au Québec, d'où la construction du roman sous forme de diptyque.

Lovelie d'Haïti est un roman sans prétention formelle : l'histoire se déroule linéairement et la fin en est presque prévisible. On notera cependant quelques images justes qui prouvent que l'auteur a une excellente connaissance de la culture haïtienne.

Passages d'Émile Ollivier est également un roman sur l'immigration, mais sa construction est beaucoup plus élaborée. Le romancier y fait alterner deux lignes narratives qui se fusionneront à la fin du roman. La première ligne narrative raconte le récit de *boat-people* s'exilant de Port-à-L'Écu pour Miami, le naufrage de leur bateau, le débarquement des rescapés sur une plage de la Floride. La deuxième ligne narrative rapporte les péripéties de Normand Malavy, immigrant haïtien dévoré de nostalgie, incapable donc de faire le deuil du pays natal. Normand laisse Montréal et ses hivers, images tangibles de la Mort, pour refaire sa vie à Miami, une sorte d'exil dans l'exil. C'est là que lui et sa maîtresse, Amparo Doukara, rencontrent les survivants qu'ils aident d'ailleurs. Cependant, Normand meurt quelque temps après, emporté par le mal qui le rongeait.

Deux voix narratives tissent cette trame assez complexe. Du côté des *boat people*, c'est Brigitte Kadmon dont Normand a recueilli les propos sur cassette. Retranscrits par Régis, ces propos constituent la première ligne narrative. Du côté de Normand, c'est Amparo Doukara, qui raconte à la veuve Leyda les derniers jours de son amant à Miami.

En dépit de sa dimension autobiographique, *Passages* transforme le thème de l'errance en une méditation philosophique et religieuse sur la vie, l'identité, l'être et le paraître, thèmes baroques dont on trouve les échos dans toute l'oeuvre d'Ollivier. La citation en épigraphe de Montaigne « Je ne peins pas l'être, je peins le passage », donne le ton à ce roman, entre tragédie et espérance. Au bout de son chemin, *l'Homo viator*, l'Homme-pèlerin, ne trouve que la mort, mais il aura découvert l'inconnu. Le voyage est donc à la fois quête de connaissance et rencontre avec la mort. On trouve dans ce roman les marques de l'écriture d'Ollivier : phrases amples, généreuses, description minutieuse des scènes de vie, réflexions sociopolitiques.

Publié par L'Hexagone (Montréal) en 1991 et en 1994 par Le Serpent à Plumes (Paris), *Passages* a été traduit en anglais en 2003 par Leonard Sugden pour Ekstasis Editions Canada Ltd.

Repérages est l'histoire intellectuelle d'Émile Ollivier. Cet ensemble de réflexions sur l'écriture et la condition d'écrivain migrant présente le parcours de l'auteur et constitue un bilan. La question centrale à laquelle *Repérages* tente de répondre est celle de l'identité de l'écrivain migrant. Selon Émile Ollivier, sa condition de migrant ou d'exilé est idéale pour lui en tant qu'écrivain, puisque l'écriture est elle-même exil, errance et que, pour entrer en littérature, tout auteur doit se déprendre de lui-même, de sa langue, de ses habitudes. Loin des crispations et des replis identitaires, Ollivier trouve donc dans sa condition d'écrivain migrant une métaphore de l'activité littéraire. L'immigration, de même que l'écriture, est ouverture à l'altérité. À l'ère de l'Internet et de la mondialisation, nos identités se défont et se refont perpétuellement; au lieu d'être stables, elles sont plutôt « mouvantes ou en évolution » (29). Ainsi, l'écrivain s'est progressivement défait de son sentiment d'être exilé : « Puis un matin, j'ai découvert que je n'étais plus un exilé, le Québec était devenu ma terre non plus d'asile mais de séjour. » Ce trajet qui va de la nostalgie à l'utopie se retrouve également dans les romans d'Ollivier dont les premiers présentent des personnages travaillés par l'idée du retour au pays natal, tandis que les publications plus tardives décrivent des personnages qui acceptent l'exil. Deleuze et Glissant servent de références intellectuelles implicites à cette vision dynamique de l'écrivain-dans-le-monde dont l'identité ne peut être que rhizomatique.

À partir de cette question centrale, Émile Ollivier en aborde d'autres, plus générales, comme son rapport à la mémoire, à l'écriture, à l'engagement. Sur ces questions, la position d'Ollivier peut se résumer ainsi : atteindre l'universel à travers le particulier. *Repérages* restera le testament littéraire et intellectuel d'Émile Ollivier, une sorte d'art poétique qui éclaire son travail d'écrivain.

Modern + Drama = ?

Ric Knowles, Joanne Tompkins, and W.B. Worthen, eds.
Modern Drama: Defining the Field. U of Toronto P $27.95

Reviewed by Len Falkenstein

For some time now, many of us who work in the fields of the drama and theatre of the late nineteenth century to the present day have been questioning the continued relevance and appropriateness of the curricular title most commonly assigned to the courses we teach: "Modern Drama." In his introduction to *Modern Drama: Defining the Field*, Ric Knowles explains that on assuming the editorship of University of Toronto-based *Modern Drama*, one of the leading journals in the field, he and his co-editors decided to hold a conference as one of several initiatives to reconsider the "terms" of the journal's title and to stimulate discussion of major critical and theoretical issues in the discipline—foremost among them how, in a time of changing critical tides and ever more variegated blossomings of performance praxis, to define what "drama" is, how to categorize, periodize, and (re-/de-)canonize it, and from what institutional site(s) to study it.

Drawn from the proceedings of this conference (titled "Modern: Drama" and held in Toronto in 2000), this book is a collection of twelve essays by a group of leading international theatre, drama, and performance scholars: Elin Diamond, Michael Sidnell, Shannon Jackson, Erika Fischer-Lichte, Stanton Garner, Jr., Loren Kruger, Sue-Ellen Case, David Savran, Ann Wilson, Josephine Lee, Alan Filewod, and Harry Elam, Jr. All of the essays engage in different ways with what Knowles calls "the anxieties,

exclusions, hierarchies, and otherings that together have constituted the field of study that brings the terms 'modern' and 'drama' together," although only a handful could be said to be primarily concerned with the project of definition promised in the book's subtitle. The essays vary widely in subject matter, style, and approach, ranging from theoretical overviews of the state of drama/theatre studies to exercises in disciplinary boundary-defining, historical case studies, and close readings of individual texts and playwrights.

Commenting on the collection, Knowles observes that "not surprisingly, this volume reports no single answer to the questions it raises, no final definition of the field, and no easily articulated new mandate for . . . the project of modern drama studies" (simple, prescriptive answers aren't in keeping with the critical temper of the times, after all). More importantly, he asserts, the essays collectively "model a type of analysis—historically grounded, archivally based, thickly described, theoretically sophisticated, and politically engaged" to which contemporary scholars of the field "aspire." Implicit in this statement is a call to arms to redress drama scholarship's longstanding status, for better or worse, as a preserve of "traditional" textual criticism in which theory has made few inroads, a fact that many would blame, at least in part, for drama's frequently (and increasingly?) marginal position within both literary and theatre studies.

As examples of the engaged, sophisticated, and cutting-edge scholarship the book's editors champion as a new model for drama studies, the essays in the collection offer much to admire and potentially also, depending on one's tastes, more than a little to annoy. At their best, as in Wilson's cultural materialist discussion of *Peter Pan*, Filewod's troubling of race issues in postcolonial agit-prop, and Savran's polemical reading of ghosts in contemporary American theatre, the essays present persuasively theorized, clearly elucidated, and provocative new perspectives on works both familiar and obscure. At other times, as in some of the essays most intent on "defining the field," we are drawn into abstruse exercises in taxonomical hair-splitting of the sort that have made certain strains of post-structuralist criticism a tough slog for many.

Owing to the frequent density of the arguments, the eclecticism of subjects and approaches, and the relative obscurity of many of the texts and figures discussed, not much in this collection is likely to recommend it to the average undergraduate seeking enlightenment for her term paper. For those of us who might be assigning that essay, however (especially if we delight in debating whether the class it's for should properly be called "Modern Drama" or "Modernity's Drama"), there is, nonetheless, much to appreciate in this challenging set of essays.

Symphonie des mots

Marie-Hélène Montpetit
40 singes-rubis. Triptyque 15,00$

Madeleine Ouellette-Michalska
Le cycle des migrations. Éditions du Noroît 16,95$

Germaine Mornard
Lumières des puys. Éditions du Noroît 14,95$

Compte rendu par Sylvain Marois

La symphonie des mots semble sans fin. Plus que tout autre genre, la voix poétique permet d'explorer la langue en repoussant, souvent, les limites des conventions, des normes, du prévisible. L'impulsivité et la spontanéité de *40 singes-rubis*, de Marie-Hélène Montpetit, la maturité et la réflexion que l'on retrouve dans *Le cycle des migrations*, de Madeleine Ouellette-Michalska, et l'invitation à la nostalgie géographique présente dans *Lumières des puys,* de Germaine Mornard, sont tout autant de cœurs qui battent au sein de la poésie contemporaine.

Marie-Hélène Montpetit publiait en 2002 son premier recueil de poèmes. L'écriture et l'édition de la poésie semblent, en ce début de XXI[e] siècle obsédé par la vitesse et les médias électroniques, tenir du miracle. Il faut non seulement saluer ce nouveau talent qu'est Montpetit, mais aussi le travail de missionnaire de l'éditeur. La poésie, qui apparaît de plus en plus marginalisée, est pourtant chez cette auteure, tout à fait accessible. La poétesse nous invite à découvrir dans *40 singes-rubis*—le titre est déjà une promesse de surprises—son univers de fuite, de violence et d'évasion : « Je m'évade de nous par les chemins de panique / sauvant ma peau / tirant ma vie par les épaules / les casseroles de la dèche jacassant à mon cou ». Les lendemains de l'amour déchantent souvent. Ils ne retiennent que bien peu de la lumière des premiers jours. Et, bien que ces spleens aient été mille fois chantés par les poètes, Montpetit parvient à surprendre, à faire naître l'image, à suggérer : « Mon corps est un sofa / dont les coussins bayent aux corneilles ».

Madeleine Ouellette-Michalska, avec plus d'une trentaine d'ouvrages à son actif, de nombreux prix, notamment le prix de l'Académie des Lettres du Québec, le prix Arthur-Buies et le prix France-Québec, poursuit dans *Le cycle des migrations* son œuvre « importante et diversifiée ». La poésie de Ouellette-Michalska respire l'expérience, la maturité, cette couleur que seul le temps peut apporter. Il n'y a toutefois pas d'opposition entre les mots d'une nouvelle poétesse comme Montpetit et ceux de Ouellette-Michalska. Il n'y a qu'une collaboration intemporelle, une mise en commun des voix pour exprimer, à divers moments de la vie humaine, des réalités jumelles : « amants aveugles nous dressons nos âges / et nos jambes / contre la chute des corps / hors la nuit partagée / dans l'abondance des salives / nos lèvres épousent / si parfaitement les courbes / de la langue / que le réel entier devient / une bouche qui tire / le sens au-dedans du corps ». Séparé en six sections ou segments—en cycles—, *Le cycle des migrations* est une quête, une « traversée du temps » qui, des souvenirs au présent, nous fait vivre et revivre « la route des eaux ». L'humilité envoûtante qui habite ces poèmes en fait un des plus sublimes recueils des dernières années. La sagesse (faute de meilleur mot!) de Madeleine Ouellette-Michalska invite à se laisser imprégner de « tout ce qui fut demain ou hier / la veine qui flambe / la venue de l'île remise à plus tard / après l'enfance et la guerre / après l'usure et le repos ».

L'invitation au voyage « vers les nuages de Baudelaire / sur la montagne de Cézanne / au bord de la mer de Proust » proposée par Germaine Mornard dans *Lumière des puys*, périgrination intérieure de femmes fortes, contient tous les ingrédients d'une montée à « la montagne des morts » . . . mais manque de nous émouvoir. La justesse et l'esthétique des poèmes de Mornard (comme : « entre les tiges de bois rouillées / nous progressons péniblement / des traces de sang sur les bouleaux / le hamac rouge de la Sainte-Enfance / a plongé dans un lac d'enfers », par exemple) laissent parfois le lecteur derrière une vitrine, une distance—volontaire ou non—, mais qui éloignent et désengagent. C'est dommage, car il y a de nombreux vers puissants et éminemment suggestifs. Il y a « nos paumes criblées de doutes », ou « l'abondance de la mémoire apaise la fin du jour ». . . Et, malgré des réussites comme : « quelques flocons / collent à leur tête / et elles s'en vont / le long d'une route bordée de platanes / avec la main comme celle d'un peintre / qui ne pourrait plus /tenir un charbon », l'ensemble du recueil nous laisse, hélas, sur notre faim.

Représentatifs de la poésie contemporaine, grâce, entre autres, à leurs thématiques universelles et à leur accessibilité, ces trois recueils constituent un beau trio

duquel se démarque *Le cycle des migrations* de Madeleine Ouellette-Michalska.

Owning versus Owning Up

Michael F. Brown
Who Owns Native Culture? Harvard U P $29.95

Bernard Schissel and Terry Wotherspoon
The Legacy of School for Aboriginal People: Education, Oppression, and Emancipation. Oxford U P $28.95

Reviewed by Christopher Bracken

Both of these books ask what happens when aboriginal people become subjects in a discourse that has traditionally treated them as objects of study. Both therefore study the problem of studying others. And both reproduce the problem they study. Scholars still see aboriginal people as a problem to be solved, but now it falls to aboriginal people to solve the problem that they themselves are.

Michael F. Brown evaluates the efforts of contemporary aboriginal societies to regain control of art, music, artefacts, and places they consider essential to their heritage. The book contains an introduction and eight chapters. "The Missionary's Photographs" examines the "right of cultural privacy" that is now invoked to sequester photographs and recordings of traditional practices. "Cultures and Copyrights" discusses how copyright law is being used to protect traditional images in Australia. "Sign Wars" studies the trademarking of traditional images, such as the Zia sun symbol. "Ethnobotany Blues" evaluates the project to patent drugs discovered by traditional healers. "Negotiating Mutual Respect" deals with the reassertion of aboriginal ownership of sacred places, such as Devil's Tower national monument in Wyoming. "At the Edge of the Indigenous" describes how groups dispossessed in the past are reinventing themselves in the present to lay claim to elements of traditional culture. "Native Heritage in the Iron Cage" discusses the UN-inspired project to protect indigenous cultures in their entirety, a "quarantine" that Brown calls "Total Heritage Protection." The conclusion, "Finding Justice in the Global Commons," contains Brown's recommendations for resolving conflicts over cultural ownership. He calls for pragmatic compromise and the pursuit of locally negotiated solutions.

So who owns native culture? According to Brown, every citizen of the global commons has "a stake" in "decisions" affecting cultural property. It is necessary to "balance" the proprietary rights of aboriginal people with the universal right to study, travel, and do business. He scrupulously examines both sides of every issue he discusses. But there is never any doubt which side he is on. His dream of achieving "balance" assumes that the two sides of the debate have equal weight. Predictably, he does not raise "the question of power" until page 245.

Schissel and Wotherspoon note that aboriginal societies are trying to influence how they are studied now because "Native people have been studied to death" already. Brown counters that cultures have never hesitated to borrow and learn from each other. The heritage protection movement cannot legislate hybridity away. But there is a troubling undercurrent to his argument. His diction repeatedly implies that aboriginal people act on "feeling" rather than "reason" when claiming cultural ownership. It is an old stereotype. Still, nobody who studies aboriginal cultures can afford to ignore the questions raised here. Brown's case studies are fascinating and carefully researched. Read them and draw your own conclusions.

Schissel and Wotherspoon aim their book at the college classroom. The first two chapters, "Educational Dreams and Disappointments" and "Aboriginal Education in Canada" discuss the significance of

aboriginal education and provide a list of sociological keywords. Chapter Three, "The Legacy of Residential Schools," is a concise, punchy history of Canada's project to use education to assimilate aboriginal societies into settler society. Chapter Four, "The Voices of Students of Aboriginal Ancestry," discusses the authors' conversations with First Nations and Métis students enrolled in alternative schools in Saskatchewan. Chapter Five, "Determinants of Successful Schooling," stresses the need for compassionate teachers and a curriculum that acknowledges the perspectives, contributions, and social circumstances of aboriginal people. Chapter Six, "Education, Justice, and Community," offers five recommendations for harmonizing aboriginal education with its social context: an understanding of difference, a flexible approach to time, access to aboriginal cultures, languages and elders, sensitivity to social and economic circumstances, and the hiring of "good teachers."

Ironically, the first two chapters indicate that Schissel and Wotherspoon lack confidence in their own student-readers. Keywords are set in bold type, which is patronizing, and supplied with question-begging definitions. "A **theory** is primarily a tool," they affirm, "used to developed a **systematic understanding** of a given problem or set of phenomena." Theorists debunked instrumental reason in the earlier twentieth century and have debated the givenness of phenomena "since Plato." Are not "good teachers" those who bring good information into the classroom?

The book's contribution is the survey of "aboriginal voices" in Chapter Four. The 80 students interviewed do not wish to overhaul current Canadian education systems. They enjoy learning and wish to continue their studies after high school. They want more control over how they are educated. They value efforts to include aboriginal languages and cultures in the curriculum and to bring Elders into schools. They are "resilient" rather than "at risk" and find school discipline counter-productive. This is necessary reading. In Chapters Five and Six, Schissel and Wotherspoon retreat to the realm of truisms. It is difficult to disagree with their formula for success, but it is too vague to be of help to teachers and administrators. "Effective educational practice," they argue, "requires an understanding of how socio-economic conditions affect people at both individual and community levels." Indeed. Instead of saying that we need understanding, though, they would do better to produce understanding—a more daunting theoretical task.

Arctic Exploration

Peter Steele
The Man Who Mapped the Arctic: The Intrepid Life of George Back, Franklin's Lieutenant.
Raincoast $39.95

Reviewed by Bryan N.S. Gooch

Peter Steele's *The Man Who Mapped the Arctic* is an important and most welcome addition to the literature concerning exploration in northern Canada and Arctic coastal waters. In tracing the astonishing exploits of George Back (1796-1878) Steele not only describes the career of his intrepid central figure from boy volunteer (in the Royal Navy) to Admiral, but clearly reveals the character and idiosyncrasies of Back and many of the other (and often notable) officers, traders, voyageurs, First Nations people, and others, with whom he came in contact. Yet this is not just a book about initiative, courage, and endurance; it is also about the wildness, danger, desolation, and beauty of Canada's remote northern rivers, its tundra, and its ice-choked Arctic shoreline, all experienced under frequently appalling conditions by men determined to chart the hinterland in order to ascertain the existence of the elusive North West

Passage. Drawing on the journals of Back and others as well as on a wide range of other sources and including black and white plates and print reproductions of drawings by Back (a sensitive and skilled artist in his own right), Steele offers a clearly organized and compelling view of exploration and adventure, which, because of its engaging nature, is likely to set readers off on further literary excursions in the literature of the North as well as to stimulate further research and travel in the current era of greater accessibility to remote areas.

Part One of the book deals with Back's early days in the Navy, including his imprisonment in France during the Napoleonic conflict, and his coming to the notice of (then Lieut.) John Franklin, commanding HMS *Trent*, on a northern voyage as far as Spitzbergen (1818). Part Two takes up the account of Franklin's initial journey by land to the Canadian Arctic with Back (1819–22), reaching (via Hudson Bay, Fort Chipewyan, and Fort Enterprise) Bathurst Inlet and Melville Sound, a gripping tale of privation, lack of supplies, trading company difficulties, and enormous challenges posed by landscape and weather. Yet surely some of the geographic blanks were filled in, and Back's record and illustrations add immeasurably to the developing picture of the hinterland. Part Three describes Franklin's second overland foray with Back, now a Lieutenant (1823–27) down the Mackenzie River to the delta and the Arctic ocean, facing not only the hazards of land and water but hostile Inuit as well. Return journeys could be as arduous, if not more so, than the outgoing trips, not only because of fatigue, damage to equipment, and so on, but because the retreat to the south meant forcing a way upstream against north-flowing rivers.

Part Four dwells briefly, and, on occasion, amusingly, with Back's short period (1830–32) out of service and his tour on the Continent, including a visit to Naples (with an excursion to the crater of Vesuvius) and Pompeii before returning to England with the prospect of another Canadian sojourn, this time in search of the missing Capt. John Ross and his nephew, who had earlier set out to find the fabled Passage. This third trip (1833–35), the subject of Part Five, with Back now in charge, involved a route through New York, Montreal, Fort Alexander (on Lake Winnipeg), Fort Resolution (on Great Slave Lake), Fort Reliance (on Artillery Lake)—for a winter of near starvation—and then, having had news of Capt. Ross' safe return to England, down the treacherous Thlew-ee-choh (Great Fish —now Back) River to the Arctic Ocean and Cape Beaufort (now Barclay) in order to fulfill his second goal—filling in remaining parts of the coastal map. Alas, weather forced a retreat, but the accomplishment—Back's "zenith," according to Steele—was duly recognized in England, and Back was promoted to Post-Captain. Part Six sees Back again in the Arctic (1836–37) in command of HMS *Terror*, to fill in more geographical gaps; stuck in the ice off Southampton Island, and drifting, eventually, across Ungava Bay, the ship survived, with its scurvy-plagued crew, just well enough to limp across the Atlantic and beach at Lough Swilly (Ireland) to be repaired sufficiently to sail back to Devonport for refit. The final chapters concern Back's last years, his marriage, another trip to Europe, his role as a member of the Arctic Council, his accumulation of well-deserved honours, and his eventual promotion to the rank of Admiral. A useful—indeed, essential—select bibliography and an index conclude this impressive piece of work.

Peter Steele's role, in this well-researched, cohesive account—something of a labour of dedication and love, one might suspect—is also to fill in gaps in our understanding of the North and the sacrifices of those who, without the sophistication and marvels of

mod-tech and GPS, managed to piece together a picture of the northern coast and the routes to it. We can cavil, if we must, that the secret of the Boothia peninsula remained obscure or that reaching Welcome Sound south of Southampton Island would have been a better choice than trying to penetrate Frozen Strait, but hindsight is always 20/20, and even apparent failures and near catastrophes can still yield significant insights. This is a splendid, much needed addition to our collection of northern resources. If there are regrets, they have to do, principally, with a scholarly desire for closer documentation of each passage deriving from a principal or secondary source in order to assist those who wish to follow on the multitude of trails the book invites. And one laments that blame for Back's possible faults is attributed rather simplistically to his Royal Navy training and his roots in "class-conscious, hierarchical Britain." One might want to think, conversely, of the strengths, traditions and accomplishments of the Royal Navy and speculate about what Back and others might not have achieved without the support of the nineteenth-century British establishment.

De l'intime et du politique : regards sur la vie contemporaine

Yves Vaillancourt
Winter et autres récits. Triptyque 18,00 $

Pierre Ouellet
La vie de mémoire. Éditions du Noroît 16,95 $

François Tétreau
En solo dans l'appareil d'État. l'Hexagone 19,95 $

Compte rendu par Martine-Emmanuelle Lapointe

Dans l'article « Filiations littéraires »,[1] Dominique Viart remarquait à juste titre que la littérature française contemporaine tendait de plus en plus vers l'intimisme, les formes subjectives, l'autofiction, proposant ainsi une écriture plus proche de l'essai-fiction ou de la micro-fiction que du roman. On pourrait sans doute en dire autant de la littérature québécoise qui, des œuvres pseudo-autobiographiques de Nelly Arcan aux voyages intérieurs de Louis Gauthier, en passant par les romans minimalistes d'Élise Turcotte et de Louise Dupré, privilégie les rituels du quotidien et les territoires de l'intime. Les trois œuvres abordées ici ne semblent pas échapper à cette fascination pour le biographique. Chacun à leur manière, Yves Vaillancourt, Pierre Ouellet et François Tétreau nous invitent à découvrir des mondes dominés par les discours de consciences subjectives, lesquelles filtrent et décryptent à la fois les faits sociaux contemporains.

Professeur de philosophie et photographe d'art, Yves Vaillancourt avait fait paraître en 1990 le recueil de nouvelles *Un certain été*.

[1] Dominique Viart, « Filiations littéraires », dans Jan Baetens et Dominique Viart (dir.), *Écritures contemporaines 2. États du roman contemporain. Actes du colloque de Calaceite 6-13 juillet 1996*, Paris/Caen, Minard, « Lettres modernes », 1999, p. 115-139.

Son second ouvrage de fiction, *Winter et autres récits*, se compose de courts textes narratifs et de huit photographies inspirés par ses périples aux Etats-Unis et en Europe de l'Est. Moments fugaces rescapés de longs voyages, les différents récits mettent en scène des rencontres impromptues et s'articulent pour la plupart autour de portraits d'inconnus croisés au hasard. L'aspect fragmentaire des textes et des photos contribue à renforcer les idées de morcellement et de mobilité qui s'avèrent inhérentes à l'expérience du voyage. Dès l'incipit de son recueil, l'auteur se présente d'ailleurs sous les traits d'un collectionneur d'instants et d'impressions : « Écrire des souvenirs de voyage, voilà bien une chose étrange. On s'efforce de raviver du mieux qu'on peut d'infimes détails de ces vacances désormais lointaines; on parle de ces villes, gens et paysages ayant laissé une trace dans notre mémoire ». La mémoire est en effet le personnage central du livre de Vaillancourt. C'est elle qui nous fait découvrir les banlieues américaines peuplées de motels bon marché et de *Burger King* (« Winter »), les virées pragoises (« L'orgie aux pieds de Staline »), les trains et les gares (« Le contrôle »). Aux premiers fragments en apparence autobiographiques succèdent des textes plus impersonnels qui oscillent entre l'écriture intime et la fiction, nous invitant à suivre d'autres personnages, double de l'auteur voyageant seul lui aussi (« La rencontre ») ou professeur enfermé dans sa propre névrose (« La porte étroite »). D'une écriture sobre et maîtrisée, le recueil constitue sans nul doute une réussite sur le mode mineur. L'auteur ne prétend guère renouveler le genre, ne propose pas de découvertes éblouissantes, mais sait intéresser son lecteur, même en lui parlant des plus infimes mouvements d'une conscience nomade.

Accordant lui aussi une large place au thème de la mémoire, Pierre Ouellet semble prolonger, dans son recueil de fragments *La vie de mémoire*, les réflexions théoriques qu'il mène dans le cadre du projet de recherche « Le soi et l'autre ». Centrés sur les questions de l'identité narrative (d'après le concept de Ricœur) et de la reconstruction mémorielle, les travaux universitaires de Ouellet trouvent ici un complément poétique et philosophique à la fois qui permet d'éclairer sous un jour neuf une pratique d'écriture diversifiée. Professeur et essayiste, Ouellet a aussi publié des recueils de poèmes et des romans, ce qui peut expliquer en partie l'entrecroisement des styles et des perspectives qui caractérise *La vie de mémoire.* Ni texte critique, ni essai, ni témoignage au sens strict, le recueil entrelace plutôt les trois formes et propose des réflexions sur la littérature qui sont indissociables d'une pensée de l'origine, de la vie quotidienne et de la filiation. La poésie, par exemple, est ramenée au domaine des affects et du corps, et non considérée à la lumière d'une théorie systématique. Pour Ouellet, l'écriture a tout d'une « lettre d'amour à l'être aimé qui nous a quitté, comme une prière désespérée au Dieu auquel on ne peut plus croire ». Des passages sobres et lumineux sur les rapports père-fils (dans le dernier fragment « Travaux de mémoire » notamment), sur la chambre d'écrivain et sur le deuil de l'origine côtoient des réflexions un peu plus ampoulées (« Humorale » par exemple) qui, sans perdre leur caractère d'abstraction, auraient pu s'incarner davantage dans des situations concrètes. Car les plus beaux moments du recueil donnent à voir des lieux, des êtres, des fragments de vie—d'ailleurs appelés *biograffitis* par l'auteur—plutôt que des thèses et des idées. En témoigne cette scène éloquente qui, à elle seule, pourrait bien résumer le parcours du livre : « Et le pot de peinture de tout ce blanc, qu'on appliquait sur les murs comme si on y mettait toute sa conscience, toute sa mémoire étalée là, blanc pur ou pur blanc cassé. Mon père peignait la façade, pendant que moi je peignais l'arrière, ou bien lui le

côté droit et moi le côté gauche. On n'a jamais peinturé ensemble, mon père et moi. » Le devoir de mémoire est ici replacé dans le contexte banal de la rénovation : père et fils peignent ensemble, mais pas du même côté. Père et fils habitent ensemble, mais pas tout à fait. Les fragments les plus réussis du recueil exposent la difficile réconciliation du passé et du présent, de l'histoire filiale et de la mémoire personnelle, en même temps qu'ils entendent rétablir une certaine forme de continuité entre les différents moments d'une vie.

Des trois ouvrages commentés, seul *En solo dans l'appareil d'État* du poète, traducteur et romancier François Tétreau pourrait recevoir la mention générique « roman ». Le personnage principal de cette fiction à la première personne se nomme Qiu Ang. Originaire de la Chine, elle visite l'Amérique du Nord au cours de la tournée de son groupe rock Dazibao. Le roman est constitué des messages que la jeune guitariste envoie à des destinataires de prime abord inconnus. Dans ses lettres, elle livre ses premières impressions, pose un regard critique sur une Amérique obsédée par l'hygiène, la célébrité et la sécurité, pointant du doigt les lâchetés et les hypocrisies de la société occidentale contemporaine. Au cours d'un spectacle, la jeune femme profite de la présence de nombreux policiers pour demander l'asile politique. Cet événement a un impact majeur sur la suite du récit. Le roman du choc des cultures se transforme dès lors en véritable suspense politique, la guitariste de rock se présentant désormais comme une espionne à la solde du régime communiste. Qiu Ang tente de traquer le diplomate Tong soupçonné de haute trahison par le gouvernement chinois tout en poursuivant le récit de ses mésaventures dans les rapports destinés à ses supérieurs. Divertissant par moments, *En solo dans l'appareil d'État* repose malheureusement sur une lecture parfois caricaturale et rapidement esquissée des rapports entre l'Occident et l'Orient. Le roman hésite entre l'essai polémique et la fiction, tâtonne et laisse finalement le lecteur sur sa faim.

Meetings

Henry Kreisel
The Almost Meeting and Other Stories. NeWest $18.95

Norman Ravvin
Lola By Night. Paperplates $19.95

Reviewed by Jon Kertzer

Henry Kreisel has exerted a subtle but continuous influence on Canadian studies. Although his essay on the impact of environment on literary sensibility ("The Prairie: a State of Mind") has become a classic, the rootedness suggested but immediately unsettled by its argument may also reflect Kreisel's own experience. When he began to teach in Edmonton, he must have seemed eccentric as an Austrian Jew who narrowly missed the Nazi invasion, was interned in England and Canada, but precociously earned his way to the University of Alberta, where by 1947 he was promoting Canadian literature to students who barely knew that it existed. Canadian literature caught up with him, however, in the sense that eccentricity and uprootedness have become the norm. His short stories, which were published in 1981, also deal with dislocation, but in a style that is seldom unsettled by the troubles of their characters. His style is notable for its tact, even when the subject is painful. Because the writing is never insistent, it seems deceptively relaxed, until the attentive reader senses a lingering suggestiveness.

Most of these stories, now reissued by NeWest Press, are reflective in tone, as characters reassess what has happened to them. Kreisel's novel *The Betrayal* begins: "Now, when I look back, it seems strange that. . . ." Looking back and discovering the strangeness of the familiar is the fate of

Kreisel's readers as well as his characters. As events are recalled, the recalling is directed at an implied listener, so that the act of sharing the story becomes a way of coping with the experience recounted. Shades of the Ancient Mariner, perhaps, but the emphasis is rarely on plot, rather on characters responding to circumstance, whether traumatic (the Holocaust) or poignant (the sorrows of a chestnut woman). Usually the stories stage a confrontation between opposites: young and old, parent and child, Europeans and Canadians, pious and assimilated Jews. Because the narrative adopts the perspective of one side, it seems to favour that party—for example, the assimilated Jew meets the *chassid*, rather than the reverse—but the confrontation is a test whereby a strong position becomes vulnerable. The assimilated Jew, the practical sister, the confident young man are unsettled by the encounter, as is the reader who has instinctively accepted the narrative focal point.

Two stories take the opposite approach by looking ahead through the eyes of children just as they are initiated into the adult world. In one, a boy learns of his father's adultery; in the other, children wonder at a woman's grief at the loss of the husband she seemed to detest. Each story ends with conflicting emotions that the child can sense but not appreciate. For example, the boy is bewildered by multiple betrayals: of the mother by the unfaithful father, and of the son by his father, but also of the father by his naïve, accusing son. This texture of failures is more than the boy can grasp, and it is left to the reader to interpret the story's final unease.

In view of the confrontational focus in these stories, it is ironic that Kreisel's most famous story, "The Almost Meeting," is about an encounter that never occurs between a young writer and his literary idol, probably based on A.M. Klein. This fable has inspired Jewish writers in Canada, perhaps because it announces a literary legacy that forever remains to be interpreted. As a novelist, academic, and editor of Canadian Jewish writing, Norman Ravvin is well acquainted with this tradition. His new novel, *Lola by Night*, presents a clever variation on the form. It, too, presents a quest for a famous Jewish author who has mysteriously fallen silent, a diasporic quest conducted through a series of meetings that prove to be oddly anti-climactic. The plot concerning a Spanish writer of romances and her attempt to unearth family secrets may seem improbably Hitchcockish (Lola, love, murder, wealth, betrayal, all encrypted in a diary—the prize that Hitchcock called "the McGuffin"); but the intrigue is reported in such a casual manner that it easily carries the reader from Barcelona to Vancouver, building up a cast of intertwined characters, all with their own troubled memories, before staging the final confrontation in New York. Ravvin deftly evokes settings and styles—melodrama, hard-boiled detective fiction, cinematic picaresque, avant-garde performance art, uncanny duplication, and coincidence—all converging on a revelation that teases with a lingering suggestiveness. Lola learns the same lesson as Kreisel's young pilgrim: that for a writer, the promise is greater than the fulfilment, but promise must be fortified by painful memories.

Closing the Circle

Ramabai Espinet
The Swinging Bridge. HarperFlamingo $32.95

Reviewed by Chelva Kanaganayakam

Da-Da, the father of the narrator, Mona Singh, has compiled a list of titles for the books he would like to write at some stage of his life, and neither his titles nor his subject matter mimics what he sees as the project of contemporary West Indian authors. According to the narrator, "The new books

by the up-and-coming West Indian writers offended him. He thought they had one purpose only: to make us look bad. All of these new writers in England were making it, he said, on the backs of the poor people they had left behind." Da-Da's reservations are hardly new, although his own titles are so overtly exotic that his plans to become a writer are also treated with ironic distance by the author/narrator. Da-Da wants to depict a land in all its pristine beauty, although nothing in his life justifies his naive idealism about Trinidad. In fact, the novel repeatedly alerts the reader to the dangers of essentializing the Caribbean. Later in the novel, Horatio, a young relative, decides to undertake a quest for lost treasures in Trinidad, and his entire plan, despite its obvious limitations, reminds the reader that the impulse to exoticize is very much a part of the psyche of the diasporic second generation, no different in its assumptions from the early colonizers.

The Swinging Bridge is, in many senses, a rewriting of traditional narratives, although it makes no attempt to mask its identification with the beauty and nostalgic appeal of Trinidad. Mona recalls: "The night sky over Manahambre Road was clear for miles around. Nothing but the stars high above and the moon sailing cleanly over the celamen tree. Falling into sleep hearing the minor key dipping and falling and making music out of our daily lives, I was a happy child. I lived in the magical world until I was seven." The magic is, however, offset by ironic awareness of disputes, betrayals, violence and tension. In fact, the dominant trope of the novel is the swing bridge, across which an unwilling Mona is forced to walk by a bully. Its presence reminds the reader that this narrative is about crossing, about uncertainty and upheaval, and about the need to succeed in a world where old certainties no longer hold and new promises turn out to be deceptive. To cross the swing bridge is to remember the past, the Kala Pani, and the whole saga of indenture. The bridge also marks a transition to the future, to the second wave of diaspora that brings the narrator's family to Canada.

The novel begins in Canada with Kello's impending death. Kello's brief period of palliative care becomes the occasion for the family to come together, to look at themselves and their past, to come to terms with their failings and celebrate their strengths. Kello insists on truth, on revisiting suppressed and carefully hidden truths, and for the most part succeeds, although he himself prefers it to be known that his illness is cancer rather than AIDS. More ironic is his desperate quest to reclaim the land that his family sold, and reshape it into a commercially successful property. He wants to turn the clock back, on his own terms, and if his success means very little in pragmatic terms, it reinforces the issue of recovering the past, even if it means jettisoning old narratives in favour of untold ones. In spatial terms, the narrative moves back and forth between Toronto and Trinidad, encapsulating the present and the past, and the peripatetic structure reinforces the thematic preoccupations of the novel.

For Mona the present is far from satisfactory. Even her findings about a woman called Cecile Fatiman for a film about Haitian women in Montreal are gently put aside for a more conventional narrative. An Indo-Caribbean heritage cannot be meaningful unless it is understood in all its complexity, and that is precisely what she attempts as she travels to Trinidad. More important than buying land is acquiring knowledge about her great grandmother Gainder, a Brahmin widow who braved the Kala Pani to start her life again in Trinidad. Her life and songs offer an alternative narrative, one that speaks of courage and fortitude, a determination to survive in a male-dominated world. To appreciate the life of Gainder is to recognize that Indian culture, Trinidadian culture, and diasporic

life in the West are all connected. Gainder broke the mold when she decided that the life of a young widow in Benares was not what she was willing to endure. The Caribbean offers the illusion of freedom, but even before she reaches her destination she discovers that patriarchy and colonialism are continuing threats. Travelling alone poses one set of problems, getting married another. It is strangely appropriate that the shadowy figure that defends her against the overtures of a British sailor is called *Jeevan*. To lose him during the passage foretells the future. And yet her voice persists through her songs, and that provides the continuity that the narrator needs to define her troubled identity.

The Swinging Bridge is a solid novel, with moments of rare lyrical beauty. The characters, for the most part, are predictable in their ordinariness, perhaps intentionally so. The concern of the novel is narrow and focused: "If you happen to be born into an Indian family, an Indian family from the Caribbean, migratory, never certain of the terrain, that's how life falls down around you. It's close and thick and sheltering, its ugly and violent secrets locked inside the family walls. The outside encroaches, but the ramparts are strong, and once you leave it you have no shelter and no ready skills for finding a different one." The tone and texture of the prose remind the reader of V.S. Naipaul although the concern is now with a more modern, westernized Mona rather than a traditional, weak-willed Biswas. The book has much to offer, despite the author's reluctance to move beyond the conventions of the standard realist narrative. *The Swinging Bridge* is a remarkable first novel, deeply concerned with "home" in an increasingly fragmented social milieu.

Dixie-Defying Drama

Michel Tremblay
Past Perfect. Talonbooks $15.95

Steve Galluccio
Mambo Italiano. Talonbooks $16.95

Dave Carley
Dave Carley: Three Plays. J. Gordon Shillingford $22.95

Reviewed by Len Falkenstein

In his Introduction to *Three Plays*, Dave Carley, citing a term coined by George F. Walker, laments "the Dixie Cup syndrome" that afflicts Canadian theatre: "I don't want my plays to be produced once and then tossed to the side of the cultural thruway." Given how infrequently the words "successful," "frequently produced," and "Canadian play" tend to come together in the same sentence, it's a rare pleasure to review five plays by three playwrights who have managed to avoid Dixie Cupping.

Michel Tremblay is one of Canada's most renowned dramatists, and *Past Perfect* marks his return to one of his most acclaimed works, *Albertine, in Five Times* (1985), and its eponymous heroine, one of his favourite creations. *Past Perfect*, first performed in French in 2003 and translated by Linda Gaboriau for English productions that have followed, is a prequel to *Albertine, in Five Times*: while the original play depicts Albertine in each of the five decades of her life from ages 30 through 70, *Past Perfect* gives us Albertine at 20, on an evening that irrevocably determined her fate. The major event dramatized in the play—Albertine's failed attempt to win back her youthful love, Alex, who has jilted her in favour of her sister, Madeleine—while seemingly the typical stuff of young heartbreak, proves anything but for Albertine. At the heart of the matter is her utterly consuming, obsessive—and by consequence, suffocating—passion for Alex, which, coupled with her refusal to accept that true love can ever

burn less hot, drives him into the arms of the more conventional Madeleine and moulds Albertine into the hardened character Tremblay plumbs in *Five Times*.

While there is a beauty to the simplicity of the drama, which preserves the unities of place and time and unfolds as a series of two-person conversations between Albertine and her mother, Madeleine, her brother, and Alex, there is also an artlessness about the play and a feeling of slightness to the material that marks *Past Perfect* as far from Tremblay's best work. The dialogue is often flatly prosaic, and while this may be a consequence of the translation, more troublesome is the clumsiness with which exposition is conveyed through dialogue. ("Don't tell me you've forgotten we came to live here precisely because your father lost his job as a translator.") Ultimately, however, the most disappointing aspect of *Past Perfect* is the sense that the events it depicts are simply not of sufficient depth and consequence to be worthy of a play, that what we have here is a quickly sketched episode from the backstory of one of Tremblay's most unforgettable characters, a scene rather than a play in and of itself.

Tremblay played a key role in the success of fellow-Montrealer Steve Galluccio's *Mambo Italiano* as an early advocate of the play and translator of its first production, in French, for Montreal's La Compagnie Jean-Duceppe in 2000. Since then, the play has broken box-office records for Montreal's Centaur Theatre, has received several other successful North American productions, and been adapted as a feature film. Like the work to which it is frequently compared, *My Big Fat Greek Wedding*, *Mambo Italiano* mines a vein of mainstream humour based on ethnic stereotypes and inter-generational conflict in a hyphenated Canadian family. Galluccio's play centres on the sudden decision of Angelo, a gay Montreal writer, to come out to his family. The deeply traditional (and very stereotypically Italian) parents of both Angelo and his lover, Nino, fall into hysterics and collectively contrive to "cure" their sons of their homosexuality by setting them up with some nice Italian girls. The result of the somewhat predictable hijinks that ensue is that Nino, a self-loathing homophobe who preferred life in the closet, ends up in a hastily arranged, unhappy heterosexual marriage, while Angelo looks forward to a new future, hurt by Nino's betrayal but at peace with himself and reconciled with his now accepting parents.

Galluccio writes for television sitcoms, and *Mambo Italiano* bears all the hallmarks, for better or worse, of that genre. Despite its mildly controversial subject matter, it is also about as shocking, provocative, and cutting-edge as an episode of *Will and Grace*. The flipside of its mainstream success, however, is that the play and its film adaptation have undoubtedly served as a catalyst for dialogue about homosexuality for many people, especially from the Italian community, for whom the subject has previously been taboo.

Toronto playwright Dave Carley is one of Canada's most prolific and produced playwrights, and *Three Plays* brings together three of his most popular works, *Midnight Madness*, *Writing with Our Feet*, and *Into*, all of which have received numerous productions. The appeal of *Midnight Madness* (first produced 1988), one of Carley's earliest plays, is not hard to understand. A simple, charming, character-driven two-hander, the play depicts a fateful encounter in a furniture store bed department between two 30-something former high-school outcasts: Wesley, living a life of quiet, lonely desperation as a furniture salesman in a dying store in the dying downtown of a small city, and Anna, a single ex-teenage mom and wild child looking to build a more bourgeois life. Their reunion occasions much mutual reflection and recrimination regarding the disappointments of their lives and, for Wesley in particular, the resolve to begin

again, in a future that the play's ending suggests just may include Anna.

Carley notes that it wasn't until after *Midnight Madness* that he began to break away from "restrictive . . . claustrophobic" naturalism. The two other plays in the collection show just how liberating this discovery was for a writer with such a delightfully inspired imagination. *Writing with Our Feet* (1990) offers a voyage through the mind of Jean-François, a recluse who lives in a garage beneath a Montreal freeway on-ramp, on the day he finally musters the courage to venture into the outside world. JF's is a strange mind indeed, visited by a parade of wacky relatives (including his amputee cousin Alphonsinette, inventor of the spray-on condom), famous real-life designer Raymond Loewy, and his beloved, recently deceased sister Sophie, with whom he perfected a system of writing with the feet as insurance against ever losing their arms. As much as the play is a tour-de-force of comic writing of the off-the-wall variety, it is also an affecting metaphor for the folly and sterility of solipsistic artistic isolation.

Into, inspired by a Julio Cortazar short story, is a surreal work of dramatic magic realism about four people, an "Urban Nun," a businessman, a lonely young woman, and a volatile youth, trapped in a traffic jam that stretches from hours to days to months. As other groups (including The Chip-eaters, The Dental Confederation, The Disaffected White Youth, and The Bourgeois Confederacy) emerge from the primordial river of social anarchy that the freeway has become, the four must similarly overcome their initial differences to forge a functioning community in order to survive. Note-perfect and utterly compelling in the fantasy world it creates, and simultaneously hauntingly dystopian and blackly comic, *Into* is a poignant exploration of the dynamics of contemporary urban alienation. Like the other plays in the collection, it demonstrates Carley's gift for social observation and his ability to walk the knife edge between despair and rapture where the richest and darkest comedy dwells.

Magic and Loss

David Arnason
The Demon Lover. Turnstone $16.95

Emily Schultz
Black Coffee Night. Insomniac $19.95

Reviewed by Tim Haner

There is much to surprise and delight the reader of *The Demon Lover,* a collection of 17 short stories from *King Jerry* author David Arnason. One wants to call them card-tricks: they're brief (most are under ten pages long), surprising in an amusing way, and demonstrate the skill of a master trickster.

Some of the stories begin with a variation of the fairy tale opening ("Once upon a time . . ."; "A long time ago. . ."; "There once was a. . .") but all of them, in some way, play with folktale and fairy tale motifs, updated and situated, for the most part, in and around Winnipeg. *Play* is the operative word here. Most of the stories are funny, some of them laugh-out-loud—which can't be said of most fairy tales. The opening story, "The Demon Lover," establishes the humorous tone that is carried through most of the rest of the collection. Here, an Armani-clad demon ominously forbids his current amour to enter a locked room in his swank apartment. When she takes the key he has deliberately left for her to find and enters the secret room, she discovers the remains of his previous lovers, not their bodies but their photographs "neatly framed and hung on the walls, and a couple of photo albums for the overflow."

As well as being just plain funny, a number of the stories play with some of post-modernism's narrative conventions. In "Drowned Lovers" the narrator/author wonders to himself whether or not he ought to drown his characters. In the clever story

"The Villain of the Piece," David Arnason himself makes an appearance as a hack writer avenging himself on the man who attempts to steal away his muse. The last four stories in the collection are notably darker in tone and theme than the others, which makes for a feeling of disjointedness given the light mood of the rest of the collection.

Though Arnason makes use of some of the ornaments of postmodern literature, including intertextuality, metanarrative, and a cheeky irony, his prose style is lucid and engaging. His characters, on the other hand, are never fleshed out, and the reader might find it difficult to care much for these rather flat creations. But perhaps that is to cavil; this is fairyland, after all.

There is little magic in Emily Schultz's short story collection *Black Coffee Night*. These 11 stories follow young characters on the slow, painful journey toward adulthood as they suffer through the deaths of loved ones, gender identification issues, break-ups, break-downs, and other challenges that adolescents and young adults face.

The mode here is realism, and reality proves hard for Schultz's characters because it refuses to conform to the shapes of desire. In the words of one of Schultz's characters: "There is the world around me, and then, there is the world inside my head. I know of all the struggles in this life—the only one that really matters is the struggle between these two." What Schultz's characters take away from this struggle are glimmers of happiness and "moments of knowing" achieved by remaking their inner worlds through the exercise of their imaginations.

In "The Value of X," one of the stronger stories in the collection, the issue is straight society's discomfort with cross-gendering. Jeanette imagines she has the power to transform girls into boys just by looking at them. She doesn't have X-ray vision; she has "XY-to-XX vision," and gender-bends a beefy classmate by "mentally drawing breasts over his semi-developed pecks and applying Cocoa Transparent to his chubby, pale boy-lips."

In "The Amateurs," Jon suffers the heartbreak of losing his girlfriend to his best friend, but it is a loss compensated for by an almost visionary reawakening to beauty he experiences while riding the bus: "I noticed how the light licked the neck hairs of the woman sitting in front of me, small golden shoots concentrated in the centre and fanned off behind her ears like the fan of a bird faraway in flight. . . . Lovely, I thought, staring out the window again. The world could still be lovely."

Though Schultz's fluidly poetic prose is occasionally dammed by an irritating overabundance of end stops, her imagery is fresh and arresting. She does an impressive job of conveying the thoughts, feelings, and impressions of characters who are making small inroads toward the kind of awareness and maturity that hardships bring, reminding us of the besieged self's capacity to refashion a difficult world to make it more habitable.

Ready, Aim (Carefully), Fire

Margaret Atwood
Moving Targets: Writing with Intent 1982-2004.
Anansi $39.95

Reviewed by Sally Chivers

This is an odd volume. Few besides reviewers and Atwood devotees will read it from cover to cover. Though full of utterly enjoyable, immensely readable, and devastatingly clever nuggets, the pieces within *Moving Targets* were not intended to work together as a unified read, and they do not. That said, the book provides a sense of Atwood's range of reading, analysis, and relevance. It also offers an intriguing cultural history of the end of the twentieth and the very beginning of the twenty-first century. The three

sections "1982-1989," "1990-2000," and "2001-2004" provide a distinctly Canadian but broadly applicable vantage on global phenomena. Not many thinkers can provide insight within a moment that endures, but Atwood can.

As Atwood ages, her readers increasingly expect and want her to produce an autobiography. This book is full of the first-person and some revealing self-portraits. Though it will not satisfy those looking for a tell-all journey through Atwood's development as a writer, it begins to tell the tale. She provides a refreshing retrospective glimpse at the pre-fame Atwood and helps readers to know that she was not always aware of how much she would succeed as a writer. Looking back at her experiences in the 1960s, she reveals that,

> Fleeing a personal life of Gordian complexity, and leaving behind a poetry manuscript rejected by all, and a first novel ditto, I scraped together what was left after a winter of living in a Charles Street rooming house and writing tours-de-force of undiscovered genius while working by day at a market research company, borrowed six hundred dollars from my parents, who were understandably somewhat nervous about my choice of the literary life by then, and climbed onto a plane.

The book contains many self-deprecating hints of her struggle to be confident in her choice to write but also her good-humoured embarrassment at her past confidence. For example, in a charming section where she explains her aunts' influence on her development as a writer, she says of herself in the late 1950s, "I had already produced several impressive poems; at least I was impressed by them."

The first section of *Moving Targets*, 1982-1989, culled from the period when Atwood was working on and published both *Cat's Eye* and *The Handmaid's Tale*, contains a mix of contemporaneous book reviews (of *The Witches of Eastwick*, *Difficult Loves*, *Beloved*, *The Warrior Queens*), theoretical contemplations on literary form (especially utopia-dystopia), articulations of her relationship to other Canadian women writers (Marian Engel, Susanna Moodie, Margaret Laurence), and some characteristic environmentalist writing. She provides some revealing insights about her coming to know Canada as a literary place:

> This was one of my first intimations that, beneath its facade of teacups and outdoor pursuits and various kinds of trees, Canada —even this literary, genteel segment of Canada, for which I had such youthful contempt—was a good deal more problematic than I had thought.

She also offers some cutting assessments of what differentiates literature from other forms of transcription:

> Those little black marks on the page mean nothing without their retranslation into sound. Even when we read silently, we read with the ear, unless we are reading bank statements.

As counterpoint, she highlights the tension required to produce good writing:

> Perhaps it's from the collisions between these two kinds of stories—what is often called 'real life' (and which writers greedily think of as their 'material') and what is sometimes dismissed as 'mere literature' or 'the kinds of things that happen only in stories'—that original and living writing is generated.

The collection's second section, "1990-2000," contains auxiliary pieces written alongside *Wilderness Tips*, *The Robber Bride*, *Good Bones*, *Morning in the Burned House*, *The Blind Assassin*, and *Alias Grace*. Topics for this section continue the themes set up in the first, but the literary critical focus is on historical realism. She concludes her public talk about writing *Alias Grace*:

> The past no longer belongs only to those who lived in it; the past belongs to those who claim it, and are willing to explore it,

> and to infuse it with meaning for those alive today. The past belongs to us, because we are the ones who need it.

Her focus is on the knowability of history, which she claims rests on "individual particulars" rather than grand patterns. The general tendency is a slight nostalgia undercut (no doubt deliberately) by wit. Her frustration and fascination with the growing effects on her readership of the postmodern questioning of authority and master narratives shows in statements such as,

> it's typical of the cynicism of our age that, if you write a novel, everyone assumes it's about real people, thinly disguised; but if you write an autobiography everyone assumes you're lying your head off.

The collection's third section, "2001-2004," comprised of pieces written alongside *Oryx and Crake,* continues to flirt with readers who desire autobiographical nuggets. Atwood refers to this final section as "A Fistful of Editors" since, as she says, "in occasional writing, it is often the editors who come up with the occasions." The most momentous occasion in this time frame is of course the attack on the World Trade Center, and Atwood's "Letter to America" comments upon the event, though she points out it began as a piece she had already promised to *The Nation* before September 11, 2001. The section also contains moving remembrances of Mordecai Richler and Carol Shields after their deaths. It concludes with a pithy set of "mortifications" wherein Atwood remembers embarrassments from her early, middle, and modern periods.

This book is aptly titled. The collection is full of moving targets, which makes it not all that readable and yet valuable. Though Atwood does indeed show herself to be an impressive cultural critic, what is most consistent and useful is her ongoing discussion of what literature is and what it can do.

Witnessing a Genocide

Roméo Dallaire (with Brent Beardsley)
Shake Hands with the Devil: The Failure of Humanity in Rwanda. Vintage Canada $24.95

Reviewed by Natasha Dagenais

Shake Hands with the Devil recounts in vivid detail the events leading up to and during the Rwandan genocide in which more than 800,000 Tutsis and moderate Hutus died from April to July 1994. While a significant number of books on the genocide in Rwanda have been published in the last decade, this autobiographical work is unique for a variety of reasons. Recipient of the 2004 Governor General's Award for non-fiction and winner of the Writers' Trust Shaughnessy Cohen Prize for Political Writing, Dallaire provides a detailed eyewitness account as the Force Commander of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Rwanda (UNAMIR). As its military leader, responsible for overseeing the peacekeeping mission, he maintained contact with all the parties involved in the implementation of the Arusha Peace Agreement, which initially set out to end the civil war in Rwanda and help enforce peace between the Rwandese Patriotic Front (RPF) and the Rwandese Government Forces (RGF). Furthermore, drawing on his insider's experience with the administrative elements of war, Dallaire painstakingly describes everyday military duties, diplomatic meetings, administrative tasks, and accounts of killings by génocidaires that took place during his mission. As a result, he was able to use these various experiences to provide a chronological and comprehensive explanation of who, what, where, when, and why. These experiences thus show his distinctive standpoint as a participant in and witness to the story.

What is particularly interesting in *Shake Hands with the Devil* is that the reader gains insight into *who* Dallaire is, the man behind the "old-school" trained military leader.

The introductory chapters help contextualize his vision and principles as a commander. Only the first three chapters (out of a total of fifteen) are dedicated to his childhood and adolescence in east-end Montreal, his bilingual background and unofficial role as translator and mediator, his love for the army, his military career, including a number of appointments and promotions, and his experience as a peacetime soldier. Instead, the greater part of the book explores the UNAMIR mission and exposes its flaws and failures. Dallaire unashamedly offers a portrait of himself as a fallible leader, whose mission, in hindsight, failed because he could not persuade the international community to intervene on behalf of the Rwandan people. Although he did use the media to "strike the conscience of the world," the outrage expressed by western countries came too late. Moreover, Dallaire delves into his personal failure as Force Commander, who struggled with inexperience coupled with helplessness and the bureaucracy of war, and the failure of western countries, which pleaded ignorance in response to the atrocities that were happening in Rwanda. Significantly, he shoulders part of the blame because he was an inexperienced peacekeeper trained to go into classic Cold War-style conflicts. Dallaire's mission was supposed to be a standard Chapter VI peacekeeping mission. That protocol essentially empowers the UN to step in and help put an end to hostilities through diplomacy and without the use of force; it did not take into consideration the "new war-style" conflicts now dominating the world stage.

The question "Are we all human, or are some more human than others?" posed by Dallaire in his powerful political memoir *Shake Hands with the Devil* raises an important issue concerning the role played by the international community, "of which the UN is only a symbol," in so-called developing countries. Should western countries become involved only when their interests will be served, as seems to be the current trend? Throughout his narrative, Dallaire alludes to the "failure of humanity," which abandoned millions of Rwandans to their plight, by pointing to the overwhelming lack of initiative and involvement on the part of the "First World" in helping to bring a decisive end to the genocide. The international community responded only after hundreds of thousands had already been slaughtered during that 100-day period in 1994. Indeed, the author argues that all too often humanity is sacrificed in the name of national self-interest. Dallaire, on the one hand, underlines the burden of accountability, as opposed to blame; nonetheless, he does point a finger at the United States and at France, two powerful and influential countries with permanent seats on the UN Security Council, for not having had the incentive to provide help sooner. On the other hand, he emphasizes the need to move beyond moral apathy and self-interest, but most importantly, as a witness to the genocide, he also underscores the need to "take concrete steps to prevent such a thing from ever happening again." While Hutu extremists attempted to "erase" all Tutsi and moderate Hutu witnesses to their crimes, *Shake Hands with the Devil* remains a haunting narrative account in memory of the genocide in Rwanda, of its victims, and of its survivors.

Trois voix/voies féminines

Françoise Hamel-Beaudoin
La vie d'Éva Sénécal. Triptyque 19,00 $

Denise Desautels; Paul Chamberland (dir.)
Mémoires parallèles. Choix de poèmes. Éditions du Noroît 18,95 $

Nadine Ltaif
Le rire de l'eau. Éditions du Noroît 14,95 $

Compte rendu par Cynthia Lévesque

L'écriture des femmes au Québec, à l'instar de tout mouvement littéraire, a évolué en regard de la société dans laquelle elle s'ancre. Ainsi la Belle Province est-elle sortie de sa léthargie dès les années 1960 pour rendre manifeste une éclosion culturelle et politique. Si les auteures étaient confrontées à une résistance morale et sociale avant la Révolution tranquille, elles ont pu exprimer leur parole singulière à une époque plus contemporaine. Cette mise en place d'une écriture féminine, voire féministe, a ensuite ouvert la voie à une liberté scripturale aujourd'hui légitimée au sein de l'institution littéraire. Éva Sénécal, Denise Desautels et Nadine Ltaif font partie de ces auteures qui ont laissé leur trace à ces trois différentes périodes de la prose féminine au Québec.

Dans *La vie d'Éva Sénécal*, Françoise Hamel-Beaudoin retrace en seize courts chapitres le parcours personnel et professionnel d'une auteure marquante pour le mouvement poétique néoromantique féminin. En s'attardant longuement sur l'enfance de l'écrivaine née en 1905 à La Patrie, dans les Cantons-de-l'Est, Hamel-Beaudoin enracine l'existence de Sénécal dans une dynamique familiale traditionnelle. Dès son plus jeune âge, elle apparaît comme une jeune fille légèrement rebelle et indisciplinée, attirée par la lecture et l'écriture. Sénécal « voit sa mère prisonnière de son rôle d'épouse et de mère qui met des enfants au monde tous les ans. [Elle] ne veut pas de cette vie-là. » Le succès littéraire d'Éva Sénécal sera aussi instantané qu'éphémère. Côtoyant les écrivains connus du Québec, travaillant comme journaliste et rédactrice, publiant recueils de poèmes et romans, la jeune femme alors âgée d'une vingtaine d'années se destine à une carrière florissante. Mais en perpétuelle quête du bonheur et de l'amour parfaits, Sénécal se désenchante rapidement et cesse d'écrire à vingt-huit ans. Hamel-Beaudoin révèle alors une écrivaine naïve et déçue par le monde adulte. Incapable de trouver un équilibre entre la vie rurale de son enfance et le rythme trépidant de la ville, Éva, jadis enthousiaste et ambitieuse, se présente comme une femme mélancolique. À son décès en 1988, elle ne semble pas avoir connu de véritables satisfactions familiale, professionnelle et amoureuse. *La vie d'Éva Sénécal* est une œuvre sensible où le lecteur a l'occasion de lever le voile sur cette poétesse trop méconnue au Québec. L'alternance entre les faits biographiques et les extraits de textes sénécaliens permet de cerner la véritable portée de cette écriture, empreinte d'amertume et d'angoisse, à l'image des réussites ou des déceptions vécues.

Il était donc difficile de prendre sa place comme écrivaine avant les années 1960 au Québec. Devant se plier aux diktats de cette société paysanne, les femmes n'avaient souvent d'autres choix que de se résigner au silence. Les chambardements sociaux qui ont suivi allaient cependant donner un souffle nouveau à la communauté culturelle québécoise, particulièrement au mouvement féministe. Plusieurs femmes, dont France Théoret, Madeleine Gagnon et Nicole Brossard, ont mis de l'avant une écriture féminine avant-gardiste où chacune aurait son droit de parole au sein d'une société valorisant le masculin. Denise Desautels fait partie de ces auteures qui ont voulu « raconter l'angle mort de l'histoire ». Le recueil *Mémoires parallèles* présente, selon un ordre chronologique, des extraits de sa poésie parue entre 1980 et 2002. Choisis et présentés

par Paul Chamberland, les textes, au total plus de 200 pages, sont tirés de quinze recueils. Dès les premières lignes apparaît la musicalité particulière de Desautels. Fragmentée, la parole féminine laisse voir un délire verbal où les réflexions brutes de l'énonciatrice se portent sur les thématiques de la mémoire, la mort, la maternité et le mal. La poétesse veut remédier au mutisme qui étrangle les femmes; elle préfère de loin « l'envergure de la voix, et l'audace, à l'illusion du silence ». De pages en pages, le lecteur accède à l'univers de cette auteure, dont la mémoire éveille une parole féconde et libératrice. *Mémoires parallèles* laisse voir un *je* féminin, imprégné de passion et de douleur, désirant concilier les élans émotifs inspirés par la vie et la mort.

Les innovations thématiques et littéraires instaurées par les écrivaines féministes des années 1970 et 1980, dont Desautels est une pionnière, ont ainsi donné lieu à un foisonnement d'œuvres créatrices écrites par des Québécoises. Le dernier recueil de Nadine Ltaif, *Le rire de l'eau*, participe à l'enrichissement de cette affluence poétique et romanesque. Soixante-huit pages séparées par douze intertitres transportent le lecteur dans un monde de rire et de ravissement. Luttant contre une temporalité contraignante et irréversible, l'énonciatrice aime se complaire dans les images de liberté et de bien-être : « J'aurais pu être cette femme / qui souffre, / la tête enfoncée entre / deux épaules, / les deux mains placées / sur ses tempes. / J'ai préféré relever la tête / et chercher la beauté. » Inspirée par la liberté de l'oiseau, le réconfort de l'eau ou le dépouillement de ce qui l'entoure, la poétesse se laisse guider par les sons et les silences. De cette écriture sereine se dégage une impression de recueillement : ne plus être subordonnée au matérialisme, au temps ou au regard de l'autre, voilà ce qu'elle convoite. Les vers de Ltaif, riches de sens, révèlent une auteure exaltant le bonheur malgré les maux de notre époque.

Métamorphoses

Margaret Michèle Cook
En un tour de main (portraits et paysages). Le Nordir 12,00 $

Claudine Bertrand
Tomber du jour. Éditions du Noroît 15,95 $

Marcelle Roy
Pattes d'oie. Éditions du Noroît 15,95 $

Compte rendu par Mélanie Collado

En un tour de main de Margaret Michèle Cook s'ouvre sur la célébration de l'amour des mots. Dans les deux premières suites poétiques de ce recueil, les mots et les sons se suivent, se déforment, se décomposent, se recomposent et s'enchaînent dans des poèmes qui ne manquent pas d'humour. Qu'il s'agisse de définitions, d'antonymes, de synonymes ou de listes engendrées par un correcteur d'orthographe prompt à afficher un péremptoire « connaît pas » suivi d'une liste d'alternatives, *En un tour de main* met en scène des mots qui se frôlent, se côtoient et s'altèrent les uns les autres. Par des rapprochements inattendus, les mots déclinent ainsi des identités multiples qui séduisent le lecteur et l'entraînent dans leur farandole. Dans les deux dernières suites intitulées « Paysages urbains » et « Signes de la vie à la campagne », la majorité des poèmes semblent saisir un moment anodin et lui restituer toute son importance. Plusieurs textes tels que « homme marchant au travail », « femme aux bras ballants », « femme à jupe à bicyclette », « deux araignées dans un bain » rappellent ces photographies en noir et blanc où le geste d'un passant anonyme est capturé pour en révéler la beauté. Calé entre les portraits de mots et les moments anodins, un récit poétique occupe le centre du recueil et dévoile au lecteur une vie féminine fragile, malade, mais soutenue par l'écriture. Ce long poème se distingue des autres par sa forme et son contenu; pourtant, comme eux, il célèbre le pouvoir de transformation de l'écriture.

Tomber du jour de Claudine Bertrand entraîne le lecteur dans l'intimité amoureuse d'une femme. De strophe en strophe, de page en page, les poèmes révèlent le corps à corps de deux amants, leur jouissance, puis la métamorphose de la passion en deuil, « Et sur la peau des amoureux / et sur la poitrine de la mer / Un vent souffle ». Le plaisir fait place à la souffrance comme s'il en était porteur, « Avant que la mer ne crache/sa vague de fond/avant que la tornade/ ne détruise maisons villes et villages/ne divise le monde/ le désir était déjà foudre sans nom ». Après la « noce » viennent l'absence et le deuil: « femme endeuillée de peau de louves/ se recouvre/ pleurant la fuite du nomade/ coureur de bonne aventure ». À la douce intimité de l'aube sur laquelle s'ouvre ce récit poétique, succèdent la perte, l'ombre, les pleurs. *Tomber du jour* est le récit d'une passion féminine, « Voyageuse à la peau volcanique/ elle a déversé ses flots de désir/ en coulées de lave/sa lèvre remue:/ effroi et cendres ». Les vers de *Tomber du jour* sont souvent courts, se réduisant parfois à un seul mot. Certains poèmes semblent ainsi faits de fragments donnant à l'ensemble du recueil un rythme saccadé qui fait écho au « souffle des amants » et aux cris de douleurs.

Pattes d'oie de Marcelle Roy est composé de quatre suites poétiques où s'inscrit la progression du temps. Les premiers poèmes se concentrent sur le choc du vieillissement physique perçu comme une trahison du corps : « C'est une vieille/ une vieille à temps et contretemps/que les ans grignotent/ jusqu'en dedans ». Dans la deuxième suite, l'irréversible métamorphose du corps se confond avec la mort, « Elle infiltre les contours de la peau/ habite les muscles les os les épaules/ruse dans les détours insidieusement ». Si le poème sait rassembler et s'oppose à la décomposition, les mots n'en vieillissent pas moins, « les verbes s'empâtent/les adjectifs ont un petit air démodé ». Bien que l'angoisse persiste dans la troisième suite, la peur ne l'emporte plus, et l'écriture aide à combler le vide, à penser autrement : « Peut-être le poème est-il/ la respiration du temps/ qui cherche un lieu ». Le temps assassin, victime de son propre mouvement, chercherait, lui aussi, un refuge dans les mots. Même si ceux-ci s'enfargent et vieillissent, ils apaisent et ils sont associés à la vie, au lendemain. Dans la quatrième suite le rapport entre la vie et l'écriture se fait plus précis : « J'écris dit-elle/ pour entendre l'absence/ j'écris pour réconcilier les mots/ouvrir l'accès au présent/ . . . l'éternité/juste un instant ». Vers la fin du recueil, le néant et l'éternité se confondent, la peur s'atténue : « Mieux vaut déguster/ les jours sans attendre/ dit le poète/ je savoure le bleu du firmament/ le gris de la pluie et même/ pourquoi pas/ la beauté de la mort des feuilles/ blessées de lumière ». Une question est posée : « l'absence/ infinie/ serait-elle/ un terme/ acceptable ». Les strophes et les vers des derniers poèmes deviennent de plus en plus brefs, comme s'ils se décomposaient, eux aussi, mais leur empreinte persiste bien après que la dernière page du recueil ait été tournée.

Les relations intimes

Katerine Caron
Vous devez être heureuse. Boréal 22,95 $

Jean-François Chassay
L'angle mort. Boréal 27,95 $

Pascale Quiviger
Le cercle parfait. L'instant même 19,95 $

Compte rendu par Sandra Hobbs

Ces trois romans s'apparentent par leur trame narrative plutôt mince et par leur interrogation des relations intimes—parentales, amoureuses, filiales—sans trop s'attarder sur la relation de l'individu à la société. Souvent le présent sert de tremplin vers le passé, les souvenirs surgissant à tout moment, permettant ainsi des réflexions sur

les liens familiaux ou intimes. Or, le souvenir dans le roman de Quiviger permet également de sonder l'expérience de l'exil, tandis que dans les deux autres romans l'intrigue se passe presque exclusivement au Québec.

Malgré sa structure calquée sur une série de conférences d'Italo Calvino (*Les leçons américaines*), *L'Angle mort* se livre sur le mode de la conversation : les trois personnages principaux, dont les vies sont imbriquées, se parlent au téléphone quand ils ne se parlent pas simplement à eux-mêmes. Cet isolement physique des personnages souligne leur isolement affectif, car chacun éprouve de la difficulté à nouer des liens durables avec autrui. Malgré leurs professions fort divergentes—cuisinier, historien, architecte—les personnages sont parfois difficiles à distinguer, à plus forte raison que les noms androgynes des personnages —Camille, Stéphane, Dominique—soulignent l'homogénéité des voix narratives. D'ailleurs, en dépit de l'orthographe et des tournures de phrase qui reflètent la langue parleé, le niveau de langue dépasse celui auquel l'on pourrait s'attendre dans une conversation téléphonique. Le thème du roman, l'angle mort, revient à plusieurs reprises, soit pour parler de l'histoire— « tiens, pour prendre une image, un historien doit regarder dans son angle mort. On ne peut pas agir comme si on était seul, comme s'il n'y avait rien derrière. Parce que ce qui se trouve derrière risque toujours de nous rentrer dedans »—soit pour représenter les relations personnelles : « tiens, c'est comme un angle mort. Là, pas là. On construit son identité à travers le miroir des autres. » L'angle mort, c'est aussi les accidents de la vie que les personnages principaux ne voient pas venir, préoccupés comme ils sont par leurs secrets au sujet des liaisons et des paternités insoupçonnées. Mais souvent le drame personnel des personnages cède la place aux discours sur l'architecture, la statistique, la cuisine, la culture américaine. Chaque personnage s'engage dans la vie, sans toutefois faire toujours attention à son angle mort, de sorte que le lecteur appréhende l'accident à tout bout de champ. Ce qui n'est pas, somme toute, une mauvaise façon de passer quelques heures de lecture, et ce qui fait que malgré sa longueur (plus de 325 pages), l'on ne perd jamais l'intérêt pour ces personnages victimes des accidents de la vie.

Le roman de Quiviger, *Le cercle parfait*, se limite par contre au point de vue d'un seul personnage, une Québécoise qui a quitté homme et foyer pour aller s'installer auprès de son amant dans un petit village italien. C'est donc au premier abord une histoire d'amour, mais qui donne lieu à des réflexions sur l'expérience de l'exil, de l'amour, de l'existence humaine. Il est question dans ce récit de tenter une réconciliation des différences, du moins temporairement, par le biais de l'amour. C'est donc un récit d'appréciation de l'autre, celui qui vient d'une autre culture et qui endosse des valeurs différentes : appréciation pour d'autres conceptions du temps, de l'espace, du sens de la vie, de la famille, des animaux, de la nature. La narratrice, Marianne, remarque constamment des différences entre les sociétés québécoise et italienne : « ils savent combien l'histoire est longue. Ils savent qu'ils ne sont que la strate vivante d'un peuple accumulé. » Au fait, le rapport de la narratrice à son amant est un rapport non seulement à lui, mais à la communauté dont il est issu et dont son identité dépend. Quiviger nous offre des analyses psychologiques fines qui sont esquissées à partir des descriptions détaillées des personnages, des rapports humains et des paysages. C'est un portrait du village saisi comme personnalité collective, comme écosystème qui se suffit à lui-même. « Ce village existe encore, tel quel, en ce moment même. » Marco constitue le cercle parfait du titre : il suffit à lui-même et évolue dans un environnement qui le soutient, tandis que Marianne perd peu à peu son identité, devient de plus en plus isolée, n'existe plus. Elle finit par rentrer au

Québec, même si son cercle ne sera pas aussi parfait. En plus de cette histoire d'amour et d'exil, le roman nous offre de belles descriptions de l'Italie, qui est présentée autant comme un espace naturel (le lac, les bois) que culturel (Giotto). L'écriture est empreinte de tous les sens: la lumière, l'odeur, le toucher, les couleurs, la température . . . tout comme dans le roman de Katerine Caron, *Vous devez être heureuse*. À l'encontre des deux romans précédents, cependant, ce roman prend comme point de départ une relation réussie : la protagoniste, son mari et leur enfant vivent paisiblement dans une maison au bord de la rivière. Claire est mère, soeur, fille et femme (au foyer) et s'interroge sur son identité qui s'érige à la jonction de ces multiples rôles. Claire a fait des études en marketing mais n'a pas poursuivi de carrière avant de fonder une famille, démarche qui semble aller à l'encontre du modèle offert par sa propre mère. En effet, Claire a toujours admiré sa mère, Jacqueline, qui a parcouru le monde et qui ne s'est jamais laissée définir comme simple mère de famille. Or, Claire a justement refusé les aventures que sa mère a vécues, préférant s'installer relativement jeune dans une maison où son contact avec le monde extérieur est restreint. De ce fait, le roman se caractérise par une pénurie de dialogues, car le récit est raconté à la première personne et reflète l'univers intérieur de Claire. Le mari, souvent absent en raison de ses voyages d'affaires, n'entretient pas souvent de conversations avec sa femme. À vrai dire, les dialogues avec son jeune fils sont les échanges les plus fréquents et les plus convaincants du roman. La question fondamentale que Claire se pose est la suivante: comment une femme peut-elle se définir en tant que mère de famille et femme au foyer au vingt-et-unième siècle? C'est en revenant à sa propre enfance, surtout à ses rapports difficiles avec un père absent et à la perte de la mère tant aimée, que Claire arrive à accepter son rôle de mère et de femme. C'est toutefois en effectuant un mouvement hors de la maison—vers le jardin, le village, la métropole puis ensuite l'Europe—qu'elle apprend à mieux se réconcilier avec son choix de vivre comme femme au foyer. Retourner à la maison, comme elle le fait à la fin du roman, signifie pour Claire assumer son propre passé familial afin d'assurer l'avenir de sa famille et de son enfant.

Voilà donc trois romans à caractère intime, qui nous révèlent l'univers intérieur des personnages tout à fait contemporains. Ces personnages ne sont guère préoccupés par des problèmes de portée sociale, mais sont plutôt engagés dans une réflexion sur le sens de leurs rapports intimes. En d'autres mots, c'est en sondant les liens avec leurs proches—parents, enfants, partenaires—que les personnages définissent leur bonheur.

Parcours initiatique d'un diplomate

Daniel Soha

Chroniques tziganes. Éditions du Gref 14,95 $

Compte rendu par Marilou Potvin-Lajoie

Le prologue s'ouvre sur la mort du père. Avec lui s'envolent « les derniers lambeaux d'insouciance » de David, un Français d'origine hongroise. Héros de ce roman baroque, les pieds solidement ancrés dans la postmodernité, David est le petit-fils de József, dont le souvenir lui rappelle d'où il vient. David est en quête du monde comme de lui-même, et ces *Chroniques* sont celles de sa vie remarquablement mouvementée. Le roman commence à New York, où David entreprend amitiés, vie amoureuse et carrière diplomatique. Travaillant au sein d'un organisme français, sa fonction lui permet de perpétuer cet exil déjà amorcé par József, en l'amenant à vivre dans plusieurs villes et sur trois continents différents : New York la magnifique, qui le possède de ses images érotisantes; Toronto, dont le charme n'opère pas spontanément auprès de David et sa

fabuleuse compagne, Juli, mais qui fait tout de même partie de la gamme des lieux sensibles; Paris, où la première fille du couple, Gael, voit le jour; et Singapour, qui laisse planer un malaise. David dérange, on en veut délibérément à son succès. Refusant de mourir au milieu de rapaces agents diplomatiques, il rentre à Toronto pour travailler dans l'éducation, démissionne pour aller à Boston et revient s'établir à Toronto. Entre temps, David et Juli font un détour par Terre-Neuve, l'île de Juli, pour s'emplir d'effluves de mer et de martinis.

L'auteur des *Chroniques tziganes* varie les perspectives en chargeant un narrateur omniscient de nuancer les propos de David. La multiplicité des points de vue, des typographies et des techniques narratives participe grandement du mouvement en spirale du roman, sur un fond d'histoire du XX^e^ siècle. L'écriture de Soha est touffue, alambiquée. L'enfance, inévitablement, ressurgit au milieu de récits analeptiques entrelacés, qui courent sur les pages, suivant les époques et les générations. Il y a profusion de langues et de cultures, de pays et de saveurs, où figurent aussi bien Gainsbourg, Dylan et Félix Leclerc que des personnages fictifs tels Rastignac ou Werther. Tous se taillent une place, suivant les déplacements du personnage. Agréable mélange d'érudition et de baroquisme, le roman est le lieu de ce qui aurait dû être, grouillant de vie, bousculant les mots et toujours, le temps. Les photos des personnages, à la toute fin, s'étalent comme des témoignages, traces biographiques dans l'univers fictionnel. La musique et les *sitcoms*, icônes des *seventies*, accompagnent David, leurs allusions font sourire et rendent compte non seulement d'une époque, mais de l'histoire d'un homme dans l'Histoire des hommes. La critique de l'Amérique, de ses habitudes culinaires à ses politiques d'urbanisme, est assez juste. Un goût mièvre, par contre, reste dans la bouche : David, savant expérimentateur dans le laboratoire de la vie, termine son aventure éclatée par un hommage au genre humain qui détonne passablement avec ce qui précède. À la toute fin, un sentiment de satisfaction remarquable habite David et Juli, des personnages de *star quality* qui ont déjà fait le procès de leur vie. Une clause, encore et toujours, reste à régler : la vieillesse, pour laquelle nul n'a créé d'entrée dans le glossaire des désirs humains.

Famille et lendemains

Lise Blouin
L'or des fous. Triptyque 19,00 $

Julie Hivon
Ce qu'il en reste. XYZ éditeur 15,00 $

Monique Le Maner
La dérive de l'Éponge. Triptyque 18,00 $

Compte rendu par Dominic Blanchette

C'est dans l'air du temps. Un débat concernant la famille et les droits de l'enfance a lieu en ce moment au Québec. Ce débat, alimenté par le constat alarmant fait par Paul Arcand dans son documentaire *Les voleurs d'enfance*, oriente plus que jamais l'attention collective vers la sphère privée et le bastion familial. Les ouvrages de fiction de production récente participent au phénomène et nombreux sont ceux où le regard sur la famille et sur l'enfance occupe une place centrale. Dans le texte qui suit, nous nous intéresserons à trois romans québécois qui thématisent chacun à leur manière l'enfance et le passage à la vie adulte.

L'histoire racontée dans le roman de Lise Blouin, *L'or des fous*, a pour cadre une petite ville du Québec rural des années 1960. On y retrouve deux enfants, frère et sœur, qui évoluent au sein d'une famille menée par un père abusif et violent et une mère inconsciente qui ne comprend pas le mal fait par son ogre de mari. La narratrice qui fait le récit de la vie de ces enfants est la femme qu'est devenue la petite fille de tels parents. C'est pourtant à la troisième personne qu'elle fait ce récit de manière à marquer la

distance que les événements traumatiques ont introduite entre elle et l'enfant qu'elle a été. Cette distance est d'autant plus présente que la narratrice se retire, après une courte introduction, derrière ces enfants à qui elle cède toute la place en les faisant revivre dans un récit au présent. « Alors je cours à leur rencontre. Malgré moi, je cours », affirme-t-elle à la fin du chapitre en question. Le vrai récit prend alors forme : « À l'été de leurs sept et neuf ans, elle, malgré les apparences, joue le rôle de l'aînée. Elle se donne un rôle de petite mère avec lui, trop enclin aux bêtises. » Avant de retrouver la narratrice, le lecteur aura pu mesurer toute l'audace de ces enfants que l'adversité aura si tôt poussés à lutter pour survivre.

Les personnages de *Ce qu'il en reste* de Julie Hivon évoluent pour leur part dans la métropole québécoise. La narratrice de ce roman d'apprentissage est une jeune femme qui, si elle n'a pas connu les mauvais traitements comme les protagonistes de *L'or des fous*, se trouve tout de même en rupture avec sa famille. Un événement malheureux, le suicide du frère aîné, a en effet rendu l'air irrespirable sous le toit parental. Elle ira se réfugier dans un logis exigu où elle vivra une vie hors-normes. Elle se fera complice de deux jeunes rencontrés un soir dans un bar, frère et sœur incestueux cherchant eux-mêmes à tirer un trait sur leur passé familial. Elle les hébergera chez elle. Ils formeront ensemble, avec l'ami Étienne qui emménagera à son tour et une certaine Claudia, une cellule efficace de lutte contre la morosité. Ils vivront une expérience fusionnelle où arts, sensualité et solidarité auront parts égales. Au terme de cette expérience, la narratrice aura trouvé la force nécessaire pour renouer avec sa famille tout en gardant son indépendance.

Il est aussi question de famille—de la pesanteur que les liens familiaux peuvent acquérir—dans le roman *La dérive de l'Éponge* de Monique le Maner, qui plonge dans le réseau sous-terrain du métro montréalais et dans la tête d'un passager qui ne se rend nulle part. Son narrateur, personnage en crise, se laisse aller à écouter un inconnu raconter l'histoire troublante de sa vie sur un banc de la station Lionel-Groulx. Avant de donner la parole à l'inconnu en question, le narrateur décrit la situation qui sert de cadre au récit de la manière suivante : « J'étais là avec ma douleur qui me serrait la gorge . . . Je me souviens de son énorme puanteur. Mes bottes me cuisaient les pieds. Il regardait droit devant lui sans rien voir. Il était laid, comme un poulet hirsute mal ficelé, une face d'halluciné. » Le récit qui suit est empreint de délire. L'individu raconte, à la troisième personne, la série de ruptures qui ont fait de lui un être en dérive. Dans son récit, il se donne le surnom « l'Éponge » par analogie avec l'animal marin qui se laisse flotter au gré des courants comme lui se laisse entraîner dans toutes les directions par les rames de métro. Le lecteur apprend que « L'Éponge », après avoir vécu quelque temps avec son épouse, est un jour définitivement rentré à la maison familiale (« la maison des mères ») à Notre-Dame-de-Grâce pour reprendre la routine morbide du domicile (« l'étouffe-maison »). Puis, un jour, il a cessé de se rendre au travail pour ne plus qu'errer dans le métro et ressasser ses histoires d'aliéné (celles-là mêmes qu'il raconte). Le lecteur a fort à faire pour déterminer la mesure dans laquelle les événements mis en scène concordent avec la réalité. Le fait que ce narrateur donne, à son tour, la parole à des personnages clefs de l'histoire—Roberta, sa sœur « folle de naissance », et Léa, l'Italienne avec qui il a convolé en juste noce et vécu un temps à Longueuil—complique davantage les choses. Ces voix auxquelles le narrateur donne libre-cours, en se faisant ventriloque, ne sont guère plus dignes de confiance que la sienne. Il en résulte un regard croisé sur les événements racontés qui, sans alléger la tâche du lecteur, contribue grandement au plaisir de la lecture.

Les trois romans qui nous intéressent mettent en scène des protagonistes ayant fait des expériences traumatisantes au foyer familial. La narratrice de *L'or des fous*, victime d'un père abusif, profite de la mise en récit de son enfance et de son adolescence pour se réconcilier enfin avec son passé. Celle de *Ce qu'il en reste* réussit à retrouver, en se créant une collectivité nouvelle, l'équilibre perdu lors du suicide de son frère. Le héros fou du roman de Monique Le Maner n'aura pas, pour sa part, la même chance... Ces trois fictions, par le choix de leur thématique, sont en phase avec la société québécoise actuelle qui s'intéresse de manière intensive à ce lieu primordial de la sphère privée qu'est la famille.

Trois poètes et un essayiste

Paul Bélanger
Les Jours de l'éclipse. Québec Amérique 16,95 $

Jean Royer
Au seuil de l'inespérable. Noroît 16,95 $

Roland Bourneuf
L'usage des sens. Les heures bleues 19,95 $

Claude Paradis
Un pont au-dessus du vide. Noroît 17,95 $

Compte rendu par Vincent Charles Lambert

Le chant, la lumière, la parole, le monde, la mémoire, le silence, la solitude, l'origine, et j'en passe : la poésie de Jean Royer pige dans le glossaire usuel des essences avec un minimalisme qui se passe malheureusement de perplexité. Ici le « chant du monde » fait place ailleurs à un « chant de lumière » et même, plus loin, au « chant de son chant », voire à « La parole de sa parole ». On est ici devant une subjectivité pour qui le commerce avec les données abstraites de l'existence semble aller de soi, sans contrainte. « Être c'est avoir lieu », écrit Royer. Or cette poésie, qui ne cache pas son penchant pour la philosophie, a manifestement perdu le sens du lieu, dans la mesure où pour elle un chemin s'étend « Jusqu'à la clarté / Souveraine », sans mise à l'épreuve semble-t-il. Au contraire de ce qu'en dit le titre du recueil, *Au seuil de l'inespérable*, on est tenté de situer cette écriture « du côté » de l'inespérable : parvenu au seuil, le seuil est peut-être déjà franchi.

« Il y aurait à écrire une longue histoire de la journée du fleuve », écrit de son côté Roland Bourneuf dans son dernier essai, *L'usage des sens*. Le projet, en tous points contraire aux préoccupations de Jean Royer, n'est pas sans rappeler les ambitions d'un Francis Ponge : « Aligner en ordre satisfaisant des mots qui rendent compte d'un objet extérieur, en sa forme et sa substance ». Ainsi Roland Bourneuf consacre de courtes proses à un caillou, une paire de gants, une chambre en hiver, un clavecin, un colibri, une souche, une vue sur le lac, et à bien d'autres sujets qu'il examine de tous les angles, adoptant à la fois le point de vue de l'historien, de l'anthropologue, du littéraire, reformulant d'un objet à l'autre cette question, éminemment pongienne elle aussi, à laquelle est confrontée toute écriture qui entreprend de traiter du monde extérieur : « à quel moment l'objet devient-il notre reflet, devient-il aussi, à la limite, nous-même ? » Et Bourneuf de tenter une réponse : ces objets « sont inscrits en nous mais aussi bien que nous sommes inscrits en eux ».

Le septième recueil de Claude Paradis, *Un pont au-dessus du vide*, se rapproche des préoccupations de Roland Bourneuf, en ce que chaque poème s'inscrit dans un lieu duquel il ne peut être dissocié, qui est le plus souvent l'endroit même où le poète s'applique à l'écriture : lampe allumée, fenêtre ouverte, musique en sourdine (un air de jazz, Bach ou Schubert), quelques arbres en bas, la rumeur des rues au dehors, les passants, toute une atmosphère, donc, à laquelle se trouvent constamment mêlés les souvenirs du poète, ses interrogations, ses quelques certitudes : « Dehors la neige enrobe la ville et les bruits de la rue / au

fond de moi l'enfance finit de tasser les rideaux sombres ». L'écriture de Claude Paradis est d'une simplicité qui parfois, comme dans les *Lettres d'écorces* (1997), déconcerte le lecteur habitué à l'hermétisme présumé, et souvent sans épaisseur, de la poésie récente, mais qui parfois aussi peut donner l'impression d'une sorte de complaisance, par exemple lorsque Paradis soutient qu'« Il n'y a pas d'autre chemin que celui du cœur », ou lorsqu'il constate: « On est au monde pour si peu / et ce peu contient tout mon bonheur. » Mais d'autres passages présentent une intensité plus sèche et étrangement familière, dont l'ensemble du recueil semble profiter : « Ciel suave dans un jour trop gris / pour n'être pas novembre / le temps décape bien un peu mes ombres / sans que je m'en inquiète / et la lampe brûle mes yeux qui s'usent / sur des phrases mal calligraphiées / et mal écrites surtout. »

Avec *Les jours de l'éclipse*, Paul Bélanger donne un septième recueil placé sous le signe de la disparition, celle du poète Michel Beaulieu en l'occurrence, à qui Bélanger rend un hommage posthume. Le caractère elliptique et un peu désorienté du vers est bien celui privilégié par Beaulieu dans l'ensemble de son oeuvre, avec moins d'audace et d'inventivité toutefois. L'impression générale est que cette poésie est préoccupée d'un deuil qui n'a pas encore trouvé de formulation : « Un mot manque pour la prière de l'absent / qui célébrerait sa présence et disputerait / au vent sa mémoire son voyage vain. » Une sorte de glissement syntaxique donne peu de prise au lecteur mais se voit relayé par un rappel de situations qui s'exprime avec beaucoup plus de précision : les deux amis sont au restaurant, boivent un café, regardent un match de baseball, marchent dans les rues de Montréal. Comme l'écrit Bélanger : « poème tu exhumes les circonstances de ma vie. » Il en résulte un aller-retour constant et parfois très rapide entre certaines considérations plus abstraites (et souvent convenues à vrai dire) et l'évocation beaucoup plus nette de souvenirs, d'anciens rendez-vous entre les deux amis : « et tandis que les chaînes de ma chute / me ramènent aux premières pierres je te suis / dans le sentier qui bifurque vers le fleuve. »

Invoking the Imagination?

Robert D. Denham

Northrop Frye: Religious Visionary and Architect of the Spiritual World. U of Virginia P $45.00

Reviewed by Robert James Merrett

Northrop Frye experienced few visionary moments but all his life exercised his considerable talents trying to understand them. Robert Denham's study details Frye's trust in religious vision, relating his ideas about imagination and literary theory in student essays, diaries, notebooks, and other unpublished works to those in his books. Frye mapped the imagination and the field of literature in schematic diagrams which mysticism, astrology, alchemy, occultism, numerology, and other esoterica assisted. A dissenting non-conformist, he subordinated theology to imagination in the belief that the latter's fuller inclusiveness hails from paradoxes of identity and difference inherent in metaphor. Adopting Blake's ideas of incarnation and resurrection, Frye holds that, as metaphors, these terms yield insight by resolving divine immanence and human transcendence. As hostile as Blake to empiricism, he insists that true imagination, like literature, makes its own world and, like religious vision, lifts us above sensation and reflection. Appealing to readers of good will uncommitted to institutional faiths, he seeks to transform ordinary language into conceptual substance, agreeing with Heidegger that language uses people. Frye makes the discovery of verbal formulations a sacramental quest that realizes absolute vision.

In seeking the key to all mythologies, Frye, like George Eliot's Casaubon, risks ironies. An intuitive thinker reliant on "hunches" and "doodles," he can strike his commentator as difficult-to-follow. His musings might strike general readers as bent on system-making rather than on spiritual contemplation. Frye's writings reveal a drive toward unity conveyed by the term "interpenetration." Following Vico, Spengler, Whitehead as well as Zen Buddhism, Frye's chief tenet is that everything existing at a given historical moment symbolizes everything else. A corollary—Frye discredited logical terms—is that self and other form a dialectic in which each remains distinctive while informing the other. Consciousness and cosmos form a unity, as do poetry and religion. So he opposes Arnold's claim that literature substitutes for faith. Despite his fault-finding, Frye contends that literature is a field of inter-penetrating visions rather than conflicting arguments. His view of the incarnation as God in humans and humans in God exemplifies inter-penetration's moving beyond dualities to claim there are no limits to the expansion of mind or the freedom of mankind. This denial of fallibility and belief in perfectibility underlie his "imaginative literalism," which holds that literal and metaphorical meanings are identical since they interpenetrate; unified in their distinctiveness, they make identity and otherness reciprocal.

Implicating similarity and difference, metaphor raises us to mythical awareness. Frye's sense of purgatory is similarly metaphorical: it is self-education through habitually seeing the world as more than natural so that our physical may be transformed into spiritual bodies. His belief that reading effects apocalyptic vision makes him claim that literature functions to reinforce metaphorical thinking so that imaginative reading may become religious. As a defender of high romanticism, Frye holds that literature produces an expanded present since human creation represents and recreates divine creation. The apocalyptic present leads readers to envision God as the eternal self and to realize that worship of Him is self-development.

It is one thing to enunciate romantic tenets and another to describe visions. Frye, sure that visions are ineffable, kept trying to express them. He turned to oriental religions, trusting they obviate discursive reasoning and single-mindedness. From them he extracts schema that embody the myth-making power of the poetic imagination as the highest reality. Likewise, his esoteric reading shows that he saw mysticism as a return to the "primitivism of free speculation." Yet he is highly selective in his appropriations from esoterica. To mystics, God hides in a cloud of unknowing, but Frye stresses divinity's accessibility. He does not value the systems of the Kabbalah, hermeticism, gnosticism and other esoterica, studies of which he calls "kook books." He does not assess correspondences between the Hebrew alphabet and worldly phenomena since such arbitrariness cannot, he claims, invalidate the Kabbalah's mentality. Nor does it matter that alchemy evolved into chemistry since its loss of scientific worth confirms its poetic value. That alchemical symbolism exists in the Bible proves the universality of archetypes: alchemy is pure typology. Such simplistic appropriation seems to abuse imaginative and moral dialectic. Depreciating the predictive force of numerology while making it uphold his anatomizing, Frye simply declares that recurrence impels the poetic imagination. His claim that astrology increasingly appeals to popular imagination proves the growing acceptance of the symmetrical pattern-thinking of poets. This claim seems pure wish-fulfillment.

Frye's reading about the tarot pack confirms his admiration for symbolism which enables initiates to communicate in shorthand. It also matches his belief that the

critic's task is not to judge but to accept all texts as potential sources of illumination. By now, one suspects that Frye's literary criticism suits readers like professors yet means little to general readers. Given his "hunches" and "doodles," one doubts whether he ever explains how imagination critiques reason. His contention that in imaginative thought there is no real knowledge of anything but of similarities and differences may not deserve Denham's honorific title regarding architectural structure. One might also ask, given Frye's romantic view that culture and civilization insulate us from nature, how much he grasped humanism's architectural metaphors so brilliantly unfolded by Paul Fussell. For all his musings about living in metaphors, oddly enough his cosmology appears not to have systematically encountered ecology and its remarkable contributions to spirituality.

Denham's study reveals deeply committed learning. He does expand our appreciation of Frye's unorthodox religious vision. Although Frye did not address the common reader in his unpublished manuscripts, his private musings correspond to his published ideas, revealing a dedication to advance literary vision that has blind spots. It is a noble quest to discover how imagination may realize humanity, to learn how the educated imagination may reform society. Yet, if Frye raised superior questions, his notebooks show that he was often impatient with himself and others and that he sometimes speaks as one exclusively blessed with insight. Such moments reveal that wise passivity and tolerance abandon him, as they do all fallible creatures.

Le mythe incomparable du pauvre

Patrice Desbiens
Désâmé. Prise de Parole 10,00 $

Patrice Desbiens
Grosse guitare rouge. livre et disque audio-numérique, musique de René Lussier. Prise de Parole 20,00 $

Robert Dickson
Libertés provisoires. Prise de Parole 13,00 $

Compte rendu par François Paré

En Ontario français, Patrice Desbiens et Robert Dickson s'imposent depuis une trentaine d'années comme les représentants les plus éloquents d'une importante esthétique de la litote et du dérisoire, proche de la chanson populaire et de l'humour. Si les œuvres de ces deux auteurs expriment un profond refus de la *littérature*, perçue comme une instance hégémonique, elles n'en restent pas moins traversées par de nombreuses voix antérieures chez qui elles ne cessent de puiser une singulière syntaxe de la marginalité

Le dernier recueil de Patrice Desbiens est plus que jamais hanté par la mort. Certes les images de la naissance abondent dans les trois segments poétiques de *Désâmé*, mais ces allusions renvoient le plus souvent à l'impuissance du poète, incapable de créer par sa parole un semblant de filiation. Le cordon ombilical qui « pend » aux bras du narrateur, couché « en carabine » avec pour toute couverture le poème troué, annonce déjà la défaite des mots. L'œuvre de Desbiens est ainsi déterminée par une mise en scène de la césure natale. S'impose une impossible différenciation. Jamais l'individu ne se dissocie de son appartenance au lien collectif. La rature, c'est bien celle de la communauté minorisée, nécrosée au sein de cette histoire à laquelle il faut tout de même prêter allégeance. Qui sont ces « dead ducks », sinon les Franco-Ontariens eux-mêmes, condamnés à demeure « dans la lumière

concassée / d'une maison où / on ne pourra jamais / vivre »? Plus tard, dans un bar de Montréal, le narrateur de Desbiens n'arrive plus à trouver la « réplique » qui lui permettrait de tirer son épingle du jeu. Assis à la fenêtre, comme un Menaud maître-draveur sans rivière et sans terre, il se laisse absorber par la violence de la vie urbaine. Dans la rue, l'homme abattu ne se recroqueville plus en quête d'une naissance incertaine; son corps meurtri jonche le pavé « comme un linge à vaisselle sale », alors que celui du poète « tombe dans son ombre / le front percutant / le parquet parfait ». La parole est réduite au minimum, les indices d'une vacuité absolue se répétant comme autant de manifestations avortées, autant de symptômes du « miracle manqué » de la poésie.

Peut-on comparer la mélancolie de ce recueil à la ferveur ironique de *Grosse guitare rouge* que reprenaient récemment les éditions Prise de Parole? Cette nouvelle version d'un fragment tiré d'*Un pépin de pomme sur un poêle à bois* (1995) s'accompagne d'une lecture audionumérique enregistrée par l'auteur. Éternelle répétition du deuil, ces textes de Desbiens reprennent les termes d'une marginalité sans merci, fermée sur elle-même. Si le fantôme de la mère constitue le filigrane essentiel de la première partie de cet enregistrement, il est remplacé progressivement par celui de l'amante au corps aussi insistant qu'évanescent. C'est au « conteur d'images » que revient la tâche de faire parler la langue de la femme, de la « frencher » comme on passe du « regard au rêve ». Cet enregistrement d'un texte poétique important aurait pu constituer un événement majeur. Cependant, en dépit des effets dramatiques créés par la musique nomade de René Lussier, la voix abasourdie du poète n'arrive guère à soulever ce texte magnifique au-delà de sa souffrance stérile.

Par ailleurs, le dernier livre de Robert Dickson est une réflexion sur le voyage. Les itinéraires français, irlandais ou québécois empruntés par le narrateur déclenchent le souvenir de paysages intimes. L'ailleurs n'est-il pas toujours habitable? Dans le « décalage du cœur », pourquoi craindre la différence, l'éparpillement :

> chose autre cause d'autres yeux
> se chercher ailleurs se chercher toujours
> puisque ce qui importe est?

Jamais l'écriture de Dickson n'aura été aussi riche de sa fragmentation, de ses parenthèses et de ses espaces disjonctifs. Si le poète se découd en se construisant, c'est qu'à la manière de Jacques Brault, il cherche à fonder son écriture dans un refus viscéral de l'institution. Toujours se faire voir ailleurs, voilà l'essentiel du déracinement qu'entraîne l'écriture. La littérature luttant contre elle-même propose des « libertés provisoires », des « polyphonies » où s'opèrent de constantes remises en question. En mettant en œuvre le « décousu » comme fondement du sens, l'écriture de Dickson n'a jamais été aussi maîtresse de ses moyens et aussi attentive à l'essentiel. Si l'œuvre de Desbiens s'enracine dans une ténuité presque beckettienne, celle de Dickson est interpellée par la multiplicité du dicible.

Jazz, Bees, and Manifestos

Andy Weaver
were the bees. NeWest $14.95

Walid Bitar
Bastardi Puri. Porcupine's Quill $14.95

Pier Giorgio Di Cicco
Dead Men of the Fifties. Mansfield $19.95

Reviewed by Aurian Haller

While these three books are distinguished by themes of music, torture, and love, it is mostly their narrative tone that sets them apart. Weaver's playful first book begins with strong traditional lyrics such as "Tangle," "Sparrows," and "The Drought," as well as the experimental "My ignorance

of Mina Loy," which is based on words he looked up while reading Loy. In the midst of such gems, however, are such lines as "achingly beautiful," and "Did i just not hear / a tree falling in the forest?" which pale in comparison.

The title sequence is an innovative poem based on an interview with Robert Duncan. Weaver remarks in an interview on experimentation, "I want to be surprised by the outcome, rather than knowing what the poem will say before I begin," and revealing unpredictability is precisely what he accomplishes. By stitching poems out of the first line of every page, then the second line in succession, he arrives at surprising stanzas such as "an important aspect / begins to be limited in message, and finally people / have their own contents."

Weaver concludes with the ghazal sequence, "Small Moons: Ghazals," and a nod to Solomon's twin gazelles. With a cast that includes George Jones, Lawrence of Arabia, Sir Sanford Fleming, The Flintstones and the quintessential ghazal man, Mirza Asadullah Beg Khan (aka Ghalib), there is much to enjoy in Weaver's wit and downright funny Youngmanesque one-liners: "the truth is in the putting." The speaker warns, "there are no great epiphanies here"; however, the poems seem freighted by their promise of depth: "i reach after answers." An uneven, but rewarding book.

Bastardi Puri is true farrago: half manifesto, half absurdist drama. Bitar does what workshoppees are forbidden to do—deal with abstractions. "When I'm abstract," muses his speaker, "I know it's escapist." All the same, Eternity, Fate, Morality, Time, Art, The Self, Reality, Perception, History, and Man become characters in his tragicomedy. To back him up, Bitar calls on heavyweights from Greek mythology and Shakespearian tragedies. His bizarre narratives deal with questions of representation, the treachery of language, cultural identity and the spectre of Big Brother with striking originality. The problem with abstractions is that they occasionally lead to such platitudes as "what's seen is not the thing itself" and "The views you think are there are illusions," which crop up too often throughout the book, instead of the more agile "I hope when what we say steps out of our mouths / for a smoke, it denies it was ever inside."

Bitar has the songwriter's talent for turning a worn expression on its ear. Some ring predictably: "Like a call waiting, it's put on hold." Others are splendidly funny: "we're . . . fired to win at any cost even if it means / being put in kilns by hippies, and coming out ceramic." His dark humour ranges from pointing to the two asses in "assassin," to the zany, "They wolf down asparagus so that the pee / passed on miscreants is memorable."

Formally, Bitar is the more traditional of the three, evoking the sonnet, the quatrain and couplet and then deliberately disregarding their formal rigidity to rich effect. He takes himself a little too seriously, however, with the dog-eared postmodern refrain, "What, I wonder, lies under my lines?" and I miss the lightness of Weaver's verse.

In *Dead Men of the Fifties*, Di Cicco becomes apologist for an era of decadence and jazz in a dizzy tour of a city and its musical stars. The tone is unabashedly celebratory, demonstrating the speaker's affection for his onetime hometown, for the big jazz numbers, the crooners, the local dives: "Baltimore, my Baltimore / I am your public diary." "What an Adult Would Watch" is particularly poignant, offering one of the few quiet notes of reason in an otherwise rosy-fevered pitch: "Keep in mind we are virtually all strolling / into the comprehensive ideas of when we / were kids."

The second section shifts in tone and chronicles the desperate innocence of ordinary people. Everyone, it seems, is " working for happiness. / To find a state that glows." Underneath the "splendour of the

age" lies also a quiet undercurrent of desperation rooted in the architecture of the suburbs, "Because nothing can be hurt here."

The last section is a humorous take on Hollywood personalities, their hairdressers, and the nature of art. Although there are some strong poems, such as " I Worship You" and "His Memory," the remainder lack the weight of earlier poems. Also, throughout the collection, Di Cicco has a tendency to fall back too often on forms of declaration and lists, such as "there are," "this is," "there is," "I am," and "it is" to move the poems along. Otherwise, this is an elegant collection.

Attending to Tensions

Nelson Ball
At the Edge of the Frog Pond. Mercury $14.50

Patrick Lane
Go Leaving Strange. Harbour $16.95

Peter Trower
Haunted Hills & Hanging Valleys: Selected Poems 1969-2004. Harbour $18.95

Reviewed by Travis V. Mason

On the page and in the ear these three collections are as different as the landscapes of British Columbia's coast mountains, Saskatchewan's interior plains, and Southern Ontario's Niagara escarpment. That is not to say each book corresponds to one *landscape*. But to open Nelson Ball's *At the Edge of the Frog Pond* and Patrick Lane's *Go Leaving Strange* at random, for example, is to visit two vastly different places.

Granted, as all landscapes have certain shared characteristics, these books share an interest in the natural or the wild side of life, albeit in different ways. The poems in Ball's latest collection express, as so many of his earlier works do, keen observation of the natural world tightly wrought and sparsely told. Consider the collection's opening and indicative poem, "Heron":

> A heron
> stands
>
> stalk-
> still
>
> in
> water
>
> waiting.

Accurate though this observation might be, after the twentieth such poem one begins to tire of the sparseness, longing for reflection, philosophy, metaphor. The novelty does not so much wear off as the power of acute observation fails to sustain itself (or the reader). Indeed, once the poem's titles become longer than the poems themselves —cf. "An old frog leads a young frog into the pond": "pplopp // plip"—they seem no longer to be about the edge of anything. Individual poems have the potential to move a reader with seemingly little effort; accumulated, they have a tendency to sharpen one's attention to a point too fine to be of any real significance.

In stark contrast to Ball's tentative reports on the exterior world, *Go Leaving Strange* seems robustly and decidedly interior. Lane's verse—especially in the first section, "After"—is thick and dark. With lines as long as any Whitman penned, Lane writes of memories of war, of stories of childhood shared across a table in the Okanagan, of the names of weeds and birds:

> There are these living things, and they are
> rare now and not to be seen
> except for the careful looking in what little
> is left of that desert place. And I
> list them here in a kind of breathing, the
> vesper sparrow, the saw-whet owl,
> and the western meadowlark, and the
> northern scorpion and the western . . .

Lane's lines lead the reader, eventually, out of the ordered fecundity of exterior "living things" and into an interior wilderness in the second section, titled "The Addiction Poems." Here the observer becomes the observed; the speaking "I" slips uneasily

into a "you" that either implicates readers in an addict's illicit, carnal activities, or marks a shift in the speaker's psychological state (or both):

> You watch from the beanbag, careful, thinking
> there's a way out, push the baby in the drawer,
> glad to see it's still alive, feet like little frogs
> rising out of the smell of its only life.

Unfortunately, the second-person perspective also holds readers at a distance that only actual experience could possibly transgress.

Experience in Peter Trower's poetry has always been contained in the language, the concise ordinariness of compound terms taken from 22 years logging the BC coast (whistlepunk, bullpuncher, spiderscrawl, millionglitter, and stumpslopes). *Haunted Hills & Hanging Valleys: Selected Poems 1969-2004* offers a satisfying introduction to the work of a writer who has never achieved the status of, say, an Al Purdy or a Patrick Lane. There is a tension in Trower's poetry between the gravity ("Ammonia Fumes," "Hell's Gate," "In the Gully") and levity ("The Lowest-Paid Job in the Woods," "Outhouse," "Kisses in the Whiskey") of manual labour; between the daily dangers and the tall tales that make the work bearable; between the socio-economic realities that impel a man into the logging profession in the first place and the environmental degradation he helps inflict this year and next, when

> the saws will yammer their nagging dirge,
> the donkeys will pull the corpses,
> the land will be hammered to stumps and ruin.

The collection suggests elegy without nostalgia or condemnation; call it awareness of the other-than-human checked with a wariness of the all-too-human. The poet, as Trower writes in "Through the Apricot Air," communicates this tension while "his mind swings erratically between micro and macrocosm / [and] he studies the eccentric comings and going of house finches."

Each of these collections in some way attends to tensions that can turn anything into poetry, whether it's a frog hopping into a pond, an addict coming to terms with his problem, or dead trees on a hillside that a logger refers to as "goosequill snags."

Constructing Masculinities

Frank Davey
Back to the War. Talonbooks $16.95

Stan Dragland
Stormy Weather: Foursomes. Pedlar $25.00

Leon Rooke
Hot Poppies. Porcupine's Quill $14.95

Reviewed by Gregory Betts

Frank Davey's *Back to the War* revisits his serious and yet rather uneventful Vancouver childhood, while Leon Rooke's *Hot Poppies* sweeps through American culture playfully and with a determined abstraction that some have been tempted to call "surreal" despite the history of the term. Stan Dragland, for his part, sets his *Stormy Weather* in St. John's, Newfoundland, confronting the turmoil of divorce, retirement, and the small pleasures that distract and pass the time. While gender for men is often supposed to be an invisible concern, these texts subtly challenge that myth. In exploring how in a myriad of subtle and outspoken ways masculinity is awkwardly and problematically constituted and perpetuated in the world, each in its own way undermines the presumption of natural male behaviours. Or, as in Dragland's disaccommodated question, "if it doesn't come naturally, should a man study how to get it right?"

Despite the title, only the early poems of Frank Davey's boyhood portrait are actually haunted by the war. The collection subtly probes its politics—and hardly in the

"astonishing" and "unsanitized" depth the back cover asserts. Rather, Davey deploys a simple-tongued narrator drawn into the mystique of the masculine fighting spirit. As the child ages, he discovers a developing sexual consciousness, coincident with the post-war peace. In this way, this rather prosaic collection of confessional poems uncovers links between Davey's boyish martial glee and the world at large. His father, predictably, embodies the child's fantasies of masculinity. During the war, this role is defined by bravery and potential violence (and difference from women). In one intimate example, Davey marvels as his father works fearlessly through a thunderstorm that upsets the womenfolk in the house—home-front heroism. The boy and his father later bond over a rifle. As Davey's mind awakens to the strain of sexuality, his latent desires are again embodied in his father—who cat-calls strangers and pinches his mother. The mood of impending conflict—particularly the fulfillment of the Freudian undertones—is ultimately left unresolved and unjustified in this selection.

While Davey's work ends awkwardly as sexuality emerges in the male mind, Rooke's book moves with the playful confidence and the virile language of a more mature masculinity. Many of the poems use linguistic schisms like puns ("It's Autumn / and here come the women / to witch / us leaves / back to the trees."), or more direct and playful humour ("Of the onehundredtwenty-thousand jobs / added in July I got seventeen"). These assume the free and flirtatious tone of a wry smile in a late-night story: slightly ribald ("Talk in the brothel is of politics"), slightly topical (with poems like "How We Elect Our President" and "Martha Stewart Living"), and slightly nonsensical ("Sky remains indispensable / though weird shit / floats upside-down within it"). Using the perspective of a different demographic than Davey, Rooke meanders disaffectedly through the contemporary American sexual and political landscape. In this case, however, rather than the awkward yearnings of a child, Rooke's narrator delights in uncovering "an entire text / given over to the breasts" and love-letters to Britney Spears. Like a fantasy, the language moves liberally and abstractly without ever resolving into substance.

Stan Dragland's *Stormy Weather*, by contrast, makes no pretence to address the Weltanshauung of an era or a culture. These prose-poems function as meditations that twist from their point of departure—be it inspired by a Sarah Harmer song, a snowstorm, or his regular coffee house—to interweave musings, intensely personal experiences, and the work of other writers. Each piece is a small journey through interconnected thoughts on the world of a retiring professor recently divorced. Without the pillars of conventional masculine identity, Dragland probes his knowledge, his personal life, and his aging body for reason, meaning, and insight: "I'm on my knees. Help me! I have a literary education; the sweetness of my semi-colons alone would tell you that; I don't need to be told that the time to apply for inspirational help is at the get-go." Each piece is a calling out, a looking in, and a prayer to the figurative and literal women of his life through which he has become himself as a man: "And yet, withholder though I be, I keep envisioning *her*, the other in whom I will some day be lost, undone. The house, this heart, this writing—offered all to her."

Rage for Order

Northrop Frye; Michael Dolzani, ed.
Northrop Frye's Notebooks on Romance. U of Toronto P $95

Reviewed by Graham N. Forst

In a telling comment near the beginning of one of his very early notebooks included in this volume, which is the fifteenth title to appear in the ongoing *Collected Works of Northrop Frye*, Frye says that "there is nothing more sterile than over-systematization." Then he adds, with no apparent irony, "Take me, for instance."

The notebooks gathered here by Michael Dolzani under the "convenient" rubric of "Romance" provide plenty of opportunity to "take" Frye at his most systematic as he struggles ceaselessly to cast a structure—in this case a "Romantic" or "V-shaped" structure—around the fruits of the creative human intellect. "V-shaped" here refers to Frye's description of the "up, down, up" shape of Romance narrative structures: that is, of narratives which move from life, to death and disappearance, to resurrection—which explains of course the connection of Romance in Frye to the shape of Christian mythology. Thus for Frye, "Romance" is not the inferior, wish-fulfilling subgenre as some have dismissively described it; it is, rather, central to our understanding of ourselves in our social contexts because of the way it, however ingenuously, illuminates our ideals and defines our fears. Thus, the myth of Romance becomes for Frye "the centre of gravity of literal or psychological meaning." And in *The Secular Scripture*, the book which emerged from many of these notes, he goes so far as to say that Romance "[forms] a single integrated vision of the world."

But there's the rub. When Dolzani began assembling this material, he must have felt like George Eliot's Dorothea Casaubon looking over her deceased husband's notes for "the Key to All Mythologies ": surely, a chimera. And although Dolzani tries to help the reader through these often tortuous pathways (there is a 60-page introduction, a 40-page index and 100 pages of notes), as Frye himself at times admitted, there is something self-defeating about trying to define Romance, a genre characterized by labyrinthine "errant wandering" and open-endedness. So it's no surprise to find on page after page Frye struggling for "a connected theory" or for "the missing links" to some elusive "unified theme" or for some elusive "total form" to some "definitive myth [or 'monomyth' as he sometimes calls it]"—for a "matrix" or "a convincing pattern" that would allow him to "find the seed-place of reality" and "to tie up this business once for all." But as Blake says to his tormenting Angel in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, "all that we see is according to your metaphysics," and here, as often in Frye, we get the distinct sense that Frye is always trying to look at his own eyes, that is, to discover a pattern which he himself is projecting.

These notebooks are full of characters every bit as obsessive as Frye about unifiable schemes and grand interconnectednesses—Jung, Blake, Spengler, Cassirer, and of course Frazier pop up on almost every page like wonder-seeking fellow-travellers, searching like Frye for some "synoptic overview." As well, utopinanists and fantasists like Walter Scott, William Morris, Yeats, and Lewis Carroll, appear everywhere, as do weird purveyors of the Tarot and of faery mythology and of the darker occult, of Cabbalism, Druidism, and of science fiction; all float around in these pages like half-remembered dreams. And, one should add, like nightmares, as Frye at times becomes quite pointed here (far more so than in *The Secular Scripture*) about the perils and terror of the "*katabasis*" or downward motion in Romance, the dizzying passage through what Dolzani calls "the fury and mire of human veins."

Dolzani has done an extraordinary job in assembling these notes, which he calls "a chrestomathy" rather than an anthology, to appropriate a term Frye used to denote a collection of thoughts with an "underlying unity" (which unity is not always very noticeable here, by the way). A few misprints—for example, Kant's "*Ding an sich*" is called a "*ding in sich*," and Mark Twain, who was never in Texas as far as I know, is called "Samuel Longhorne Clemens"—appear, but such lapses are rare in an otherwise meticulously edited book.

For non-Frygians, a lot of this is not easy going: the bite and wit of Frye's public orations are missing here, and readers had better know their Aristotle and Blake before venturing into these notebooks. But those who are patient, and willing to allow time to pass slowly in reading this volume, will almost certainly, as Dolzani says, "find their view of Frye transformed and deepened" by this fascinating if vain pursuit of a quixotic dream to find a "Key to All Romances."

Valuable Confessions

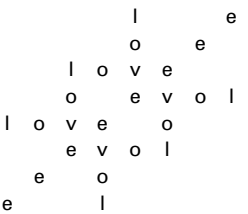
bpNichol
Konfessions of an Elizabethan Fan Dancer. Coach House $17.95

Stuart Ross
Confessions of a Small Press Racketeer. Anvil $16.00

Reviewed by Stephen Cain

The value of the reissued or reprinted book often rests with the extra material included in a new production. In these new editions of previously published work by bpNichol and Stuart Ross, the supplement of postscripts, bibliographies, introductions, annotations adds substantial scholarly value to material already of considerable literary merit.

Konfessions of an Elizabethan Fan Dancer, originally published in 1967 in the UK and revised for publication in Canada in 1973, is Nichol's most extensive collection of concrete poetry. It is Nichol at his most playful and accessible, yet it also contains some of his most hermetic and challenging visual pieces. Take, for example, his often-anthologized poem "Blues":



While a quick reading of this piece suggests that "love" becomes "evil" when inverted, the backwards spelling of "love" as "evol" also implies "evolution"—that love evolves. Combined with "Eve" and the Fall, this poem can be read in the Miltonic tradition, but its title "Blues" also implies American popular music with the "e" through-line suggesting a guitar string, the key of E, or a singer's wail. Many of Nichol's poems in this collection follow a similar trajectory of reading: on first glance, the pieces appear simplistic, but upon closer examination reveal a myriad of possible interpretations.

The difficulty of reproducing "Blues" on a word processor also foregrounds the material process of many poems in this collection. These are specifically typewriter poems, using the standardized spacing of the typewriter, as well as its conventions of deleting, or crossing-out, with the "x" character. This reliance on the typewriter is made clear by the collection's cover image of an Underwood, as well as in editor Nelson Ball's meticulous notes and introduction. Ball, the original Canadian publisher of *Konfessions* (through weed/flower press), has done scholars of Nichol's work a great service with his detailed annotations, particularly the concluding bibliography, which lists not only the early appearance of many of the poems in *Konfessions*, but all of Nichol's early periodical publications, including lyric poems and uncollected

concrete pieces. This compilation is extremely valuable as most of these poems first appeared in small magazines often omitted from periodical databases and listings. Ball also includes a short introduction tracing Nichol's growth as a concrete poet and a checklist of Nichol's early interviews.

Together with Roy Miki's collection of Nichol's criticism, *Meanwhile* (2002), Ball's edition of *Konfessions of an Elizabethan Fan Dancer* provides the basis for serious scholarship on Nichol's writing. Such study is certainly warranted. Fittingly, this new edition is published by Coach House, a press to which Nichol devoted much of his energy in the last years of his life.

As well as sharing the confessions aspect of the title, Stuart Ross shares Nichol's commitment to the small press community, which is made manifest in his first non-fiction collection *Confessions of a Small Press Racketeer*. Although a member of the generation that followed Nichol's, Ross was in contact with Nichol during the 1980s, resulting in an important interview that appeared in Ross' small press magazine, *Mondo Hunkamooga*. While *Mondo Hunkamooga* ceased regular publication in 1997, the spirit of Ross' enterprise continued with his "Hunkamooga" column that appeared bi-monthly in Toronto's *Word* newspaper from 2001 to 2005. These columns are now collected in *Confessions of a Small Press Racketeer*, along with four new essays.

Of greatest interest to those familiar with this reprinted material are the postscripts that follow many of Ross' essays. Of particular note are those endnotes which deal with the results of his publishing certain columns —such as losing his publisher, or losing friends from the writing community. This fallout, however, may have been expected as Ross is frequently acerbic and trenchant in his criticism, but no less witty or correct for being so. As also may be expected, not all the pieces in this collection are uniformly excellent—as with any column written on a regular basis, some installments are stronger than others.

The last four new essays, however, are particularly good, dealing with public readings, collaboration, parenthood, and the allure of type. Still, by the collection's end, one begins to find the title somewhat disingenuous. While Ross is certainly candid about his literary dealings and writing philosophy, these are not complete confessions. As so many of Ross' literary friendships and associations have ended in animosity, one begins to wonder what the real source of all this discord is, and whether there are stories that Ross isn't telling. Moreover, and more importantly, Ross demonstrates in many of the essays in this book that he has a wide knowledge of small press activities and people, both in Canada and in the United States. Few have stuck with the small press as long and been so active in doing so. That said, and notwithstanding the brief introduction recounting some of Ross' publishing history, readers still await the detailed recounting of the history of the North American small press, or at least the Toronto small press, that Ross can surely tell.

Versions of Lyric

Lyle Neff
Bizarre Winery Tragedy. Anvil $14.00

Michael Kenyon
The Sutler. Brick $17.00

Robert Allen
Standing Wave. Véhicule $16.00

Reviewed by Douglas Barbour

There are too many poets to ever keep up with; or at least too many for me. Two of these are writers whose work I did not know. I'm grateful that this review has given me a chance to learn something of their work. What seems to connect them is their various uses of the lyric "I," in all three cases at least partly as a representation of the poet's own mind and heart.

Bizarre Winery Tragedy is Lyle Neff's third collection. The blurbs suggest it represents the work he has been doing from the start—a tough short lyric, full of a sense of the cityscapes in which his various characters live and fight and love and hate. The speakers in Neff's poems tend to rant, but they do so with intelligence and wit, and the poems sizzle with energy. At first I felt that some of his similes strained too hard, but as the book gathered momentum they fell into place, and when he turns the whole poem into a modern epic simile, as in "How Did You Feel?," it can be a lot of down and dirty fun. The opening couplet sets the stage for the whole weird comedy: "Like a chaotic small terrorist / operation, was how she'd felt." Although Neff's sense of line and line breaks is sometimes a bit wobbly, here it's dead-on.

Reading *Bizarre Winery Tragedy* is a bit like getting caught with that mad yapper in the pub, except Neff has a thousand different stories to tell and nearly as many figures through which to tell them. Although I began to feel a bit too much of a muchness about these poems, their energy and directness will keep a reader engaged.

Michael Kenyon's background as a writer of fiction provides a narrative drive to the lyrics and sequences that fill *The Sutler*. The first section, "The Ice Age," seems to be a series of confessional poems about the breakup of a marriage, yet a couple of them are just out of place enough to undermine such a simple reading. Still, most of them seem to deal with events in the poet's life.

"Battlefield," the middle section, contains "Death of a Samurai," a poetic sequence intent upon an image of Mifune Toshiro falling gracefully to death in a remembered film. Yet "When I try to find Mifune / falling, in films already seen, / some moments come close" but none is it even though "the image in my head / has played so often that it's antique, / and what I want to extract from / Mifune." This poem is as much a memoir as a meditation on how memory works. The title poem, in contrast, is a persona poem about a camp follower in the trenches of World War I. Although some of the images seem to strain too hard for effect (and affect), a felt compassion comes through.

"The Rising Body," the final section, returns to something like confessional lyrics, but, again, just enough poems insist upon a deliberate fiction to undercut such a reading. Nevertheless, poems about aunts, growing up in England, and the final poem addressed to the dedicatee of the book, suggest that the poet has chosen to represent a lyric self in the opening and closing sections, while constructing figures of possibility in the two longer sequences. *The Sutler* is an intriguing attempt to combine a personal journey from loss to a new life with stories that can distance all such emotion into a fictional realm of analogy.

Robert Allen's *Standing Wave* is a summation, but does not stand quite alone in that its second section, "The Encantadas [101-158]," makes the most sense if you've read the first 100 sections, concerning various fictional figures, in earlier books. The first section of *Standing Wave* is "Thirty-eight Sonnets from Jimmy Walker Swamp," and although these sonnets lean toward a certain openness, they certainly assume a lyric stance wherein the "I" appears to represent the writer.

Allen is a witty writer, with an astonishing range of reference that comes close to sustaining these attempts to engage the twentieth century from the deeply personal perspective of someone who lived its second half. Of course, no single volume can do that, but *Standing Wave* stands as a complexly intelligent and sardonic try. "And the young — / in one another's arms, quiverless, without thought. Time's baleen jaws scoop them / by the million, . . . — no part / of the fossil record, like their poems, about love." Lines like these appear throughout, and

provide this volume with a satisfactory weight, the *gravitas* properly undercut by the sharp scholarly wit.

Ombres miniatures

Carole David
Averses et réglisses noires. La courte échelle 9,95 $

Denise Desautels
La marathonienne. La courte échelle 9,95 $

Louise Dupré
Une écharde sous ton ongle. Le Noroît 16,95 $

Isabelle Gaudet-Labine
Des ombres en formes d'oiseaux. Le Noroît 15,95 $

Compte rendu par Thierry Bissonnette

Malgré les doutes légitimes qu'on peut émettre concernant la spécificité d'une « poésie pour adolescents », les éditions La courte échelle ont su bâtir une collection de qualité à l'enseigne de ce sous-genre, collection dont les titres sont tout à fait recevables par le lecteur « adulte ». Plus d'une douzaine de brèves plaquettes illustrées figurent maintenant sur les rayons, la plupart signées par des noms connus de la littérature québécoise ou acadienne. Rejoignant en cela les recueils de Martine Audet ou de Serge Patrice Thibodeau, ceux de Carole David et Denise Desautels demeurent fidèles à la poétique respective des auteurs tout en allégeant un peu la proposition. Ainsi Carole David, dans *Averses et réglisses noires*, opte pour une fiction psychologique autour du deuil et d'une enfance tirant à sa fin, tout en évitant l'ironie présente dans nombre de ses autres livres. Si le motif d'une Amérique un brin décadente est visible par endroits, l'attention est davantage centrée sur la parole intime d'une jeune fille s'adressant à son frère. D'allure spontanée, ce dispositif contribue de toute évidence à entraîner une identification de la part du lecteur, l'évocation de la mère décédée venant favoriser l'éveil aux pouvoirs du langage : « tu fais tes adieux / en quelque sorte / au monde que nous avions construit / au jardin inondé de lumière / tu emportes avec toi / des sons et des images / tu te détaches lentement / de ce que nous étions / tu te fraies un chemin jusqu'à la rue. » Quant à *La marathonienne* de Denise Desautels, on y retrouve un personnage de sportive rappelant la joggeuse du recueil *Pendant la mort* publié un an plus tôt, bien que l'être observé semble plus jeune, à la lisière de l'âge adulte. L'automne, l'angoisse et la mélancolie sont également de la partie, d'où la sensation que l'auteur imagine sa propre enfance pour effectuer une variation supplémentaire sur le travail du deuil. Tout comme celle de Carole David, cette plaquette se déploie méticuleusement sur le mode mineur, échappant presque au didactisme que génère toute poésie possédant un « public cible » aussi déterminé.

Louise Dupré, qui a aussi participé à la collection mentionnée ci-dessus, atteignait récemment le cap du neuvième recueil de poèmes avec *Une écharde sous ton ongle*. Comme le suggère son titre, l'ouvrage s'inscrit dans une « écriture de la douleur » déjà très florissante au Québec. Chacune des sept sections porte le nom d'un mois de l'année, sans que jamais ne se succèdent deux mois contigus. En parallèle aux ellipses que cela suggère, l'écriture demeure en continuité avec elle-même puisque tout le livre se déploie dans un même rythme, fait d'une alternance irrégulière entre de brèves strophes allant d'un à trois vers. Cette dimension des strophes contribue à une poétique minimaliste, où des thèmes graves sont abordés dans un discours dont la sensation demeure légère, contraste qu'appuie la fréquente fragmentation des phrases : « tu as été une femme / de peu de chose // un ruban, une bague / trouvée dans le sable / un rire // qui résonnait / entre deux combats. » D'autre part, une clé de lecture est rapidement fournie qui permet d'associer chaque section/mois à un épisode menstruel, en concordance avec l'omniprésence des thèmes de la transformation et du passage :

« le jour reste pour toi / cette allégresse du sang // quand il se décide à couler / le long de tes cuisses / après une longue insomnie. » Enfin, une symétrie formelle est présente entre la deuxième et l'avant-dernière section, toutes deux en caractères italiques, ce qui s'accompagne dans les deux cas d'une légère accélération rythmique. Méditative, l'œuvre peut être lue entre autres comme une réflexion poétique sur le vieillissement.

Au delà de la différence de générations, le premier recueil d'Isabelle Gaudet-Labine (*Des ombres en formes d'oiseaux*) rejoint assez bien le propos et le ton des poétesses précédentes. Elle aussi attentive aux replis de la subjectivité, à la part d'ombre qui agite secrètement la réalité, Gaudet-Labine explore de plus les registres de l'amour et de l'érotisme dans un langage plutôt transparent : « bruits de peaux // dis-moi / sans parler // nous ne serons pas trop ridées / pas trop rondes / pour comprendre // je t'aime ». Héritière de l'écriture féminine des années 1980-90, héritière aussi de Jacques Brault et de l'intimisme « façon Noroît », cette écriture apparaît faut-il dire conservatrice, un trait qu'elle partage malheureusement avec quantité de jeunes auteurs contemporains.

Survivre

France Vézina
Léonie Imbeault. XYZ 25,00 $

Martyne Rondeau
Ultimes battements d'eau. XYZ 20,00 $

Compte rendu par Mélanie Collado

On pourrait comparer *Léonie Imbeault* à une sorte de toile où viennent s'inscrire, par touches successives, plusieurs histoires ; en particulier celles de Léonie Imbeault et d'Émilie Lajoie. À treize ans, suite à une maladie, Léonie Imbeault s'éveille à la vie et découvre la poésie, l'amour et le pouvoir de l'imaginaire. Cette découverte est, pour elle, inséparable des chevaux mythiques qui peuplent ses rêves : « elle se mettra à écrire et les Chevaux l'inspireront, lui souffleront les Mots à l'oreille. » Malheureusement le « trop plein de vie » de Léonie et sa précocité inquiètent ses parents qui ne la comprennent plus. L'adolescente se voit ainsi forcée de défendre sa vie intérieure (« son Monstre Radieux ») contre ceux qui veulent la sauver de ce qu'ils appellent sa folie.

Pour Émilie Lajoie, la narratrice et l'auteure fictive de *Léonie Imbeault*, raconter l'histoire de Léonie est une affaire de survie : c'est en essayant d'en faire un scénario de film, *Le Monstre Radieux*, qu'Émilie a pu survivre au suicide de son partenaire ; c'est en refondant cette histoire dans un roman qu'elle échappe à la dépression provoquée par l'échec du projet de film. Le récit d'Émilie nous livre ses doutes, ses espoirs et ses craintes sur le texte qu'elle a entrepris d'écrire : « [j]e fais l'impossible pour qu'entre les lignes de ce roman, sous chaque mot triste, gribouillé sur le papier, ou tapé sur le clavier, se glisse, se lise une gaieté folle énergisante, et cela, même si le moment est tragique. Une enfant, pleine de vie, a des bleus. Elle va bientôt être internée, c'est un fait. Avant même que cela n'ait lieu, elle peut en mourir. »

Léonie a dix-neuf ans à la fin de l'histoire, Émilie a l'âge d'être grand-mère, et pourtant ces deux personnages ont de nombreux points communs : toutes deux se trouvent confrontées au deuil, à la solitude, à l'incompréhension et au risque de la folie. Bien qu'Émilie rappelle à plusieurs reprises qu'elle n'est pas Léonie (« C'est une histoire inventée. C'est tout. »), elles semblent se confondre. L'auteur elle-même a du mal à maintenir ses distances : « [l]a sensation que Léonie et moi sommes la même personne me rattrape. Me colle à la peau. Ne veux pas le savoir. » Pour l'une et l'autre l'écriture est un terrain d'envol permettant d'échapper à l'insupportable... le temps de se régénérer dans son univers intime. Comme Léonie, Émilie s'est créé une passerelle pour aller et venir entre le réel et son imaginaire, il s'agit

d'Oneiros, sa voix intérieure. Toutefois, à la différence d'Émilie, Léonie est toujours entraînée plus loin dans la violence et dans l'isolement, comme si, par l'intermédiaire du personnage qu'elle a créé, Émilie Lajoie se permettait de franchir des frontières dangereuses. Les deux récits principaux sont entrecoupés d'autres récits où d'autres êtres en difficulté, principalement des femmes, se plongent dans la créativité pour survivre. Si le roman aborde des sujets douloureux tels que l'internement en asile psychiatrique, le deuil, la dépression, *Léonie Imbeault* est pourtant, avant tout, un hymne à l'enfance, à l'imagination et à la créativité.

Comme la narratrice de *Léonie Imbeault*, celle d'*Ultimes battements d'eau* est en deuil de l'homme de sa vie et c'est vers l'écriture qu'elle se tourne pour survivre au suicide d'Arto (au désir d'Arto). Anéantie par sa perte, la narratrice est en état de manque ; elle ne semble voir aucune issue à son désarroi, sinon celle de revivre son amour et son intimité par l'intermédiaire de l'écriture. Les deux amants se donnaient chaque fois l'un à l'autre comme si c'était leur dernier jour, et pour cause : Arto pensait chaque jour à son suicide, « [i]l avait la mort en bandoulière ». Dans le récit, sa mort est présentée comme inévitable : elle savait qu'il se tuerait, « [c]haque matin il se lève avec l'idée de mourir. Il pense à se suicider. Il élabore son plan », « [i]l voulait que je m'habitue à sa disparition ». Arto ne veut même laisser aucune trace de vie derrière lui, et surtout pas l'enfant que désire sa partenaire, « [j]e t'aime trop pour te laisser avec un autre boulet aux talons ». Alors l'amante abandonnée ramasse ce qu'elle peut : les écrits d'Arto qu'elle insère dans son propre texte, sa douleur, sa vie, son désir et ses souvenirs. Son récit revient sans cesse à la relation physique qui les unissait, « [s]es lèvres mâchent les voyelles perlées autour de mes mamelons, en érection tous les deux, nous sommes ». Elle se sert parfois de mots beaucoup plus crus, crus comme la lumière qu'elle jette sur ses souvenirs, crus comme la douleur qu'elle éprouve.

L'amour et la souffrance ne sont cependant pas les seuls thèmes du roman, les réflexions sur l'écriture y tiennent une place importante. Pour la narratrice l'écriture est une bouée de sauvetage à laquelle elle s'accroche afin de maintenir un dernier lien avec le corps disparu : « [j]'écris pour le rejoindre au-delà », « [j]'écris parce que les mots me rattachent au réel, me permettent de ne pas basculer, ils me maintiennent dans un long bouche-à-bouche ». À ces déclarations s'ajoutent aussi de nombreux commentaires critiques sur le conformisme de l'enseignement de la littérature au Québec. Bien que la narratrice affirme qu'elle n'écrit pas pour être publiée, *Ultimes battements d'eau* se présente dès les premières pages comme un projet d'écriture, comme « une voix » cherchant « à révéler l'envers » et se refusant à être une « oeuvre somnifère » qui réconforterait le lecteur dans « sa platitude existentielle ».

Moving beyond Community

Robert Richard
L'Émotion européenne : Dante, Sade, Aquin. Varia $24.95

Reviewed by Susan Dalton

Robert Richard has produced an interdisciplinary essay using literature, more specifically Dante Alighieri (1265-1321), Donatien Alphonse François de Sade (1740-1814) and Hubert Aquin (1929-1977), to think about the nature of political association. His goal is to revive the contractual conception of political association, a European ideal the author sees as threatening to fall into disuse, from the Anglo-Saxon liberal notion dominating politics today. The interdisciplinary nature of the essay reflects Robert Richard's many interests and manifold intellectual identity. He is a novelist, a journalist and a

literary scholar with ties to a number of Canadian universities, including the University of Alberta, where he is professor emeritus. He has previously published on Hubert Aquin and literary movements in early modern Europe; here his interest is more polemical as he sets out to make an argument about Europeanness and its ability to embrace the Other and about the emotion that Aquin provokes.

The basis for this political model is frankly psychoanalytic, as Richard identifies its basis as an incest law that forces a woman to marry outside her clan, thus figuratively and literally accepting the Other inside of her to give birth to the political subject, one who is free of the laws of this world, or the law of the father. This founding moment and principle is illustrated for Richard in Tintoretto's *Annunciation* (1582-87), in which Mary shows fear at the prospect of being violated by the messengers of God and yet opens herself to He who is not of her world. Like Mary, then, Richard proposes that Europeans continue to accept this otherness to "fonder un corps politique en dehors de toute communauté d'esprit, de langue ou de culture." This, for Richard, is the "contract" that we as political subjects should sign, one that is formed with one who is unlike oneself, as opposed to one's figurative brother.

The three writers Richard chooses to concentrate on illustrate this political ideal in different ways. Dante promotes the *illustre vulgaire* (poetic language) that is not rooted in any time or place; Sade reactivates voluntarism by proposing that God's will can ultimately not be understood by man and could take on the appearance of evil; finally, Aquin has his characters reject the Lacanian Law of the Father by alienating themselves to the Other in a number of forms, like having sex with one's mother as K does in *Prochain Épisode*.

How one feels about the book no doubt depends on one's intellectual perspective. The essay recently received the Eva-le-Grand essay prize awarded by the Quebec literary publication *Spirale*. For those who are not sympathetic to psychoanalytic approaches, however, the work is more problematic. Certainly the main message of the book—the idea of confronting and integrating difference—is important and timely at a time when the global village seems to grow ever smaller. Nonetheless, it is also true that psychoanalytic theory does a poor job of helping the author deal with one important issue that hovers around the edges of this book: culture. If the goal is to push us to refute culture, to unravel national identity, how strange is it to do so by attributing this impulse to a unitary movement, that is to European contractualism. What Richard is defending, then, is a specific tradition that not only links the authors he studies but that also *presumes* culture. As he writes, "[a]ucune autre civilisation n'a eu l'audace de formuler une idée comme celle de l'homme nouveau, pour en faire—comble de cette audace—son paradigme *princeps*." Europe, we learn, is not a geographical reality, but rather a history and an entity, "le continent de l'écriture, de la musique, de l'art et de la peinture, le continent de la sculpture et de l'architecture," that needs to be rediscovered. As an intellectual, and thus, *fils du Dieu barbare*, is it not Richard's lot to destroy the culture from which he issues? Instead, he seems to do just the opposite, celebrating Dante's "invention" of Europe in 1304, and insisting on the necessity of preserving Europe's unique "sensibility" to otherness by having all EU diplomats read Sade, Dante, and Aquin before entering into any negotiation. What is this, if not the transmission of culture, the very thing he seems to be arguing against?

La vie comme exil

Franco Catanzariti
Sahel. Prise de Parole 13,00 $

Hédi Bouraoui
Illuminations autistes : pensées-éclairs. Édition du Gref 12,00 $

Compte rendu par Natalie Chevalier

Créée en 2003 au Théâtre du Nouvel-Ontario de Sudbury et publiée la même année avec huit photographies qui ont été tirées des représentations, *Sahel*, de l'arabe signifiant « rivage », est une pièce en vingt-trois tableaux découlant de l'expérience que Catanzariti a vécue lors d'un séjour de deux ans au Ghana, en 1973.

Ponctuée de mots empruntés aux *Wodaabe*, ces pasteurs nomades de la région du Sahel, la pièce met en scène deux personnages, une femme et un enfant, « les grands perdants de l'histoire ». Dans l'indifférence générale rendue, notamment, par le motif du cœur comparé tantôt aux nuages « vides et aveugles », tantôt au désert « grand, aride et parsemé d'épines », les deux protagonistes, affamés, attendent la mort dans la solitude oppressante du désert qui constituera, en définitive, leur tombe. En effet, seule la mort, inévitable dans ces conditions de vie austères, viendra à leur rencontre, mais ne sera, finalement, qu'une éternité de plus « à pleurer de solitude », sans qu'aucune forme de rédemption ne soit possible, bien que l'enfant, contrairement à la femme, l'ait espérée jusqu'à la fin.

Dans *Sahel*, les silences ajoutent un contrepoint aux dialogues, minimalistes, et laissent sourdre une émotion de fin du monde. Articulée comme une critique sociale, la pièce montre des laissés-pour-compte « dont les cris de souffrance et de rage, occultés et déformés . . . , ne parviennent que rarement aux oreilles de l'Humanité ». L'injustice et l'indifférence dont ils font l'objet les privent de leur essence, de leur raison d'être, et les condamnent à la mort : « Nous ne sommes rien … Rien dans le vide . . . C'est ça la mort … » Le spectateur se sent d'autant plus interpellé lorsque le regard d'un observateur extérieur à la scène se superpose au sien : « Papa… regardons autre chose. C'est triste des gens qui meurent de faim dans le désert. »

Illustré par Micheline Montgomery, *Illuminations autistes* se décline en dix-neuf « pensées-éclairs » titrées et issues de la rencontre de Hédi Bouraoui avec Naoufel Allani, un autiste de 24 ans. L'auteur y avoue son intention de traduire, par ses poèmes, la vision du monde du jeune autiste qu'il a côtoyé à Paris en 1984, bref, d'en être le « porte-parole ».

Pour rendre compte de la désorganisation du langage et des hésitations du locuteur à formuler sa pensée, l'auteur a recours à divers procédés, l'écholalie, les points de suspension, les blancs typographiques et l'italique, qui concourent à donner au texte son rythme syncopé. La pensée y est concrète et digressive et constitue une sorte de coq-à-l'âne où la sonorité d'un mot en évoque un autre. Dans un langage simple truffé d'arabismes et de répétitions utilisées, entre autres, comme leitmotiv, le « poète-narrateur » traite de sa relation à la mère et au corps médical, de sa difficulté à s'insérer dans la société et de ses efforts pour conserver un équilibre précaire « à l'abri des *cri*…ises nerveuses » et de la stigmatisation; « rouler droit sur les rails », « pas faire de faux plis » sont autant de déclinaisons du prix à payer pour accéder à la liberté.

L'édition du recueil, vingt ans après sa rédaction, s'inscrit dans le contexte d'une levée de fonds pour une Association d'aide aux autistes, ce qui peut expliquer la présence en bas de page d'informations didactiques sur l'autisme, notamment, qui étonnent dans un recueil de poèmes. L'engagement de l'auteur envers Naoufel est manifeste, mais le lecteur ne se sent pas particulièrement concerné par la quête et le désir d'émancipation du locuteur. La poésie perd là

où l'auteur sacrifie sa voix à faire émerger celle d'un autre.

Entre critique et jeunes filles

Daniela Di Cecco
Entre femmes et jeunes filles: Le roman pour adolescentes en France et au Québec. Éditions du Remue-ménage 20,95 $

Compte rendu par Juliette M. Rogers

Daniela Di Cecco entreprend ici un projet frappant et original : elle étudie le roman pour adolescentes écrit en France et au Québec, et met l'accent sur des livres publiés entre 1985 et 1999. Dans la partie historique qui ouvre son étude, Di Cecco nous offre d'abord une lecture critique des romans « de » l'adolescence de la première moitié du vingtième siècle, c'est-à-dire de textes dont la protagoniste est une jeune fille, mais destinés à un public adulte. Colette, Gide, Proust, Blais, et Ducharme sont parmi les auteurs célèbres étudiés dans ce premier chapitre. Di Cecco nous décrit ensuite l'évolution du roman « pour » adolescentes où lectrice et protagoniste sont toutes deux des jeunes filles, et elle présente une brève histoire des maisons d'édition ainsi que de leurs pratiques actuelles en France et au Québec.

Dans la deuxième partie de son ouvrage, Di Cecco propose des analyses textuelles perspicaces de plus de cinquante romans récents, désignant les principales formes, valeurs et approches littéraires employées. Cette partie parle non seulement de questions techniques, mais aussi de questions culturelles et politiques : par exemple, comment le féminisme est-il inclus (ou exclus) de ces récits? Comment l'auteure (adulte) et la lectrice (adolescente) peuvent-elles communiquer quand les expériences de leurs générations les séparent? Et, plus généralement, doit-on offrir aux jeunes filles une vue idéalisée du monde, non raciste et non sexiste? Ou est-il préférable de faire un récit plutôt « réaliste » qui prépare les jeunes filles à l'avenir? Di Cecco revient souvent à ces questions importantes, avec des réponses multiples et parfois surprenantes.

Une clé du succès de ce livre est la recherche méticuleuse et admirable de Di Cecco. Grâce à ses entretiens avec des éditeurs et des auteurs connus, elle arrive à faire un exposé clair et soigné de leurs approches souvent opposées, et elle explique avec finesse la politique compliquée qui entoure les pratiques de marketing pour ce groupe de consommatrices. La bibliographie et l'appendice des romans récents fournissent aux chercheurs une excellente base de travail.

Longtemps méconnu ou dénoncé comme littérature « populaire » et donc sans importance, le roman pour adolescentes se révèle ici comme un sujet bien fascinant et diversifié. L'approche historique et socioculturelle de Di Cecco suggère des perspectives multiples sur ce corpus: littéraire, commercial, psychologique, et historique. Elle nous incite à lire ces textes et à les comprendre comme un lien essentiel entre la littérature pour enfants et la littérature pour adultes.

Question de frontières

Paul-François Sylvestre
Lectures franco-ontariennes. Éditions du Gref 14,95 $

Jean-François Côté et Emanuelle Tremblay (dir.)
Le nouveau récit des frontières dans les Amériques. PUL 24,00 $

Compte rendu par Lucie Hotte

Lectures franco-ontariennes de Paul-François Sylvestre regroupe des comptes rendus qui portent sur des textes écrits à l'intérieur des frontières de l'Ontario. Ils ont d'abord parus dans deux hebdomadaires de Toronto, *L'Express* et *Le Métropolitain* ainsi que dans des journaux de la région (*Le Régional* de

Hamilton, *L'Action* de London, *Le Rempart* de Windsor) entre avril 2002 et mars 2005. Les genres couverts sont variés : roman, essais, autobiographie, nouvelles, littérature jeunesse et même des revues. Chacun est suivi d'une courte mais précise biobibliographie de l'auteur de l'ouvrage recensé. Tous adoptent une forme similaire : un résumé de l'œuvre, émaillé de citations et suivi d'un jugement. Si parfois les livres semblent avoir laissé l'auteur indifférent, d'autres sont louangés ou décriés. Bien que, dans certains cas, on puisse ne pas être du même avis, on ne peut nier la maîtrise qu'a Sylvestre du genre. Ses textes se lisent comme des récits! À la fin de l'ouvrage on trouve trois palmarès (2002, 2003 et 2004) qui, eux, ne se limitent pas aux frontières de l'Ontario français. Suivent en appendice une conférence, « L'Ontario français historique et littéraire », un tableau historique et littéraire et une brève chronologie de l'Ontario français. Ce livre servira sans doute surtout d'ouvrage de référence pour ceux qui désirent choisir leurs lectures futures. Il permet aussi aux chercheurs dans le domaine d'avoir accès à des comptes rendus qui sont difficilement accessibles étant donné la faible diffusion de certains de ces journaux.

Tout autre est *Le nouveau récit des frontières dans les Amériques*. Les textes regroupés dans cet ouvrage collectif se penchent sur la question de la mouvance des frontières tant géographiques, culturelles, identitaires, raciales que temporelles et littéraires dans le contexte de la globalisation de la fin du XX^e^ siècle. Ils analysent de « soi-disant » récits de voyage que les éditeurs de l'ouvrage posent comme le genre fondamental de la littérature dans le contexte des Amériques. « Soi-disant », car les ouvrages étudiés s'écartent parfois de la définition traditionnelle du genre, puisque le voyage peut y être aussi bien intérieur, temporel que spatial. Les textes abordés, de corpus littéraires variés—étatsuniens, québécois, antillais, mexicains, brésiliens, autochtones—sont essentiellement des romans, bien que quelques poèmes et pièces de théâtre soient également étudiés. L'analyse porte autant sur la forme des textes (éclatement des frontières génériques, par exemple) que sur le contenu, notamment l'exploitation des thèmes de l'errance, de l'exil, de l'altérité et de la mobilité identitaire. Ainsi, si les frontières sont traversées et surtout déplacées, comme le notent les auteurs des différents chapitres, elles demeurent cependant encore liées à la question identitaire. De plus, ce qui est particulièrement frappant à la lecture de ces analyses, c'est que peu importe le contexte mis en scène dans les livres, peu importe l'appartenance de l'auteur à une communauté culturelle, cette traversée des frontières se fait sur un mode dysphorique. Étant donné les formes multiples qu'adopte le récit des frontières à la fin du XX^e^ siècle, le titre aurait sans doute dû être au pluriel.

Amour et jouissance

Patrick Nicol
La Blonde de Patrick Nicol. Triptyque 19,00 $

Alexandre Laferrière
Pour une croûte. Triptyque 19,00 $

Compte rendu par Christine St-Pierre

La Blonde de Patrick Nicol est un roman-miroir qui reflète les désirs d'amour de l'auteur, Patrick Nicol. Fuyant la médiocrité de sa vie antérieure, l'auteur-narrateur se retrouve sans emploi et sans compagne. Épris de lui-même, Nicol se questionne sur le sens de sa vie : « Comment vais-je vivre, à quoi vais-je penser? » *La Blonde de Patrick Nicol* évoque l'oscillement de l'homme flottant dans les limbes de ses pensées : l'écrivain noircit les pages blanches de son manuscrit d'histoires réelles et inventées et qu'il cerne comme « cette manie que j'ai de faire des livres avec ce qui m'est jamais arrivé ». Dans sa quête du bonheur, Nicol cherche à se connaître et à redevenir utile à la société dans un univers réel et fictif qui, pour

l'instant, se compose de femmes. Que celles-ci soient une voisine, une amie, une collègue de travail, une bibliothécaire ou Lady Chatterley, elles réussissent momentanément à anéantir l'ennui du vide existentiel qui l'accable et à lui faire prendre conscience de son corps à travers celui de l'amante. Au cours de sa réflexion, Nicol et son homonyme, le professeur de littérature Patrick Nicol, critiquent les romans *(Anna Karénine, Madame Bovary*) qui mettent en vedette des femmes adultères. Par ailleurs, *La Blonde de Patrick Nicol*, est une (auto) critique du travail, des amours, de la vie en général de l'auteur-narrateur.

Patrick Nicol propose un roman psychologique nuancé de fantasmes et de faits réels dans lequel il retrouve celle qu'il aime : sa fille. Il réapprend peu à peu à s'occuper de la fille qu'il a longtemps négligée. *La Blonde de Patrick Nicol* est le passage d'un homme qui s'était perdu dans le travail quotidien et qui, à l'aide de l'écriture et des yeux de sa fille, se redéfinit. La prose libre et souple de Patrick Nicol entame un sujet universel : l'amour et la jouissance.

Le roman, *Pour une croûte*, d'Alexandre Laferrière, évoque, à son tour, ce même thème. C'est l'histoire de deux perdants québécois, d'une trentaine d'années, peu éduqués, « pauvres comme Job », qui recherchent un petit morceau de paradis dans un monde qui leur paraît injuste. Vivant dans la plus noire des misères, les protagonistes se consolent dans leurs rêves de rencontrer un jour la femme de leur vie. Pour Jérémy (alias Baquet), cette femme se trouve illusoirement dans la photo de Claudette, une fille de Toronto avec qui il correspond régulièrement depuis l'adolescence. Tandis que Paquin rencontre Véra, une Hongroise, à l'Eurowoodstock de Budapest.

Divisé en trois parties, le roman révèle, d'une part, la correspondance des deux copains—Paquin errant en Europe et Jérémy chômant dans l'est de Montréal—et, d'autre part, le journal de Jérémy qui trouve le moyen d'aller séjourner pendant quelques mois chez ce nouveau couple spirituel mais amaigri et endetté. *Pour une croûte* est l'histoire de leur survivance avec des riens, de leur rage contre le système socio-économique et de la camaderie de copains qui font, malgré leur paresse, ce qu'ils peuvent pour gagner leur croûte. Dans la dernière partie du roman, Jérémy rencontre sa Claudette à Paris et retourne au pays vivre à ses côtés malgré la monotonie de la vie conjuguale. Alexandre Laferrière présente, avec compassion, des scènes comiques, grotesques, joualisantes et parfois pénibles du manque de vivre de ses personnages en quête du petit bonheur.

N'importe quoi

Marc Vaïs

Pour tourner la page. Triptyque 17,00 $

Compte rendu par Lyne Girard

Marc Vaïs rassemble dans ce recueil deux courtes fictions qui tiennent plus de l'exercice de style que du récit. L'auteur semble s'être donné pour mission de défier les règles de cohérence et de réalisme pour laisser libre cours à son imagination. Qu'on en juge.

Dans *Pour tourner la page*, Ubald—nommé Six par le narrateur—devient bien malgré lui le héros d'un récit qui tourne en boucle et où les fragments de vie des nombreux personnages servent de prétexte à la rencontre de deux personnages : un homme (Ubald) et une femme (Fadadi), tous deux silencieux et solitaires. Six se fait voler ses chaussures par Max, neveu de Nadi, dont le cousin, Alex, s'est fendu le crâne sans que le docteur Romanox et son épouse, Samadi, n'aient pu rien y faire. La veuve d'Alex, Sombodi, héberge leur patiente favorite, Fadadi, récemment débarquée sur le continent après que sa mère (Tatoudi) lui ait offert un billet pour les colonies lointaines.

L'âme de Fadadi est « fendue » depuis le décès de Bix, son jumeau, lequel souffrait de la perte d'attention de Fadadi à son égard, cette dernière étant captivée par les séances d'inertie de Pax, son grand-père lointain. Pendant ce temps, Six découvre Pax dans le dictionnaire et s'adonne à la thérapie de Pax jusqu'à être atteint « d'arrêt[s] paxien[s] involontaire[s] et inquiétant[s] ». N'en pouvant plus, il s'achète un billet pour les colonies lointaines et fait la rencontre de Fadadi, pour qui il redevient Ubald et avec qui il partage sa solitude. Bref, un récit étourdissant dont les personnages sans consistance semblent superposables : Six, Bix, Max, Pax . . . ; Nadi, Fadadi, Samadi, Sombodi, Tatoudi, . . . Le lecteur croit lire le récit d'Ubald, mais est emporté par la plume de Vaïs qui le mène ailleurs. Un ailleurs qu'il cherchera vainement à lier au personnage principal qu'il connaît à peine ; un ailleurs qui n'avait d'autre motif que d'introduire Fadadi dont, au bout du compte, on aura appris que bien peu de chose. Bref, une histoire sans histoire.

Dans *En tombant de ma chaise,* Vaïs s'abandonne au plaisir de l'écriture « libre » . . . sans contrainte. Le récit nous offre son propre résumé de l'histoire qu'il raconte : « c'est une histoire à propos d'un jeune homme sourd et aveugle, coincé dans la ' mélasse ' avec des moutons, des souris, un chien noir, Lalogique qui dort dans le tiroir à bas, les journaux étendus par terre autour des pantoufles collés, c'est très touchant. . . » On sent bien la présence de l'auteur dans le texte. Il crée un narrateur-écrivain auquel il confie la tâche de rendre compte de son « expérience personnelle dans la pratique de l'écriture » et de transmettre une invitation aux lecteurs : « Allez confronter vos miroirs, allez découvrir vos univers, allez faire vos énumérations étonnantes, vos poèmes, vos trouvailles insoupçonnées et heureuses. Allez créer vos mondes innocents, allez chanter la gloire de vos héros intimes du fond de votre cœur. » Le narrateur—« le rêveur » ou « Machin »—, entre ses tombées de chaise, se raconte . . . ou plutôt, livre aux lecteurs le fruit de ses envolées créatrices que « Lalogique » (cachée dans le fond de son tiroir) parvient tout juste à maintenir sur le seuil de la cohérence, à sortir de la « mélasse » (excès d'imagination). Autrement dit, Vaïs rappelle que le lecteur se cherche en vain dans l'écriture des autres, puisque toute écriture est forcément écriture du moi, d'où la difficulté pour l'écrivain de se sortir de la « mélasse » malgré tous les efforts déployés pour préserver logique et cohérence, et l'impossibilité pour le lecteur de retrouver son histoire dans le récit.

Deux récits étourdissants, dans lesquels Vaïs semble faire le pari que pour écrire, nul besoin de donner consistance et réalisme à son récit. Il suffit de se laisser emporter par sa plume, au gré de ses fantaisies : « On commence quelque chose, n'importe comment, et en cours de route on s'aperçoit que ça mène quelque part, que ça cherche à dire quelque chose . . . » Deux récits au terme desquels Vaïs peut dire « Mission accomplie! »

Whose Canada?

Charlotte Gray and Sara Angel
The Museum Called Canada. Random House $65.00

Reviewed by Carole Gerson

In *Quill & Quire*'s memorial tribute to Pierre Berton (January 2005), Charlotte Gray commended him as a mentor who "kept alive the tradition of narrative history in an era when academic historians had turned their backs on it." Herself the winner of the Berton award for 2003, conferred since 1994 by Canada's National History Society, Gray is in some ways his successor—indeed, the same issue of *Quill & Quire* acclaimed *A Museum Called Canada* as "a project of pure celebration" and placed it at the top of their list of the best books of 2004. This

volume is certainly ambitious—to quote *Quill & Q*uire one last time: "Canadians can now have their own national museum on their coffee table." I regret that this volume does not enjoy the dimensions of a coffee-table book, as many of its carefully chosen images would benefit from being shown on a larger scale. It is also regrettable that the role of curator Sara Angel, whose team selected and organized the objects, is minimized by the publisher, whereas Gray, whose job was to choose among these artefacts for the subjects of her essays, receives top credit.

Arranged as 25 "rooms of wonder," the volume begins in the "Fossil Foyer" and ends in the "Earth & Sky Atrium." Each section presents a collage of images and texts, in a feast of material culture. As a whole, the project is an organizational triumph, integrating the larger sweeps of history with anecdotes and artefacts that bring the past to life. Interspersed with official documents and portraits are implements, clothing, and arcane tidbits of information—such as the invention of Pablum during the 1930s by doctors at Toronto's Hospital for Sick Children. Thus Martin Frobisher's disastrous quest for northern gold is captured in a sixteenth-century stone wall in Dartford, England, containing chunks of his useless ore. Wolfe's conquest of Quebec is personalized through his annotated copy of Gray's *Elegy*, now reposing in the Fisher Library at the University of Toronto. In addition to formal photographs of the Fathers of Confederation, we see the Confederation Quilt stitched by seamstress Fanny Parlee from remnants from the gowns of the dignitaries' wives who attended the ball at the Charlottetown Conference of 1864. The charisma of the Franklins is captured in two Staffordshire figurines, and that of Louis Riel in the coat, moccasins, and pieces of rope laying claim to the status of relics. The human cost of World War I appears in a heart-stopping pre-printed field service postcard and a gripping essay on gas warfare—a brilliant juxtaposition to the tear gas cannister deployed in a later section to encapsulate the demonstrations in Quebec City against the 2001 Summit of the Americas. The artefacts include samples of Canada's print and literary heritage: we see the first newspaper published in Canada, the *Halifax Gazette* of 23 March 1752, and also the press on which Joseph Howe produced his reformist *Novascotian* eight decades later. Coverage of books ranges from Joseph Brant's Mohawk translation of *The Book of Common Prayer* (1787) to a page celebrating the global success of *The English Patient*.

Interestingly, there is no "Ladies' Parlour." Rather than being segregated into separate quarters, women are sprinkled throughout the volume—although vastly outnumbered by important men, a feature that could have been adjusted with greater stress on families and communities. In addition to meeting expected historical figures such as Susanna Moodie, Nellie McClung, and Thérèse Casgrain, we encounter the Black presence in Ontario through a full page on Mary Ann Shadd Cary, and Native culture in an essay on Pauline Johnson. However, the refreshing inclusion of under-acknowledged women artists such as Jane Ellice and Molly Bobak does not compensate for the surprising absence of Emily Carr and Joyce Wieland, especially as their male counterparts are showcased with Tom Thomson's shaving mug on display alongside *Canoe Lake*, and samples of Michael Snow's *Walking Women*.

While the book's array of artefacts includes many intriguing surprises, several aspects of its selectivity and presentation troubled me. This celebratory volume tends to downplay some features of Canada's past. For example, while the existence of slavery in Canada is acknowledged in the reproduction of François Malépart de Beaucourt's 1786 painting, *La Négresse*, the accompanying text elides the presence of slaves in the Maritime colonies and the

region's subsequent black communities. First Nations artefacts receive considerable admiration, many displayed in a dedicated "First Peoples' Room," but the narrative is sanitized: we don't learn why the buffalo vanished or that Aboriginal children were forced to attend residential schools. My second concern is that the treatment of French Canada is particularly light, restricted mostly to the "Salon de la Nouvelle France." We see little of post-Conquest life, nor do we meet Maurice Duplessis, or get much sense of the enormous impact of the Quiet Revolution. I wonder what this museum would have contained if one of its curators were francophone, and I remain curious about the reception of this book in Quebec.

The pedants among us will enjoy the appendices which (in the tiniest of fonts) cite locations of the images and references used in composing the texts. The index and the fold-out time-line assist in navigating through the displays, though signposting is often sparse; a few modern maps would be helpful, as would the more consistent presence of page numbers. On a number of occasions, the book presumes that the reader already knows the context of a display, such as the origins of the Winnipeg General Strike. Despite such oversights, most teachers and students of Canada's past will relish discovering the unusual artefacts collected by Angel and the accompanying stories written by Gray. My own classes will certainly benefit.

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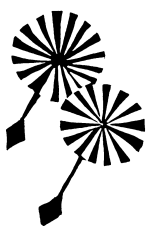

Of Note

Bill Gallaher
A Man Called Moses: The Curious Life of Wellington Delaney Moses. Heritage House $18.95

A Man Called Moses traces the inspirational life story of Wellington Delaney Moses on his journey from slavery in the Cayman Islands to freedom in British Columbia. It highlights the fierce determination and bravery that drove this man to seek reprieve from the inhumanities that marred his existence as a recently freed slave in the Caymans. It chronicles his struggles to achieve equality and justice in a context in which the basic humanity of the black individual was constantly being questioned and challenged.

Although this novel is a fictionalized account of the diaries of Wellington Delaney Moses, it is filled with accurate firsthand historical accounts of some of the most pertinent and pressing issues that faced educated and upwardly mobile black people at the end of the nineteenth century. Still, there are times in the novel when, as a reader, I questioned the ethics of presenting personal and in some ways humiliating accounts of injustices suffered by those who struggled for freedom from white American tyranny. I often wondered how the subjects of Gallaher's fictionalized account would feel about having their most personal stories revealed in such fashion.

The life of Wellington Delaney Moses is nonetheless an important aspect of black British Columbian history. In San Francisco, where he stayed before arriving in Victoria, he met Mifflin Gibbs, who had a great impact on the direction of his life. With Gibbs as his friend and colleague, Moses became a successful businessman and a conductor on the Underground Railroad in the rough and intolerant climate of nineteenth-century San Francisco. The virtuous way in which he expressed his

responsibility to runaway slaves and his criticism of the ruthlessness of America's racialized caste system is moving as well as compelling.

In 1858 Moses emigrated to Victoria, British Columbia with a small group of black American pioneers who had similar ambitions to escape the increasingly hostile and oppressive social and political climate of San Francisco. Moses again became involved in all aspects of the struggle for civil rights that was waged for a short but important time in Victoria. Thanks in part to the efforts of men like Moses, these black pioneers are the most influential, successful, and remembered group of settlers in the history of black British Columbia.

The end of the book leaves the reader with a profound sense of the humility of this man who had achieved so much during his lifetime and in the end seemed to desire so little. Though his work ethic and shrewd business sense could have taken him to stations that some, including Mifflin Gibbs, would consider more befitting a man of his ability, he was content to finish his days in relative obscurity in a small town in the interior of British Columbia. It seems he may have found what he was looking for in Barkerville, of all places—acceptance in a place where white and black people knew his name and at the very least respected his right to live out the rest of his days in freedom. — ADAM RUDDER

Réjean Beaudoin, Annette Hayward, and André Lamontagne, eds.
Bibliographie de la critique de la littérature québécoise au Canada anglais (1939-1989). Nota Bene $25.95

The outcome of a SSHRC-funded team effort, this book contains some 2700 bibliographical items dedicated to Quebec literature, gathered from no less than 78 English Canadian journals. They were compiled in an attempt to reconstruct what the authors call, using a notion introduced by Stanley Fish, the English Canadian "interpretive community." Because of differing aesthetic experiences and expectations, they argue, this community is likely to lend different meanings to works hailing from Quebec. Hubert Aquin would be a case in point: often studied from the vantage point of psychoanalysis and poetics by French-language critics, his novels have fallen prey in the rest of Canada to a widespread tendency to see Quebec fiction as an (albeit distorted) mirror of society. This might in turn explain why a slightly different canon of Quebec literature has developed. Not surprisingly, the hit-parade of writers having received most critical attention outside the "Belle Province" opens with Gabrielle Roy, Marie-Claire Blais, and Anne Hébert, closely followed by a "triumvirate" comprised of Michel Tremblay, Hubert Aquin, and Roch Carrier. Réjean Ducharme and Jacques Poulin, considered "at home" to be two of today's foremost writers, lag far behind.

In addition, a significant portion of the Canadian "interpretive community" has access to Quebec writing in English translation. Now, literary translation only took off in earnest after the creation, in 1972, of a Canada Council grants programme specifically aimed at making writing available in the other official language. Since then, the multiplication of works in translation has been accompanied by an explosion of critical interest in French-Canadian literature, to which the present book bears testimony. Book reviews make up the vast majority of the entries (they account for roughly 85% of the total), but the list also includes prefaces to translations, introductions to anthologies, essays in scholarly journals, and even some 70 book-length studies. For anyone interested in the functioning of Canadian literature as an "institution," as Harry Levin used to say, the wealth of material contained in

this detailed bibliography makes it a useful working tool (the equivalent of which, one cannot help but notice, does not exist in Quebec). Two regrets: the layout cannot be said to be particularly user-friendly and there seems to be only one index (of Quebec writers, but not of English-Canadian critics and journals). — RAINIER GRUTMAN

Julia Ulrike Köneke
A Rock and a Hard Place: Eine Untersuchung über die Traditions- und Kulturpflege der Ukrainer in Kanada. Peter Lang Verlag $51.50

Julia Ulrike Köneke's dissertation on Ukrainian life in Canada is a hybrid book. Crossing the boundaries between traditionally distinct academic disciplines, *A Rock and a Hard Place* is simultaneously historiography, social study, political analysis, art history, media study, and literary criticism. This broad approach allows Köneke to explore in great detail the Ukrainian Canadian experience from the beginnings of Ukrainian immigration in 1891 to the very present.

Köneke opens her study with a rather short theoretical chapter in which she briefly introduces and defines such crucial terms and ideas as ethnicity, personal and collective identity, and processes of identity formation. This overview necessarily has to remain selective, but an in-depth discussion of key concepts like multiculturalism and such related terms as transculturalism would have been beneficial. The following chapter provides the historical background for the analysis of Ukrainian Canadian culture. It begins with an outline of the political situation in Eastern Europe in 1891 and then chronicles the three major waves of Ukrainian immigration to Canada: 1896-1914, 1919-1939, and 1947-1951. Köneke competently describes the socio-economic conditions the emigrants encountered in the New World and devotes a particularly interesting chapter to the internment of thousands of Ukrainians as so-called enemy aliens during World War I. The next major section focuses on the importance of religion and the church for Ukrainian communities in Canada. This is followed by a survey of a number of Ukrainian organizations such as the Ukrainian War Veterans' Association (UWVA), the Ukrainian Catholic Brotherhood (UCB), the Ukrainian Canadian Committee (UCC), and several others.

Köneke's cross-generic study also offers a detailed analysis of Ukrainian Canadian writing. She outlines the preoccupations of Ukrainian Canadian literature and traces its development from the late nineteenth century to the present. Making use of a broad definition of literature, she also comments on Ukrainian newspapers in Canada and on Ukrainian Canadian historiography. In a series of short portraits, several contemporary writers such as George Ryga, Myrna Kostash, and Janice Kulyk Keefer are introduced. The overview concludes with a short chapter on visual poetry, in which the work of Jars Balan is highlighted. The section on literature is complemented by a section on Ukrainian Canadian painting, radio, television, music, and dance. In the final part of *A Rock and a Hard Place*, Köneke explores the political participation of Ukrainian Canadians. Here the main focus is on Ukrainian language education as well as on the official policy of multiculturalism. Köneke's well-written study thus provides readers with a comprehensive view of Ukrainian Canadian life. Despite its rather sketchy theoretical framework, *A Rock and a Hard Place* will certainly be of value to anyone interested in Ukrainian cultures and identities in Canada. — GORDON BÖLLING

Rozena Maart
Rosa's District 6. TSAR $18.95

Rosa's District 6 is a collection of five short stories set in Cape Town in 1970. At this point South Africans had experienced more than two decades of Apartheid; many of their political leaders (including Mandela) were imprisoned on Robben Island (visible from Cape Town); and student activism was emerging (under Steve Biko). Rozena Maart was born and raised in District Six, a "Coloured" suburb of Cape Town. When she emigrated in 1989, Maart brought this history with her to Canada. While her stories are rooted in South Africa and reflect a post-Apartheid concern with questions of gender and sexuality, they also subtly explore the problematic of Canadian identity.

Rosa, a precocious eight-year old, serves as the fulcrum throughout the stories. She is not constantly present, but appears at crucial moments: to witness a passionate encounter between women in "No Rosa, No District Six," to inform the sisters in "The Green Chair" that their mother communes with their dead brother, and to observe with a writer's eye the homophobic and hypocritical Carolyn at the end of "The Bracelet." Rosa records the lives of the district's inhabitants in a notebook on a string she carries around her neck. The stories are engaging, particularly when events unfold through Rosa's perspective; contrary to the title's promise, however, these moments are rare.

The opening story in the collection, "No Rosa, No District Six," won the Journey Prize for Best Short Fiction when it was first published in 1992. It charts a young girl's encounter with the complexities of female identity and sexuality. While Rosa's voice opens the story, a more educated narrative voice quickly takes over and attempts to record her observations. After deciding to skip school, Rosa hides under Auntie Flowers' bed. While there, she witnesses Flowers and Hood make love in a tin tub and comments (unrealistically for a child) on their sagging breasts' "resistance to White-settler colonial culture." Homosexuality is central in the last story in the collection, "The Bracelet," about a young married couple living on the outskirts of District Six and passing as white. Nathaniel admits that he is gay, an admission that raises a number of connected issues around class and race, as well as the ire of his wife, Carolyn, a "progressive" English teacher. For Rosa, the ambitious and hypocritical Carolyn is the antithesis of Flowers and Hood.

Maart's book, with its extensive glossary, is a welcome, if occasionally flawed, contribution to the recent interest in sexuality in South African writing. Although not set in Canada, it was produced and published here and therefore raises questions about the range of Canadian literature. The stories belong to a rich Canadian tradition of immigrant writing, in which writers (think of Rohinton Mistry, Dionne Brand, and Yvonne Vera) try to make sense of their past in a new place. In this respect, Maart engages the reader with her vivid descriptions of the landscape, people, politics, and even the food of her past. — JULIE CAIRNIE

Emily Pohl-Weary
A Girl Like Sugar. McGilligan Books $24.95

David Layton
The Bird Factory. McClelland and Stewart $24.99

Angst, finding oneself, and sexual exploration: these seem to be the key components of many of the realist novels (and television shows) being written for young adults these days. The only alteration in the predictability of this current trend is whether or not the protagonists of the novel will win or lose in the journey toward some level of satisfaction and self-awareness in their lives.

Both *A Girl Like Sugar* and *The Bird Factory* follow this predictable pattern with certain variables thrown in to try to distinguish each book from all the others in the sub-genre.

Pohl-Weary's *A Girl Like Sugar*, set in modern-day Toronto, offers a potpourri of social activism, homosexuality, and the arts, as well as adolescent sexual encounters including a fascination with pornography in a story about a young woman's attempt to "find" herself. After the death of Marco, her famous, drug-addicted rock-star boyfriend, and six months of spending nights having long conversations and rather unsatisfactory sex with his persistent ghost, Sugar Jones sets out to discover who she really is. While her mother brings home a new girlfriend, Sugar bounces from pornography to encounters with activists to the party scene and finally a "nice boy" in the course of her journey. While the character is reasonably engaging, her adventures and encounters are drearily familiar and tired, even to her best friend deciding to have a baby with the dead-beat drug-pusher/drummer from Marco's old band who sold him the drugs that kept him high for months and eventually killed him. Despite its lack of depth, the novel is reasonably well-written and has an "artsy" tone, so it would have some appeal to younger adults struggling with their own angst, who have an interest in books with some quality, but it is not likely to engage any adults older than 30.

Layton's *The Bird Factory* is a duller read than *Sugar*, largely because the main character, Luke Gray, is completely lacklustre. He has no ambition or interests, he dislikes risks (which includes moving house) and, while he loves his wife, he rapidly loses interest in her during the process of trying to have a child when they find she cannot conceive without medical help. The bulk of the book recounts the trials and humiliations of an infertile couple trying to have a child with the aid of a fertility clinic. Unlike Sugar, Luke does no growing and remains a flat, even tedious character. The couple's families are predictably eccentric and yet predictably conventional. The plot is plodding and offers neither action nor depth. The book has well-written passages but lacks the spark of life. — LYNN (J.R.) WYTENBROEK

Robert Kroetsch, with wood engravings by Jim Westergard
Seed Catalogue. Red Deer $19.95

If it is safe after almost three decades to call a work a classic, *Seed Catalogue* is deserving of the name. A groundbreaking work at the time of its initial publication in 1977 by Turnstone Press, this seminal prairie long poem has been once reissued (1986) and several times anthologized. This new hardcover edition, illustrated with beautiful wood engravings by Jim Westergard, is a collector's item sure to create considerable interest. Readers with a fondness for this perennial work in its earlier emergences will be pleased to see how well it has withstood its several seasons. And those digging up this book for the first time will not be disappointed by its quality and beauty.

In its first appearance, *Seed Catalogue* asked how to grow a poet on the prairies, specifically in the mid-twentieth century soil of Heisler, Alberta. It tore down the *Bildung,* kicked out the *Künstler*, and with sly wit, gentle humour, and candid pathos answered itself through the rapid evolution of an indigenous species. It is all regrown here, but the most prominent feature of this edition is the graceful symbiosis of word and image, Westergard's inspired engravings now integral to the full-flowering organism.

After a generation, Western Canadians know what thrives best in their particular climate. What the new catalogue reminds us of is the manifold variety of the particular prairie species contained within its pages, particularly when its yields are grafted to the superlative creations of the visual artist. — NEIL QUERENGESSER

Teaching Rohinton Mistry's *A Fine Balance:* Two Cheers for Universalism?

Susan Fisher

At 803 pages, *A Fine Balance* is 600 pages too long for many undergraduates. Sensible advice about reading the novel over the summer or plodding through it at a steady 20 pages a night (at that rate just 40 nights!) falls for the most part on deaf ears. Students hit the wall with *A Fine Balance*, and some never recover.

Nonetheless, I have taught this novel twice, and I will teach it again. I could save myself the trouble by teaching one of Mistry's short stories, but, good as they are, the stories in *Tales from Firozsha Baag* are lightweight stuff compared to *A Fine Balance*. In order to expose students to what is so remarkable about Mistry— the scope of his plots, the range of his sympathies, and the detail of his social and historical landscape —one has to assign one of his novels.

Despite my anxieties about its length, students who persevere with *A Fine Balance* seem not to mind. The following comments are typical of what I see on post-course questionnaires:

> The novel didn't take me very long to read despite its size – I wanted to find out what was going to happen to the main characters.

> Several times I had to close the book because of the horrible details, but I kept reading because the story always seemed to hold a hope of happy endings.

Such responses should not be surprising. *A Fine Balance*, after all, was chosen for Oprah's book club; the paperback version alone has sold over a quarter of a million copies in Canada (Seligman). Such popular success proves that many readers are, as my students have been, caught up in the story and in the lives of its characters. I imagine most readers would not take exception to the way the Oprah website sums up *A Fine Balance*: "With a compassionate realism and narrative sweep that recalls masters from Balzac to Dickens, this novel captures all the cruelty and corruption, dignity and heroism of India. . . . As the characters move from distrust to friendship and from friendship to love, *A Fine Balance* creates an enduring panorama of the human spirit in an inhuman state." For teachers of postcolonial literature, however, that reference to the "enduring panorama of the human spirit" is likely to trigger the gag reflex or at least signal dangerous ground. It smacks of universalism, of woolly-headed humanism —attitudes we seem professionally required to denounce. For example, in her discussion of *A Fine Balance*, Laura Moss notes with disapproval the book jacket copy that pronounces it "A Work of genius . . . *the* India novel, the novel readers have been waiting for since E.M. Forster" (163). While Moss is entirely right to point out that the Forster

comparison is ludicrous (as if no one had written about India since *Passage to India*), I am less sure about her contention that the publicists have "foreground [ed] the universal humanist elements of the novel . . . in order to decontextualize, dehistoricize and ultimately depoliticize the realism in the novel" (163). Moss quotes other examples of book jacket copy (including the quotation from the Oprah website) to demonstrate the "undeniably humanist" tone adopted by most reviewers. While she doesn't disagree entirely with this response to *A Fine Balance*, she does assert that because of its tragic ending—the complete frustration of the hopes of its characters—the "universalist paradigm cannot hold" as a way of reading Mistry's novel. But this position assumes that "universalism" is intrinsically optimistic and irremediably blind to political and historical context; it assumes that readers who see the novel's characters as individuals like themselves will therefore miss the important political dimensions of the text. Does Mistry's careful evocation of particular places and conditions—pre-Independence life in village India, and the urban slums during the 1975-77 Emergency—rule out "universalism"? Can one not be aware of the political, social and cultural conditions and at the same time feel for the characters as human beings like oneself? If this latter response cannot be allowed, then many student readers will feel chastised for reading with their hearts. This struggle between postcolonial ways of thinking and one's own readerly instincts is, it seems to me, precisely what Moss is wrestling with. *A Fine Balance* is a realist novel, one that makes us believe in the joys and aspirations and ultimate tragedy of its characters; yet at the same time it is an intensely political novel, detailed and ferocious in its critique of Indira Gandhi's dictatorship. In order to appreciate both these aspects of Mistry's work, we need, as Moss puts it, to "rescue" the realist novel. We need to re-examine our assumptions that realism is intrinsically "ideologically conservative" (163).

The difficulty of acknowledging both the "Indianness" of *A Fine Balance* and its "universal" appeal is evident in much of what has been written about Mistry's novel. In his review, John Clement Ball asserts that "Mistry . . . is deeply concerned with the moral dimensions of his characters' lives" (237). In a long and respectful footnote, Ball anticipates the criticism that this remark will likely engender: that he is using "universalizing critical frameworks that cast third-world novels free of their local moorings into the sea of a generalized 'human condition'" (238-9). (Arun Mukherjee made this sort of criticism of Ball's earlier review of Mistry's *Such a Long Journey*.) In his footnote, Ball bravely asserts that "the political and the moral . . . [are] inseparably linked." Championing the moral vision of *A Fine Balance* does not obscure its political message; on the contrary, the moral foundations of Mistry's fiction give force to its politics.

What did Mukherjee object to in Ball's review of Mistry's earlier novel? First, she felt that comparing *Such a Long Journey* to the Victorian realist novel left out what is distinctly Indian in Mistry's technique: his use of gossip and storytelling to show how popular "narrativizing" operates in a climate of official silence ("Narrating" 145). Fair enough, but *Such a Long Journey* is nonetheless a realist novel in the Victorian or at least nineteenth-century European tradition. Any doubts about Mistry's affiliation with this tradition were surely eliminated by the epigraph to *A Fine Balance*: a quotation from Balzac asserting that "this tragedy is not a fiction. All is true." Balzac called himself the secretary of society, and I think Mistry sees himself in the same way. In an interview for the Oprah website, Mistry declares that "my main intention in writing this novel was to look at history from the bottom up, from the point of view of people

like Ishvar and Om. The dispossessed. The hungry. The homeless. [I wanted to] see what it meant to them to live during this time of The Emergency." The epigraph from Balzac, with its faint whiff of authorial contempt for the reader—"after you have read this story of great misfortunes, you will no doubt dine well" — defies us to forget *A Fine Balance* or to think of it merely as a fiction. With its unshakeable nineteenth-century confidence in the power of fiction to depict reality, the epigraph challenges us to look for the social, historical, and political truths that undergird *A Fine Balance*.

Ball is certainly not alone in using nineteenth-century parallels to describe Mistry's work. John Updike, writing in *The New Yorker*, called Mistry's realism "Tolstoyan" (140). Pico Iyer, in *The New York Review*, declared *A Fine Balance* "the strongest novel to come out of India in English" and suggested that in "reading him, you are less in the company of Salman Rushdie or Arundhati Roy than in that of Victor Hugo, perhaps, or Thomas Hardy" (30). The book jacket of the French translation makes similar claims: "Voici le grand roman de l'Inde contemporaine, réaliste, foisonnant, inspiré—traversé par le souffle d'un Hugo ou d'un Dickens." Frank Kermode, in the *London Review of Books*, noted the usual comparisons with Dickens and Stendhal but asserted that "the English novelist [Mistry] most resembles seems to be Arnold Bennett" because Bennett was "always mindful of the ordinary reader" (11). Given the popularity of Mistry's fiction, Kermode's comparison seems particularly appropriate.

Mukherjee's second objection to Ball's review arose from his assertion that *Such a Long Journey* deals with "important moral problems." In an exasperated tone, Mukherjee wrote, "Heaven forbid that the novel also talks about life as it is lived under specific historical circumstances and demands that the cultural outsider pay attention to its cultural-historical specificity" ("Narrating" 148). Here, Mukherjee appears to be taking aim at what she regards as a "liberal humanist reading practice" that neglects the geopolitical context of characters' lives. But in a more recent book, *Postcolonialism: My Living*, Mukherjee seems equally concerned about the "new universalism" of postcolonial studies, which "collaps[es] a diverse range of experiences and life situations" (33) into a single theoretical schema: "A prefabricated, cookie-cutter theoretical framework not only allots writers from postcolonial countries a place, albeit a marginal one, in the curriculum but also predetermines what will be said about them" (25). Mukherjee cites a list of "tediously familiar" theoretical concepts—mimicry, hybridity, subaltern studies—that get applied to all literary works deemed postcolonial, regardless of their country of origin. In the particular case of *A Fine Balance*, Mukherjee suggests that it "portrays the marginalized poor of India" but does not, as postcolonial theory might claim, "give voice" to them; instead, Mistry's novel "seems to suggest that the poor accept their lot fatalistically" (34). Mukherjee evidently objects to this portrayal, not on the generalized postcolonial principle that elites should not speak for the marginalized, but on specific historical grounds—i.e., the actual history of popular resistance to the Emergency.

Mukherjee suggests that it would be constructive to compare Canadian responses with those of Indian critics (35). She notes that while Canadian critics tend to perceive South Asian Canadian novels as "exotic," Indian critics remain fixated on them as immigrant writing, without relevance to readers in India. *A Fine Balance*, however, has evoked from Indian critics something different, for no one could construe this novel set entirely in India as a typical work of immigrant fiction. Indian critics have had to do precisely what Mukherjee exhorts them to do: "to consider the possibility that

South Asian Canadian writing may have something valuable to say about Indian life" (36). Interestingly, in responding to *A Fine Balance*, Indian critics have not been so different from critics elsewhere: they too have offered both universalist interpretations and historically specific ones.

Ameena Kazi Ansari claims that "the novel is not a political one. It may be read as an effort at interweaving national history with the personal lives of the protagonists in a manner that is characteristic of immigrant Indian English writing" (181). I'm not sure what exactly this means—is the phrase "characteristic of immigrant Indian English writing" an indirect reference to the familiar postcolonial genre of national allegory? —but it appears that Ansari does not take the politics in *A Fine Balance* very seriously. Yet she brings to her critique a valuable sense of the cultural realities of the novel's setting. North American readers may not be shocked when Dina, a middle-class Parsi, decides to let the two untouchable tailors live in her flat, but Ansari suggests that Indian readers certainly would be:

> Coming as they do from disparate social strata, their interaction would appear unreal to those who have had a close brush with realities of the Indian social scenario. It is impossible for such a reader to imagine, let alone accept, the close communion that Ishvar, Omprakash, Maneck and Dina enjoy. The apartheid of the strict caste system disallows such a communion and it is perhaps impossible for people of such varied social backgrounds to ever interconnect in such close proximity with each other. (183)

Ansari also points out the cultural significance of the language of the novel. The characters all communicate in English, and while this appears entirely natural and unremarkable to Canadian readers, to the Indian reader it signals "the country's cultural pluralism": English is "a compatible vehicle for all the fictive characters to communicate in" because they do not share a common Indian language (183). Despite this useful attention to the cultural specificity of *A Fine Balance*, Ansari's final verdict is a resolutely universal one: "In spite of the stark life that it represents, the novel reveals an underlying moral purpose and a positive commitment to justice and humanitarian concerns" (187).

Savita Goel calls *A Fine Balance* "a stark and moving portrait of life during this period" that "reflects the reality of India—the predatory politics of corruption, tyranny, exploitation, violence and blood-shed." She sees Mistry's treatment of caste discrimination as both historically accurate and touching: "The writer, here, focuses on man's inhumanity to man and on the deprivation, inequities and injustice faced by the underprivileged in India" (191). Goel connects *A Fine Balance* to nineteenth-century models: "The book is rich in a Dickensian cast of minor characters" (197).

Vinita Dhondiyal Bhatnagar's article "'And everything ends badly': A Reading of *A Fine Balance*" objects to the unremitting pessimism of the novel, not, as one might assume, on moral grounds but on historical ones. (Hilary Mantel, in a review originally written for the *New York Review of Books*, found the pessimism of *A Fine Balance* a narrative weakness: in her view "the novel is an optimistic form," but Mistry's characters, "caught within a vast, predetermined prepatterned design, which the author embroiders fiercely, glibly" are deprived of the "choice or hope" that is necessary in a novel [193]). Bhatnagar points out that in depicting the Emergency, Mistry shows only one character who resists repression, the student leader Avinash. But Avinash's struggles achieve nothing, except perhaps the suicides of his dowry-less sisters. He is murdered by the police and thrown on the railway tracks. Bhatnagar suggests that Avinash "seems to have been introduced only to reaffirm this philosophy" that

everything ends badly (107). Similarly, in depicting the untouchables' struggle to exercise the rights awarded them by the Constitution, Mistry does not allow any victories. The defiant untouchables are punished with torture, murder, castration. Dina, who struggles against the patriarchal authority of her brother, eventually must resign herself to being a servant in his household. Bhatnagar suggests that these defeats make *A Fine Balance* "the story of individuals rather than of India" (108):

> Almost twenty-three years after the events of the novel we find a Dalit government at the helm of affairs at U.P. and the voice of the lower castes becoming increasingly assertive in the mainstream of our political life. . . . Obviously there has been an increasing awareness among the lower castes and an increasing ability to become agents rather than mere victims in their own dramas. By refusing to grant his characters this agency and presenting them ever and always merely as victims, Mistry has overlooked some of the facts that constitute Indian reality. . . . (108).

Bhatnagar's insistence on a fuller context—on seeing that Indian citizens have seized opportunities to exercise their political rights—is important to convey to students, for it helps them avoid the easy error of seeing India as a hopeless case, worthy only of pity and charity.

Nilufer Bharucha claims that *A Fine Balance* records the "dark and shameful episode [of the Emergency] with unrelenting honesty" (143), but she does not consider it a reliable portrait of India. She explicitly compares it to works by Dickens, Eliot, Balzac, and Hugo, not only because it presents a panorama of urban life but also because it shows injustice without any hope or examples of resistance. Bharucha sees Mistry as a member of the elite who has assumed the right to speak for the marginalized of Indian society. But it is not on some Spivakian principle that she objects to Mistry's representations of the marginalized; what she objects to is "the hegemonic all-inclusive nature of what Mistry categorizes as the Marginals" (145). The two tailors from the Chamaar caste of untouchables "are lumped together with the Monkeyman, of the Madari caste, the Muslim Ashraf Chacha . . . the urban Beggar Master." Added to these are Dina Dalal, "a Parsi woman, whose marginalisation is due to her gender rather than her socio-economic/caste grouping," and the middle-class Parsi youth Maneck and his Maharashtrian college friend, Avinash. Maneck is not economically or socially a victim, yet he succumbs to his own despair; Avinash, the activist, is the victim of police brutality. Bharucha (herself a Parsi) finds that Mistry's Parsi characters, Dina and Maneck, "ring true" (167), but the rest of his "horrorscape of poverty" (166) is less accurate:

> While Mistry has to be appreciated for trying to magnify the scope of his narratives and making them take in a wider Indian reality, there is a heavy price he has paid for moving away from his ethnocentric discourse. His rural, lower-caste characters and his urban beggars and conmen come across as cardboard figures—an urban, westernized Indian's construct of the Dalit classes (167).

Bharucha is particularly critical of Mistry's treatment of caste discrimination in the tailors' home village: "This section . . . sadly lacks in authority and authenticity that is immediately evident to Indian readers . . . though ironically it is these parts of the text that most impressed several Western reviewers and general readers" (152). In response to a query about the particular details that Indian readers would find implausible, Bharucha offered the following examples:

> The chapter under discussion ["In a Village by the River"] opens with Dukhi Mochi, the lower caste cobbler character, remembering his initiation in the tanner

> trade and his mother now telling him he smelt like an adult, i.e, a chamaar, with the smell of dead skin and flesh on him. This is an urban upper caste stereotype about the peculiar smell that emanates from the chamaars. . . .
>
> Then there is the conversation between Dukhi mochi and his friends. . . about the kind of punishment meted out to the lower caste men and women by the upper castes for real and imagined "crimes." In terms of characterization, these passages are suspect. Here I believe Mistry is unburdening himself of all the information he has gathered about the lower castes and their lives. . . .

Does this proposal mean that readers abroad should disregard what Mistry says about caste abuses (many of which, in the novel's time frame, take place in the 1930s and 1940s)? However dismaying this aspect of Indian life may be, the evidence is that caste abuses exactly like those Mistry describes did take place; many still occur.[1] While Mistry may have heaped upon his two tailors an excessive burden of suffering, he is not inventing the problem of caste violence.

Given so many competing views of *A Fine Balance*, how can an instructor, with at best three to four weeks to devote to the novel, do justice to the complexity of its subject matter? If, as Arun Mukherjee claims, "there is no short cut to the meaning of the text except through immersion in the narratives of a culture" (*Postcolonialism* 13), what is the best way to teach *A Fine Balance*?

I have decided to take a universalist approach, fraught though it might be with the dangers of pity and Western self-indulgence. Perhaps one could call this a "strategic universalism."[2] I do not want to present *A Fine Balance* as a sentimental epic about the noble poor (though it certainly is this at times), but I do want students to acquire through this novel some respect for the world's poor, for their intelligence and skill and perseverance. At the same time, I want them to have at least an embryonic awareness of India's diversity and its complex history. So perhaps it is best to say that I have adopted a modified universalist approach, one which includes lectures on topics such as the Emergency, the caste system, and Indian linguistic and cultural diversity. At the end of the course, one student wrote, "I mainly found this book to be like an 'India for Dummies' type of book, since I've known very little about Indian society." (This student has since enrolled in an Indian history class.) Another student wrote, "I believe the value is in understanding how a majority of the world survives instead of remaining ignorant in our little bubble. I think more students should study this just to show how grateful we should be with our country and what we could do to help other people in other places." A third student expressed a similar view: "It made me grateful for the relative utopia we live in, and also made me aware of how important it is to avoid discrimination and violations of civil rights." This same student made an astute observation about the narrative difficulties of writing popular fiction with a political edge: "*A Fine Balance* is at its best when the characters themselves are being explored. . . . The weaker parts happen when Mistry shows things happening to the characters in order to make historical and political statements." It was a term paper on *A Fine Balance*, however, that offered the most encouraging response to the novel:

> As a Canadian, I treasure this country's devotion to multiculturalism. The firm belief that Canada upholds is that this is a nation formed by many different ethnicities, religious and cultural traditions and even landscapes pieced together to form a "quilt" of diversity. Similarly, India, though generally not thought of as being diverse, is in fact a country with varied cultural groups. Rohinton Mistry's novel *A Fine Balance* sets out to enlighten readers, primarily not of Indian descent or at

> least with very little knowledge of India, on life in India during the Emergency.
>
> I, as an ignorant reader, was surprised by Mistry's description of "the snow-covered peaks" (259) that Maneck remembers of his home in the chapter "Mountains." As Maneck describes "the pink and orange of the sunrise, imagine[s] the mist ticking the mountain's ear or chucking it under the chin or weaving a cap for it" (260), I thought that he must have been talking about the very landscape that lies around us in British Columbia. I had never thought of India in this way before, though I knew that India had mountains.

This student essay contains an emergent awareness of two important ideas. First, it acknowledges that multiculturalism is not a Canadian invention. Recognizing that pluralism (to use a term less identified with Canadian policies) has been a feature of many human communities is a valuable antidote to anxieties about globalization and migration. Second, this student essay acknowledges that India, like Canada, possesses natural beauty. This may seem self-evident to the well-travelled reader, but in the context of an undergraduate class, it means that students have shed their previous, limited notions of India. After reading *A Fine Balance*, students know that India is not just crowded trains or street urchins or dusty villages. Such understandings, which clearly serve to make students more sensitive to the lives and situations of others, can arise from a modified "universalist" approach to *A Fine Balance*—that is, one based on the assumption that this novel, while set in a particular nation at a particular historical moment, nonetheless deals with moral questions of universal relevance.

NOTES

I would like to thank the students of English 245 at the University College of the Fraser Valley for their thoughtful comments on *A Fine Balance*. I would also like to thank the University College of the Fraser Valley for its support of Indo-Canadian Studies.

1 "Broken People: Caste Violence against India's Untouchables," a 1999 report issued by Human Rights Watch, documents the continuing violation of the human rights of India's Dalits (untouchables). As the report points out, the passage of the 1989 Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act was "an acknowledgment on the part of the government that abuses, in their most degrading and violent forms, were still perpetrated against Dalits decades after independence." The report goes on to say that "the laws, however, have benefited very few." The report contains numerous examples of recent discrimination and violence, ranging from segregation in schools and enforced labour to mutilation, rape, and murder. A recent CBC *Ideas* program (first broadcast in February, 2005) reported that "according to government statistics, caste prejudice is responsible for at least 25,000 crimes against Dalits each year. Every two hours, a Dalit woman is raped" (Phinney).

2 Donna Palmateer Pennee, in her article "Looking Elsewhere for Answers to the Postcolonial Question: From Literary Studies to State Policy in Canada," suggests that we adopt a "strategic nationalism" or "strategic particularity" in our discussions of Canadian literature. As Pennee puts it, these terms "appropriate[] something of Gayatri Spivak's work to make the point that, despite knowing that 'nationalism' can be a contentious term and practice, precisely because people differentially located and empowered cannot agree on its contents and are differentially on the receiving end of its practices—we can nevertheless use the structural power already invested in the term as a strategy for doing different kinds of work with notions of cultural distinctness …" (79). Perhaps "strategic universalism" can convey a similar provisional endorsement –that is, universalism is not a perfect strategy, but it does enable us to talk about important questions.

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Kanadische Literaturgeschichte

Eva-Marie Kröller

The publication of the *Kanadische Literaturgeschichte,* edited by Konrad Gross, Wolfgang Klooss, and Reingard M. Nischik (Metzler $70), coincides with the retirement from teaching of Konrad Gross, one of Germany's most distinguished Canadianists. In the introduction, his co-editors acknowledge that it was his idea to produce this literary history and that he is responsible for the overall intellectual design of the work. One could not conceive of a better testimonial to his lifelong engagement with Canadian studies. The list of contributors to this volume—all German-speaking Canadianists— reads like a genealogy which now encompasses three generations of scholars of whom the most senior is Paul Goetsch, Gross' teacher. While Metzler published sections on Canadian literature in earlier histories of, respectively, French literature and American literature, Canadian studies now have a foothold at German universities strong enough to warrant this separate 445-page volume.

This is a handsome book with wide margins featuring headings to ease orientation, and it is copiously illustrated with maps, book covers and photographs. The clarity of visual design does, however, come with an unusual lay-out of content. There are eighteen contributors listed on the ISBN page, along with the page numbers of their contributions (in several cases three, in one case even four), but the narrative itself is printed as if it were single-authored. At its best, the result is a polyvocal and collegial text, impressively illustrated in the first few sections authored by Hartmut Lutz, Konrad Gross, Klaus-Peter Ertler, Dorothee Scholl, and Wolfgang Klooss respectively. Lutz's opening chapter on Aboriginal oral literature mediates between academic expertise and general educated reader by using analogies between Native forms of expression and European ones. For example, he draws parallels between "honouring song" and "elegy" and between Native tale and fable, while a whole battery of comparisons with Loki, Goethe's sorcerer's apprentice, Mary Shelley's Frankenstein, Prometheus, and "Reineke Fuchs" (the fox of the animal fable) is necessary to give even an approximative idea of the trickster figure's many unpredictable manifestations. In an approach he repeats in his section on multicultural writing towards the end of the *Geschichte*, Lutz is careful, however, not to allow such comparisons to diminish the specific nature of the cultural practises he discusses and he is sensitive to the problems attending the nomenclature used by outsiders to describe them. A tightly documented section on exploration literature follows, written by Gross, one of the leading international specialists in the literature of exploration and the fur trade. His exhaustive historical overview is complemented by precise rhetorical analyses of key texts such

as André Thevet's *Les singularitez de la France antarctique* (1557) and *La cosmographie universelle* (1557). His assured knowledge of Canadian culture is also evident in two separate sections later in the book where his commentary on background developments provides the glue that holds individual chapters together.

Gross' section is coordinated with Lutz's and subjects raised in the latter are developed further, drawing attention—for example—to the kidnapping of Indigenous peoples by European explorers and discussing the emergence of cultures stereotypes as the result of thwarted imperialistic encounter. Gross' approach, especially the successful combination of large canvas and detail, is mirrored in that of Dorothee Scholl, also from the University of Kiel, who writes about the period between the Treaty of Paris and Confederation. Inserted between Gross' and Scholl's contributions, we find Ertler's discussion of early francophone culture. This is first-rate, like all of the sections on franco-Canada (authored, in addition to Ertler, by Doris Eibl, Fritz Peter Kirsch, Rolf Lohse, Ursula Mathis-Moser, and Andrea Oberhuber), many of which are distinguished by background discussions of simultaneous literary developments in France. This approach is chosen to the same extent in the anglophone part of the *Geschichte* only by Waldemar Zacharasiewicz, who frequently draws on his expertise in the literature of the American South to illustrate developments in Canadian literature, and by Heinz Antor, who brings his knowledge of British and American literature to bear on his reading of contemporary Canadian drama. The chapters on francophone writing are furthermore remarkable for their unwillingness to repeat popular but outdated notions about Canadian literature. Kirsch, for example, deconstructs the mythic status of *Maria Chapdelaine* by looking at Hémon's career as a whole. Klooss, an expert in the historical novel, links up with both Scholl and Kirsch by addressing historical novelists' efforts to address the conflicted relationship between English and French. The contemporary self-reflexive version of historical fiction, discussed in a later chapter by Martin Kuester (University of Marburg), is rightly given abundant space.

Although there are many excellent sections, this level of coordination is not equally maintained throughout the volume. It would have been good to eliminate some of the repetitions recounting, for example, more than once the history of the Canadian national anthem, the significance of the Massey Commission, the meaning of "historiographic metafiction," the foundation of the New Canadian Library, and—gratifying as repeated references to it are to those associated with the journal—the beginnings of *Canadian Literature*. Nor was it necessary to clarify several times that Carol Shields died in 2003 and is now "late." A more attentive editorial eye would also have made sure that Sara Jeannette Duncan and Pauline Johnson were born in Brantford, not Branton or Brantfort, and that Jean McIlwraith's name is not spelled McIlwrath.

As is the fate of any literary history, some of the assertions made in this volume had been challenged by the time the work was published. Thus, following the publication of David Stouck's biography (2003), Ethel Wilson's career is no longer quite the "mystery" that it perhaps once was nor is Sheila Watson's slim output quite so puzzling after reading Fred Flahiff's account (2005) of the marital dynamics between her and Wilfrid Watson. None of these quibbles diminishes the fact, however, that—together with his fine collaborators—Konrad Gross has produced an impressive book and that he has concluded his career with a volume befitting his lifetime achievement.

Contributors

Articles

Susan **Fisher**, a former associate and acting editor of *Canadian Literature*, edited *CL*#179, a special issue on literature and war. She teaches Canadian and Indian literature at the University College of the Fraser Valley.

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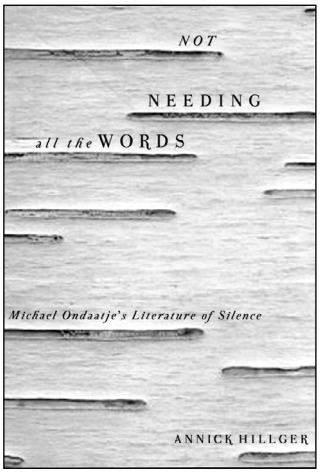

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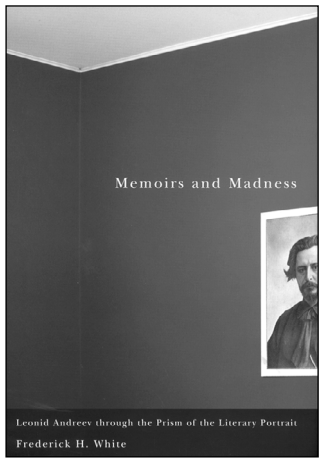

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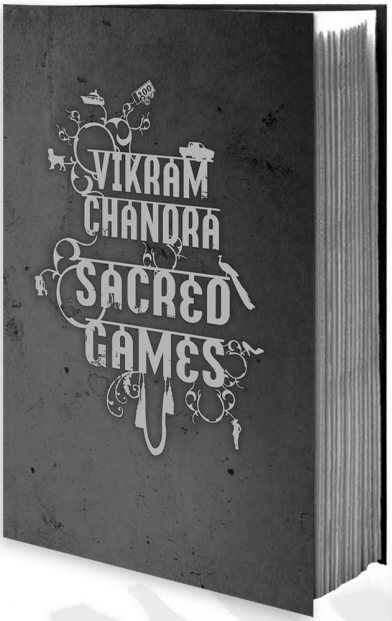

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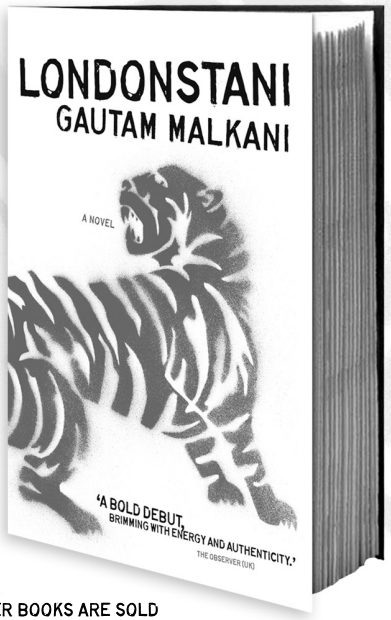

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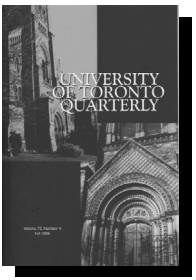

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