

Canadian Literature / Littérature canadienne

A Quarterly of Criticism and Review

Number 193, Summer 2007

Published by The University of British Columbia, Vancouver

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Best Wishes: Laurie Ricou completed his term as Editor in June 2007. The incoming Editor is Margery Fee, who was Associate Editor (Reviews) from 1995 to 2000. Kevin McNeilly, Associate Editor (Poetry), has also completed his term; the incoming Associate Editor (Poetry) is Larissa Lai.

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

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GST R108161779

Publication of *Canadian Literature* is assisted by the University of British Columbia, the Faculty of Arts (UBC), and SSHRC. We acknowledge the financial support of the Government of Canada through the Publications Assistance Program and the Canada Magazine Fund.

Canada

Canadian Literature is indexed in *Canadian Periodical Index*, *Canadian Magazine Index*, *Humanities International Complete*; and the *MLA International Bibliography*, among numerous others. The journal is indexed and abstracted by EBSCO, PROQUEST and ABES. Full text of articles and reviews from 1997 is available from PROQUEST and EBSCO Publishing. The journal is available in microfilm from University Microfilm International.

For subscriptions, back issues (as available), and annual and cumulative indexes, write Managing Editor, *Canadian Literature*, at the address below.

Publications Mail Agreement NO. 40592543
Registration NO. 08647

RETURN UNDELIVERABLE CANADIAN
ADDRESSES TO

Canadian Literature
The University of British Columbia
Buchanan E158 - 1866 Main Mall,
Vancouver, BC
Canada V6T 1Z1

TELEPHONE: (604) 822-2780
FAX: (604) 822-5504
E-MAIL: Can.Lit@ubc.ca
<http://www.canlit.ca>

SUBSCRIPTIONS: \$50 INDIVIDUAL;
\$79 INSTITUTIONAL GST INCLUDED.
OUTSIDE CANADA: US \$70 INDIVIDUAL;
US \$99 INSTITUTIONAL.

ISSN 0008-4360

Managing Editor: Donna Chin
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Production Staff: Matthew Gruman
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Layout: Faye Taylor
Illustrations: George Kuthan
Printing: Hignell Printing Limited
Typefaces: Minion and Univers
Paper: recycled and acid-free

When it Rains It Winks

Laurie Ricou

When it rains
it winks, then puckers up all over, then,
moving two more inches into metamorphosis,
shudders into pelt.

Don McKay "Pond"

Outside the window
is the rain, green
because it is summer, and beyond that
the trees and then the world,

Margaret Atwood "You Begin"

The Royal Society's annual symposium in November 2006 addressed the topic of water. One in six people in the world lacks clean drinking water, we were told. Humans are now literally "mining" groundwater, another speaker warned—mining it like gold or coal: "We remove it, and it cannot be replaced." Developed countries in particular cherish a myth (clearly intended in this case to mean "illusion" and "false") of an endless water supply. And, then, a voice said ruefully, as if turning to Canadian literature, "we have an image of ourselves as a nation of canoeists."

I was rather carelessly jotting down (and not attributing) these and other alarming observations, because my mind kept drifting to a question: what does literature, and its critical study, have to do with all this? I thought of how the narrative of Joseph Boyden's *Three Day Road*, pushed and pulled by a deep and ancient Aboriginal knowledge of water routes, meanders, as water moving through landforms at once deposits and erodes. And, since the connection between the novels is inescapable, I thought of the intricate aspiration of hundreds of water images in Timothy Findley's *The Wars*.

A few weeks after the symposium, I read Don McKay's "Pond." "Pond," McKay's exquisitely delayed, suspended syntax announces, "takes [everything] in": it "declines[s]" "nothing." Such poetic fullness seemed to add the dimension I'd been listening for. In an exuberantly restrained freset of water vocabulary, McKay subtly reminds that each water verb—"been rush

been drip been / geyser”—is also a noun. And so, of course, is “pond” a noun-verb. The small, confined body of still water is also a movement, both instinctive and planetary, a gathering together. The narrative of the poem might follow the elusive, invisible, vital cycle of transpiration that keeps our animal body, and the planet, breathing and nourished. Look in a pond, McKay wonders, supposing a new Narcissus:

would the course of self-love
run so smooth with that exquisite face
rendered in bruin undertone . . . ?

To pond is to ponder the “pollen, heron, leaves, larvae, greater / and lesser scaup” that the pond takes in and is. And looking at this wholeness, the human bears can’t help but see themselves composed of earth and decomposing into earth.

“Pond” is my favourite poem at the moment. This claim is sufficiently adolescent that it’s worth keeping because it might launch the envoi that seems demanded of any retiring Editor. Just recently I was being interviewed with video camera rolling: as a final question, the interviewer asked “What is your favourite book?” To which I replied with evasive conviction: it’s whatever book I am teaching at the moment. *As You Like It* is as important as *King Lear*; Edgar Lear as valuable as John Donne; Daphne Marlatt as audacious as Anne Carson.

I hope some principle hides in this glib and familiar response. If the book I am teaching tomorrow is my favourite, I am keeping myself as fully open as possible to its possibilities and connections, to its patterns and dreams. I want to allow it to make its meanings, to connect in ways I’d never thought of, to prompt deep feeling in my students.

I remember being asked a similar question not too long after I began teaching Canadian literature at UBC in 1978. “Who is *your* best author?” challenged one of my colleagues slightly imperiously. “Well,” I stumbled, “Canadian literature has so many authors worth reading I don’t really want to think of any single one as *best*.” “Mine,” came the abrupt response, designed to close off the barely opened discussion, triumphantly—“is Shakespeare.”

Thirty years later I still like my hesitant position—I’m more convinced of tentativeness now. Sometimes my favourite piece of Canadian writing these days does not even fit most categories of Canadian literature. Canadian liter-

ature has evolved in this capacious, open way. *As For Me and My House* is my favourite Canadian novel. But I have not taught it for years. Maybe it will become my favourite again.

A sense of being possessed by every verb seems to be economically expressed in the opening lines of a poem generously addressed to me in Robert Kroetsch's *Advice to My Friends*:

Let the surprise surprise you, I said
(or should have)

In that curiously permissive imperative, in that half-swallowed redundancy stirs a manifesto of sorts. It speaks not only about being open to the unexpected, about being willing to be surprised, but of creating surprise, of not wanting to reduce the wonder. The *sur* in surprise signals something in addition to the *prise*, something beyond or above the *taking*, some attitude that allows that everything has the capacity to astonish.

"The rain," McKay observes, in "Five Ways to Lose Your Way":

after you've watched it for awhile,
seems to discover stillness in itself and,
though it keeps on falling,
pauses. Each drop
equivocates and would,
were it possible, ebb back
up its plummet.

But of course it is possible. The poem makes it so. As it words itself, the poem uncovers its surprise. By making the ordinary strange in a twist of syntax and image, McKay makes us alert to reciprocating pond and rain. When we let the surprise surprise us, we discover hope, the pond winks within a culture of perpetual environmental crisis that might lead only to desperation or inaction. Let poems mottle the chemical analyses of groundwater. Let poems texture the bulleted precision of public policy papers. Let's be pond, touching and taking in—with generous restraint—the wealth and limits of our planet.

Alley in the Rain

Carrying an oil-paper umbrella
wandering alone in the deep, deep
and desolate rain-filled alley
I expect to meet
a girl imbued with sadness of lilac

She will be steeped in the colours of lilac
sad in the rain
sad and wandering

She will be wandering in this lonely alley
carrying an oil-paper umbrella
like me
just like me
walking in silence
solitary and sad

She will approach in silence
draw close and gaze deep, deep into my eyes
she will drift past
like a figure in a dream

Like lilac
drifting in a dream
the girl will drift away from me
the girl will drift away from me
further and further, still in silence
she will pass a broken-down fence
and out of the rain-filled alley

Amid the melancholy music of the rain
her colour will fade
her fragrance will fade
fade away like her deep, deep gaze
and lilac sadness

I expect that as I wander alone
in the deep, deep and desolate rain-filled alley
carrying an oil-paper umbrella
I shall see a girl drift past
steeped in the sadness of lilac



Listening to the Readers of “Canada Reads”

Across the developed world fewer people are reading more books. Perhaps we should be asking *how* they are reading them.

David Finkelstein and Alistair McCleery,
An Introduction to Book History

Why does the idea of celebrities championing Canadian literature on CBC radio and television make academics laugh? During the lively discussions at the “TransCanada” conference in June 2005,¹ almost everyone giggled when Barbara Godard pointed out that the CBC chose pop stars rather than academics to appear on CBC Radio One’s “Canada Reads” series. Now, this reaction may have been a brief outburst of conference-induced mass hysteria, but it was also an intriguing moment. What was so funny? Was it the idea that Canada has produced celebrities? Was it the juxtaposed image of pop star (connoting popular, media-savvy, access to a mass audience) and Canadian literature that provoked amusement? Did the laughter indicate concern about a “watered-down” literary critique aired on radio by “unqualified” readers? How much professional anxiety about the impact of our role as teachers and thinkers on the world outside the university campus prompted our laughter? Or, was this the laughter of dismissal and the rejection of a popular program format?

Mass reading events such as “Canada Reads” and “One Book, One Community” programs have certainly attracted criticism for their vulgarization of a cultural practice (literary interpretation) and their pandering to “the prizes and showbiz mentality” that has “infiltrated” Canadian literary culture (Henighan 166).² Former editor and publisher Roy MacSkimming describes “the ‘one book’ craze” as “the *reductio ad absurdum*” of a “blockbuster culture” that generates a “fixation with competition and success” (373). Writer and critic Aritha Van Herk accuses the series of “reducing the

whole rainbow of Canadian Literature to Michael Ondaatje's *In the Skin of a Lion*" (140). In one of only two published academic essays to engage with "Canada Reads," Smaro Kamboureli offers a trenchant critique of "the tropes that inform the culture of celebrity" (47). She illustrates how "Canada Reads," through its championing of Ondaatje's novel in series one (2002), inevitably enacts the logic of the "imperium of affect" (45). Meanwhile, Laura Moss implicitly recognizes the show's position within a global market economy and various institutional and ideological structures when she notes that the series "showcases Canadian writing, promotes Canadian writers, encourages literacy, and supports the publishing industry in Canada." Her unease lies in the framing and interpreting of Canadian writing with "depoliticized discussions" that "reinforce certain popular notions of Canadianness," such as global peacekeeping and an idealized multiculturalism. As she points out, this inclination alone is a good enough reason for Canadian literature critics to take the "Canada Reads" "game" seriously. But in her preoccupation with the celebrities, Guy Vanderhaeghe's "thinly-veiled dig at academic discourse,"³ and "the watered-down aestheticism" of the show's book discussions, Moss pinpoints the anxiety that some of us may feel about our own role as so-called "expert" or "professional" readers when Canadian literature is conveyed in so many popular cultural formations—book groups, radio "games," "One book, One Community" programs. Non-academic readers are missing from Moss' ruminations on "Canada Reads" and from most other commentaries on the state and status of Canadian literature.

In this essay I begin to consider that absence by examining both the reading practices promoted by "Canada Reads" on-air, and those adopted by readers participating in the series through book group discussions and on-line bulletin boards. I identify the notion of literacy that "Canada Reads" constructs through its representational practices, the reading practices that the show promotes, and discuss the responses of selected readers who "use" the practices and selected titles. Redefining "response" as "use" steers between the hermeneutic and affective definitions of reading favoured by reader-response theorists (Murray 163; Price 305). This shift is important, not only as part of the conceptual work that book history needs to undertake in order to advance reading studies, but also because the notion of the "personalized" response to literature and art is widely employed (with both positive and negative connotations) by media commentators and within many people's everyday conversations (e.g. Taylor). I argue that on-air

“Canada Reads” frequently favours interpretive practices shaped by canonical aesthetics and formalist hermeneutics. However, off-air readers exhibit both resistance to and conformity with the on-air reading practices. Further, between the first and fourth series of “Canada Reads” (2002-2005) there was a gradual shift on-air toward the vernacular reading practices and social dynamics common in many face-to-face book groups. If popular reading cultures and media formats are re-shaping the use of Canadian literature, then surely, as literary scholars, we should be taking those cultural formations seriously. There are lessons to be learned, not only from our laughter, but also from listening to readers engaging with the “game” of “Canada Reads.”

“Canada Reads” is a “game”: it is a radio show (and, less successfully, a television show) that adapts a popular reality-TV format (“Survivor”). It is not a university seminar, a literary journal, nor an academic conference. These obvious differences in media and in intended audience among these events are worth signposting. The producers of “Canada Reads” are neither academics nor literary reviewers: they are experienced mass media professionals who make radio programs for Canada’s public broadcaster. When, as literary academics, we cast our critical gaze upon a radio show, it is important to consider not only the implicit agenda of the producers and the discursive effect of the broadcasts, but also the context and materiality of the show’s production. I have commented elsewhere upon the production history of the show, its mixed success at constructing a media spectacle in an age of techno-capitalism, and the CBC’s historical involvement with the publication and promotion of Canadian literature (Fuller and Rehberg Sedo). Here, I want to begin my discussion of reading practices by briefly examining the production team’s selection of the on-air panellists.

“Canada Reads” was formulated during a period of upheaval at the CBC by an interdisciplinary production team drawn from a number of different production units (Fuller and Rehberg Sedo 6-7; 15-17). Senior producer, Talin Vartanian, describes herself as a “keen reader” of Canadian literature, although not “a literary maven,” and nominates other CBC colleagues, including Ann Jansen, Jackie Carlos, and David Barnard—all of whom were involved in the first two series of “Canada Reads”—as more “widely read” (Vartanian and Barnard). When I asked Vartanian and Barnard about the format of the show, they linked both their choice of a balloon debate and their selection of panellists with their objective of increasing the size and demographic range of the audience for CBC Radio One:

TV: There are plenty of programs that deal with books in a serious fashion. . . . You have to come up with something that is unique and different. So, [we had] the idea of turning it into a little bit of a game. But also picking people to be the panelists who are not at all earnest. Who are playful. Who are unexpected.

DB: Yeah, it's surprising that they're [the panellists] talking about books because, "wait a minute, that person, I've never heard that person talk about books before."

DF: That was a deliberate choice then?

TV: Oh yeah, like deciding to pick people who we know to be readers but who are known primarily as politicians or musicians or in some other cases, actors. And putting them into the role of a reader and getting them to talk about it in a way that is compelling to a listener because they think, "oh, I get to listen to Justin Trudeau talk about something other than his dad." And so that, the curiosity factor, draws people to the radio. It's not to hear another book show. (Vartanian and Barnard).

Making radio that sounded lively, and that might generate some dramatic surprises (like Trudeau voting against his own book choice) were paramount concerns in the producers' minds. The choice of "non-professional" readers was deliberate, and so was the engagement with celebrity culture which, the producers hoped, would bring some new (and hopefully younger) listeners to the show precisely because it was not like a "serious" book review program.

In year one (2002), Vartanian brainstormed with her colleague Jan Wong, in order to select panellists who would work well together to produce "magic," "chemistry," and "good radio" in a studio discussion game (Vartanian and Carlos 2003). In subsequent years, other production team members were involved in these discussions. They consulted their contact diaries, thus drawing upon their own social and cultural networks. Some panellists in years two through five (2003-2006) were likely chosen as a result of being contacted in a previous year for the "Canadians Recommend" website feature. While this description of process suggests some of the limitations involved in selecting panellists (many of them were likely names and people already known to CBC insiders; each panellist had already to have some degree of media visibility), it also demonstrates the pragmatics of producing a radio show with a limited (and temporary) staff and restricted economic resources. Thus, selecting Olivia Chow as a panellist (2005) does not necessarily indicate the producers' endorsement of her political position (and, after all, Kim Campbell was a panellist in 2002), any more than choosing Jim Cuddy (2004) indicates the producers' preference for a particular type of popular music. What the selections may suggest is the Toronto-cen-

tric content of the average Front-Street-based CBC insider's Rolodex, and their sporadic efforts to find panellists from other regions.

"Canada Reads" was conceived for the medium of radio; its popular format was intentional, and it explicitly promotes the reading of Canadian literature. Via the show, the CBC is able to extend its role as a "literacy sponsor." According to Deborah Brandt's formulation, "literacy sponsors" "are any agents, local or distant, concrete or abstract, who enable, support, teach, model, as well as recruit, regulate, suppress, or withhold literacy—and gain advantage by it in some way." (166, quoted in Hall 651). The tension articulated by Brandt between facilitating literacy and limiting it to a particular ideological formation is illustrated by R. Mark Hall's compelling analysis of Oprah Winfrey's career as a literacy sponsor. Hall argues that, "valuing literacy for transformation, as Winfrey does, means that other ways of reading—and consequences of literacy—don't register on "Oprah's Book Club" (661). By contrast, although the "Canada Reads" broadcasts have represented the view that reading is valuable because it can transform the individual, such literacy is not the primary or only type advocated. Implicit in the project and the original question, "What is the book that the whole of Canada should read?" (CBC 2002), and the amended version which omits the moral imperative implied by "should," is another model of transformation that marries the reading of Canadian literature to the development of a collective cultural literacy via the creation of an imagined community of readers (Fuller and Rehberg Sedo 13-21). Informed by the liberal nationalist ideology driving the CBC's foundational mandate to "enlighten, reflect and connect Canadians," the model of cultural literacy imbricated in the content and format of "Canada Reads" is about producing "better," more culturally competent and socially aware, citizens. Of course, it is precisely this project of social improvement, and the exercising of the CBC's cultural authority that underwrites it, that irritates many critics of "Canada Reads" (Bethune 52; Gordon A18; Niedzwiecki 16). In sum, reading to learn about Canada and Canadians was an explicit, if secondary, theme of several broadcast discussions over the program's first four years. Since I have discussed the cultural work of national imagining that "Canada Reads" performs via its book selections and on-air discussions elsewhere (Fuller and Rehberg Sedo), my focus here is the series' representation and evaluation of scholarly and colloquial reading practices.

Although none of the "Canada Reads" panels has to date featured an academic, "the scholar's position of authority within the world of reading," or,

at least, the scholar's way of reading ("privileging the cognitive, ideational, and analytic mode," [Long, "Textual" 192]), seems irrepressible.⁴ At times this approach is satirized by the panellists: "Can I use the 'P[ostmodern]' word?" wondered writer Will Ferguson discussing *Sarah Binks* in year two (2003). Three others disavowed any academic reading: "I had to switch off my university head," declared rock musician Jim Cuddy in year three (2004).⁵ Notions of literary value associated with scholarly reading practices trigger anxiety about levels of cultural competency: "I'm just feeling intimidated now!" declared the then-Mayor of Winnipeg Glen Murray after the initial discussion in year three about the criteria panel members used to select their books. For the show's on-air readers, an academic mode of reading is associated with formal literary features, knowledge of stylistics, and a specialist vocabulary: these elements insistently return in nearly every radio discussion. Given that each year at least one panellist has taken literature at an undergraduate and/or graduate level, the employment of interpretative and evaluative models for considering literature that are common within the academy is not in the least surprising. What is more significant is the air-time that they are afforded, and the ways that editing the show for drama and pace, and to enhance the personality dynamics among the on-air panellists, references the authority, and even upholds the value, of scholarly reading practices.

Although no academic critic has been an on-air panellist, a few scholars of Canadian literature have acted as consultants, providing sound-bites about specific texts and/or producing materials for the show's website. Janet Paterson wrote the readers' guide for *Next Episode/Prochain Episode* (winner of the 2003 series); Terry Riegelhof prepared the guides for *Beautiful Losers* (2005) and *Cocksure* (2006) (at the behest of their publisher McClelland & Stewart), and Gwen Davies prepared the time-line website feature for the 2005 winner, *Rockbound*. All three scholars were excited that these books and their writers were gaining a wider audience through their exposure on the radio show (Davies, Paterson, Riegelhof). By deferring to these "expert" scholarly readers for interpretations of literary texts and their contexts, the producers of "Canada Reads" are acknowledging the value that they place upon "academic" reading practices—practices that are, in fact, given air-time, even when the panellists adopt some of the social behaviours more commonly found in many (non-institutional) book groups.⁶ Asking "professional" readers (as opposed to the "celebrity" readers) to produce the supporting website materials also reinforces the pedagogical imperative

embedded within the CBC's mandate to "enlighten Canadians"—an obligation that neatly meshes with the rhetoric of on-air readers who frequently describe what they have "learned" from the selected books.

Are "less schooled" ways of reading that are not so "text-intensive, ideational, and analytical" represented and legitimated on-air (McGinley and Conley 219)? The short answer is "yes" they are represented, but they are not always legitimated. A variety of "nonaesthetic systems of value" (Long, *Book Clubs* 150) have been articulated on air by some panellists and on-line through the discussion boards and the celebrity recommendations web feature. Practices include reading as a politically transformative practice and valuing books for their "ability to create moral empathy" (Long, *Book Clubs* 150). Reading in order to understand and empathize with different worlds is also represented (Long *Book Clubs*; Rehberg Sedo "Badges"), as well as reading as a form of subjective identification (as when readers seek connections to their personal experience). Non-aesthetic or vernacular reading practices are not necessarily apolitical or devoid of aesthetic appreciation, although they are often so perceived. On-air reader Glen Murray proved to be a skilled and politically engaged vernacular reader, for example. In 2004 he claimed that, "I like novels that move me outside my comfort zone . . . I want to get annoyed and angry when I read." His advocacy of Thomas King's novel *Green Grass, Running Water* supported a reading practice oriented toward political transformation: it required questioning his own values as well as seeking to understand the novel's "non-European framework," King's "satire of Christian values," and his use of indigenous oral tradition. During a verbal battle with the other panellists who variously described and downgraded the novel as "too didactic [and] slight," (Jim Cuddy) "NativeLite—humour without the danger" (Zsuzsi Gartner), and "a little cute" (Francine Pelletier), Murray found an ally in Measha Brueggergosman. In her declaration that *Green Grass* was "the book that Canadians should challenge themselves with," Brueggergosman echoed Murray's notion of reading as potentially politically transformative.

Similarly, in series four (2005), Toronto City Hall politician Olivia Chow framed Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake* as an environmentally-engaged and politically topical book that provokes reflection upon and engagement with scientific advances and contemporary social issues. Chow also presented the novel as a useful tool in the project of increasing literacy among young men: the sector of the population whom librarians in all northern industrialized countries are most actively attempting to involve in reading

(Barrs and Pidgeon; Carnell; Jones). On a number of occasions, she explicitly sought the support of fellow panellist Roch Carrier, former National Librarian of Canada, for this project. The “game” format of the show meant that Carrier was initially reluctant to back Chow on this point, since his role was to promote *Volkswagen Blues*, but there was also an implicit clash of reading practices at play in their encounters. Carrier’s eloquent advocacy of Poulin’s novel centred on aesthetics, while Chow’s interpretations of all five novels were directed by a highly mimetic reading practice. Subsequently, *Beautiful Losers* with its non-linear narrative and ludic engagement with genre codes was a “difficult” read for Chow, whereas for Carrier, Cohen’s novel “still smack[ed] . . . of the new, and the outrageous and the revolutionary.” While Glen Murray’s political advocacy of King’s novel was upheld by at least one panel member, Chow’s political reading of Atwood’s novel lost ground as the other panellists devalued her other contributions to the discussions. Chow was gradually made to appear less intellectual and astute than the other panellists. Donna Morrissey corrected her “mis-reading” of Cohen’s representation of women, and the novel’s champion, Molly Johnson, cited the various “experts” whom she had consulted about the historical literary value of the novel (including, ironically enough, Margaret Atwood). The comments of Carrier and host Bill Richardson about the “ground-breaking” form, content and literary brilliance of *Beautiful Losers* were given considerable air-time.⁷ *Beautiful Losers* thus became the test-case through which the 2005 panellists proved their critical mettle and Chow failed the test.

Panellists who read and interpret through non-academic frames tend to get side-lined, especially if they are women. In 2003, actor Mag Ruffman’s vernacular reading practice was predicated on the desire for immersion in, rather than analysis of, the text. Compared to the other panellists, Ruffman came across as distinctly un-schooled in literary criticism and the art of debate. Her comments frequently seemed banal and unengaged—and I admit that I found this irritating and unsatisfactory, particularly in regards to her “failure” to make a compelling case for Helen Humphrey’s *The Lost Garden*. The journalist Brian Bethune interpreted Ruffman’s stance (ironically?) as a comic performance: “From early on Ruffman decides to play the ditz, a part she takes on with shrewdness and comic timing” (Bethune 52). On closer examination, however, Ruffman’s performance as a reader hints at a colloquial reading practice that is given time and credence within many face-to-face book groups (Long, *Book Clubs* 152). Her introductory com-

ments to *The Lost Garden* emphasize the necessity of accessibility and a compelling plot that enable a reader's immersion in a fictional world, and she hints at the importance of believable characters to reader identification with that imagined reality: "My book is very easy to read—you go through it quite fast. . . . It's a great book because you can't put it down. . . . It's a book that I've lent to five or six people and they've read it in one sitting. . . . It's a lovely book and the characters are great and the story is great." Note too, that Ruffman has shared this book with other readers—maybe with what scholars of book clubs term her "trusted others" (Rehberg Sedo "Badges") in an act of "social exchange" (Hartley 91).

Unfortunately for Ruffman (and Humphrey's novel), the "Canada Reads" panellists do not recognize her commentary as the beginnings of a non-aesthetic evaluation and, furthermore, the *Survivor*-style competition militated against them reading "with" her in the collaborative and collective style of book group book talk (Hartley 137; Long *Book Clubs*; Rehberg Sedo "Badges"). Instead, presenter and chair Bill Richardson cut into Ruffman's introduction to add information about the book's setting, as if to correct her style of commentary. In a later broadcast, writer Nancy Lee mounted an eloquent literary defence of the novel that brought its presentation into line with the promotion of the other novels. Colloquial reading practices are present in the radio shows but the demands of the show's contest format, editing, and the need to produce a dramatic "spectacle" frequently conspire with the cultural authority of aesthetic interpretation to contain them (Fuller and Rehberg Sedo 13-4).

Despite these examples, I would like to suggest that, with each series, "Canada Reads" has given increasingly more on-air time to vernacular reading practices, including shared reading practices that mimic the form and function of face-to-face reading groups. In 2005 (series four), for example, a range of reading practices (as well as diverse interpretations) were undertaken, tested out and, in some cases, rejected by the five panellists in favour of alternative interpretive modes. These included both passionate, personalized and identificatory readings, such as writer Donna Morrissey's vivid anecdote about her father's experience in the Newfoundland fishery as part of her promotion of Frank Parker Day's *Rockbound*. Singer Molly Johnson commented upon the failure of identification as a sustained form of reader engagement in relation to Mairuth Sarsfield's *No Crystal Stair*: "I wish there had been books around about being black in Canada when I was 17. My mother knows Mairuth. . . . I had lots of points of entry into this book but I

didn't think the story was that great." In both cases, Johnson and Morrissey offered other ways of reading the same texts. Morrissey's advocacy of *Rockbound* involved the invocation of humanist values (she refers to the "age-old questions of humanity" that Parker Day explores, for example); a political and environmental reading of the text in terms of the contemporary destruction of the Atlantic fishery; and an interpretation of the novel informed by western generic conventions of "fable," "myth," and "romance." Johnson referenced a series of approaches to *No Crystal Stair*: the consideration of narrative form; a socio-political reading that established the book as an important articulation of "Black community and disappeared history," and the socially valuable capacity of the novel to generate "book talk" among friends even if, as an individual reader, Johnson was not particularly engaged by either the characters or the story: "I had really great conversations with the women in my world," she enthused.

There were other ways in which "Canada Reads" series four sounded more like a book group discussion than a "knock-out" contest. Although the *Survivor* format of the show demands that individuals champion a specific book and vote off another each day, the panellists in 2005 were far more reluctant than those in previous programs to dismiss or condemn each other's books, despite Bill Richardson's prompting. Richardson made repeated references to book debate as boxing but, rather than taking each other on, the 2005 "Canada Reads" panellists occasionally ditched the rules of the game. In broadcast four, Roch Carrier underlined his view that all the books were "good books" that listeners could enjoy, while in the final broadcast, Olympian fencer Sherraine MacKay added, "they're only rejected because we're playing this silly game." She then proceeded to initiate what might be described as a "Peggy Atwood love-in" among the discussants. The "Canada Reads" panellists adopted other book group-type behaviours that were given extended air-time. Notable was Olivia Chow's presentation of her research into the origins and images of "Oryx." Instead of allowing the pace and drama of a debate to drive editorial decisions, in this instance the producers retained Chow's discourse on *Oryx*, which became somewhat disconnected from her analysis of the novel. Whereas Chow's comments on *Beautiful Losers* were dismissed by the other panellists, her contextual research on Atwood's novel was not. Her diversion away from the text would have been familiar territory to any listener-reader who belongs to a book club: the ways that books can prompt members to research both relevant and tangential material and then share it with the group is a common component of "book

talk” (Long, *Book Clubs*; Rehberg Sedo “Badges”). Equally striking in this regard, was Chow’s description of a “Canada Reads” “feast” that she had held with friends (themed dinners being a staple of many book groups [Hartley 16-7]); Johnson’s narration of her reading history of Cohen’s *Beautiful Losers* and her seeking out of “expert” opinion on it as part of her preparation for the show (note that she asks writers rather than academics); and the exchange of familial stories of physical work and rural communities that occurs between Morrissey and Carrier in a discussion about *Rockbound*. While this group of panellists did not consistently exhibit book group behaviours, they were more accommodating of vernacular reading practices than previous on-air readers.

Allowing book group behaviours to blur the spirit of competition may, of course, be a smart move on the part of the show’s producers who are aware, via their outreach work, that many listeners are precisely the type of people who belong to book groups (Vartanian and Barnard). I also suspect that the gender of the panellists in year four (2005)—the only year across five series of “Canada Reads” in which four out of five panellists have been women (Johnson substituted at a late date for Rufus Wainwright)—impacted on the social dynamics of the group, and that this in turn shaped the editing of the show. However, media representations of book groups in Canada are not particularly positive (e.g. Daspin; Robbins). Journalist Kate Taylor criticized the type of critical practices highlighted on-air in 2005:

[“Canada Reads”] accelerate[s] the trend toward the personalization of all criticism; the notion that artistic value lies mainly in our personal interaction with art, one particularly heightened if the art echoes our own memories or experiences.

While I recognize that highly personalized interpretations of literary texts can erase the wider social and political issues that a writer may be raising, not all affective reading practices or those which begin with personal identification operate this way. To further this argument it is necessary to turn to the interpretive work undertaken by off-air readers of “Canada Reads.”

Through its online presence and the local activities it inspires, “Canada Reads” offers scholars of Canadian literature an opportunity to investigate the uses that readers make of the show and its book selections.⁸ Specific demographic data for “Canada Reads” is not available, but data relating to the audience for CBC radio as a whole suggests that the majority of listeners are over 35 with age groups of 50 years and over recording the highest weekly listening hours (between 20 and 25) (Friends). Feedback received by the producers of “Canada Reads” has included e-mails from teachers, high school

students, and other readers under 35, suggesting that the show has to date attracted a small number of younger readers/listeners (Vartanian and Barnard). While it is difficult to determine whether or not the show creates new readers for Canadian literature and, if so, how many, sales figures for selected titles suggest that the series is successful in creating a wider readership for the featured books (Fuller and Rehberg Sedo 28). More significantly for my purposes in this essay, postings on the show's website in the second, third and fourth series of "Canada Reads" (2003-2005) offer evidence for a range of reading practices, not all of which are determined by the on-air discussions or by the medium of expression.

The material examined includes comments posted on the CBC's on-line discussion boards, which were active for approximately six weeks during the 2003 and 2004 series of "Canada Reads." In 2005 the discussion boards were replaced by a new version of the "People's Choice" award. For two months, readers were invited to post short commentaries about the book they would recommend to Canadians, rather than simply entering a title on a ballot (as in 2002) or voting for one of the five featured books (2003 and 2004). The 2005 People's Choice feature produced an interesting series of reading narratives, many of which were highly autobiographical in content. Taking part in a written form of exchange may be one factor that encouraged participants to borrow from the textual genres of memoir and autobiography, and to respond to each other's contributions by mimicking the content, semi-formal register, and narrative structure of previous postings. A majority of the commentaries articulate the emotional and/or intellectual role that a particularly beloved book has played in the reader's life, for example. Nearly all readers chose books that have not yet been featured on "Canada Reads," and several took issue with the show for failing to highlight a particular author (such as David Adams Richards) or genre of writing (notably fantasy and children's fiction, genres that are often marginalized by academic critics).

The postings suggest that the "Canada Reads" producers are neither responding to nor particularly paying attention to what Canadians really read and want to read "together." Readers' nominations of books, genres, and authors can also be interpreted as offering some resistance to the canonical approach that underwrites at least half of the "Canada Reads" book choices. A sizeable number of readers make no reference at all in their postings to the show or its literary selections. It is tempting to interpret these commentaries as a rejection of the CBC "nannyism" cited by Hal Niedzviecki in his disparaging remarks about "Canada Reads" and "One

Book, One Community” programs (16). Further, the articulation of alternative Canadian literature lists within a medium provided by the CBC could be interpreted as a meaningful form of public engagement with (and negotiations of) hierarchies of literary value.

The format of the “People’s Choice” forum mediates the reading practices recorded there and the language used to describe “value.” Many postings expressing opinions about the post-ers’ reading histories and preferences adopted the style of a reading diary or, more appropriate to the medium, a reader’s blog. The reader/blogger both notes and reflects critically upon their reading habits, while seeking to influence those of other readers who may use the web as a resource in selecting books to read (Rehberg Sedo “Convergence”).⁹ Several readers of this type employ the language of avid, voracious book readers to articulate the pleasure they gain by consuming Canadian fiction: “the chapters I had devoured” (Crystal Walsh, St John’s); “I was consumed by the story” (Karen, St John’s); “I would recommend [this book] to anyone seeking a taste of Canadian literature” (Alison Lennie, Edmonton). This discourse of consumption not only reflects the pervasive consumer-oriented organization of contemporary Western societies, it also expresses a visceral reading experience that “feeds” both imaginative and bodily needs. Perhaps this pleasure is replayed for readers who share their reading experiences with others through online postings or blogging?

Discussion boards mediate reading practices differently from the People’s Choice format. By inviting post-ers to debate directly with each other, albeit in a written rather than an oral form, the “Canada Reads” discussion boards elicit more overt examples of readers negotiating with notions of literary value, and reflecting on the role that reading plays in their everyday lives. In the two years that the “Canada Reads” team ran the on-line discussion boards (2003 and 2004), the moderator was also kept busy refereeing the eloquent outbursts of outrage and support for the show’s format, the quality (or not) of the book chat on-air, and the various conspiracy theories about the “political agenda” of those running the show. Additionally, readers used the boards to explain the value that specific books held for them. There were overt expressions of the “identity work” that readers were undertaking with and through reading, sometimes alone, but also within groups (Turner 102). These ranged from the feel-good affirmation of an un-problematized Canadian identity, to critical reflections upon notions of national and regional identities. A reader in Waterford, Ontario exemplifies the celebratory, affirmative reading experience, one apparently shared by members of their book group:

Our group has read a number of the Canada Reads selections and our choice is *The Colony of Unrequited Dreams* by Wayne Johnston. This tale embraces the spirit of "Canadianism." We felt Canadian reading it and believe this to be the ultimate compliment to a Canadian book and its author. We are enjoying the lively panel discussions taking place on the CBC this week and believe Canada Reads is a great way to celebrate Canada Book Week and the wonderful Canadian Literature that is available. We look forward to next year's list. Kudos to the CBC! (23 April 2003)

The irony of adopting Johnston's anti-colonial historical fiction of Newfoundland, a book that laments the province's lost chance of becoming a sovereign state, is invisible here, just as it was on-air when, championed by Justin Trudeau, it was held up as a great example of Canadian federalism (Sugars 169 n.1) I am particularly struck by the willingness of readers in Ontario to "embrace" a Newfoundland story as the epitome of all things Canadian, thereby neatly inverting the usual cultural function of Newfoundland as central Canada's marginalized "other"—the "handout province" requiring too much taxpayer's money. A reversal of this sort may well be inflected by nostalgia for the lost world of small rural townships that Johnston represents in *Colony* as well as his evocative passages of lyrical landscape description that fulfil an urban longing for apparently cohesive communities (Fuller "Strange" 22).

This particular group of readers, in common with a number of other post-ers, employ the "Canada Reads" selections as a resource through which to build their shared reading list. They also use the books to celebrate being "Canadian" through a literature that they regard as high in quality if and when it affirms their sense of a collective identity. While these uses of Canadian literature may not coincide with the motivations of many of the "professional readers" who teach and research it, they should not all be dismissed out of hand as "un-politicized" (Moss). At times, as noted in the Waterford example, on-line readers perform readings that uphold dominant nationalist ideology, but these readings can offer scholars insights into the relation between mainstream representation of Canadian literary culture and the perpetuation of normative values. Further, from the perspective of cultural politics at least, the state funding of Canadian literary culture post-Massey-Lévesque Commission to the early 1990s appears to have paid off. The post-ers on the "Canada Reads" website demonstrate an awareness of Canadian writing in various genres, and most readers celebrate the fun involved in reading these books. Indeed, the various pleasures derived by these Canadians in their reading of Canadian literature suggest another area

for critical investigation that has been under-researched by literary scholars.

The other reading practice which dominated the “Canada Reads” discussion boards was more critically self-reflexive:

I read to be a little unsettled, to have my perspectives called into question, so that I am reminded to tread carefully in my interactions with others. The world is not simple, issues are not black and white. The energy and creativity in life lie in the grey areas, the realm of the ambiguous—the uncomfortable domain of *Next Episode*. (Mark, March 2003)

The textual, written medium of the discussion board (less “instant” than on-line chat, for example) combined with the ability of the commentator to re-read and reflect upon previous postings carefully, can lead to more developed analyses than are sometimes given space on-air. Another post-er wrote a more extended analysis of self-transformation, perhaps encouraged by the example of earlier contributors such as Mark:

I believe it was a brave move of the panel to select *Next Episode* [as the winner] not only because it was a French Canadian novel, but because terrorism and separatism is something that effects us all [sic] . . . and no matter where we are in Canada—it is better to try to understand each other through the perspectives of our regionality than to dismiss the value of our diverse Canadian experience. I myself was sure *Colony of Unrequited Dreams* would win—but I am glad *Next Episode* came out on top because it is important to understand the many different perspectives Aquin gives in this novel—the insane, the desperate, the separatist, the Quebecois, and, ultimately the Canadian. The decision was not about politics, it was about having an open mind—trying something new and different and uncomfortable because you might enjoy it anyway. (Angela, April 2003)

While Angela’s commentary veers between a liberal discourse of diversity and a more ideologically radical stance that seeks to recognize and value differences within the Canadian polity, she is certain about the value that Canadian literature has for her.

Mark’s and Angela’s notion of reading books in order to have your identity and assumptions “unsettled” was echoed by many readers on the discussion boards in both 2003 and 2004. By contrast, only one on-air example from those two years adopts a similar stance: the occasion in 2004 when Glen Murray and Measha Brueggergosman mounted their passionate defence of Thomas King’s novel. This example shows that the reader-listeners of “Canada Reads,” empowered in part by the more reflective, written mode of communication available to them on-line, sometimes read against the grain of the show’s tendency to default to a reading practice structured by canonical aesthetics. Although postings on discussion boards can be a

frustrating source for investigating reading practices since post-ers frequently do not provide their location, gender, age, or other detail about their lives, the “Canada Reads” postings demonstrate readers “at work” negotiating with literary texts, with the cultural authority of the CBC, with the on-air discussions, with different constructions of “Canadian” identity, and with each other’s opinions.

Meanwhile, academic readers have also responded to “Canada Reads” through various media. Some scholars of Canadian literature posted brief critical comments on-line via the CANLIT-L listserv, or, via personal blogs (e.g. “scribbling woman”). Many of the CANLIT-L postings echoed the content and concerns of the “non-academic” readers who posted on the “Canada Reads” discussion boards. Issues featured on CANLIT-L included the negative criticism of selected books necessitated by the “Survivor” format of the show; the “dullness” of conversation during year one (2002), the sensationalist mis-representation on-air of *Prochain Episode* as a novel “whose hero is a terrorist” in year two (2003) (Forsyth), and, most provocatively, whether or not the series showcases Canadian literature in a way that is laudable. The latter theme elicited a small handful of largely positive responses from post-ers in February/March 2005 who felt that “any show that promotes literature and gets people curious and reading” (Lesk) or “that gets Frank Parker Day read” (Dean) had some cultural value. Perhaps not surprisingly, post-ers identifying themselves as librarians also shared this view, and were particularly quick to express their support for the show during the first year (2002). Academic dis-ease with “Canada Reads” has, to date, focussed on its perpetuation of the culture of celebrity and global commodity capitalism (e.g. Kambourelis; Lynch). Via the CANLIT-L listserv, Gerald Lynch has twice expressed his dissatisfaction with “Canada Reads” and literary awards as vehicles of consumer capitalism focussed on “selling one thing a lot” (2003). In other words, academic readers have been pre-occupied with the wider cultural, ideological significance and structural situation of “Canada Reads,” and, perhaps surprisingly for people whose training privileges textual criticism, they have been rather less concerned with the actual content of the show, the on-air discussions and the books selected.

Finally, a small but growing band of academic readers wish to “use” or respond to “Canada Reads” by engaging with the show more directly and inter-actively. English and library faculty members at UBC, UNBC and the University of Winnipeg, among others, have been involved with tie-in events

such as panel discussions or book displays on-and off-campus during the radio series. Other academics have incorporated critical readings of the show, its book selections and its construction of a reading public into their undergraduate teaching of Canadian literature (Moss “correspondence”; Rifkind). The former “hands-on” responses to “Canada Reads” might be described as a particular vernacular reading practice: they are certainly socially-oriented in their direct engagement with non-academic readers, and in their possible contribution to better “town/gown” relations. The pedagogical responses, meanwhile, are clearly influenced by cultural studies approaches to literary-cultural production and reception. They also represent dynamic pedagogical strategies through which to engage the interest of students whose reading competencies have been developed on-line as much as they may have been learned through reading print texts.

Undergraduate students in a Canadian literature classroom or posting in a Virtual Learning Environment can, of course, be considered to form a reading group, albeit one that is framed and structured by institutional educational imperatives. The final reading practices that I want to consider are those of people who also demonstrably and regularly read together and who, arguably, do not require a series such as “Canada Reads” to recommend Canadian writing that they might enjoy. Established book groups have their own rules of selection and modes of discussion and evaluation which, while not as “free” or “anarchical” as one scholar of reading has suggested (Petrucci 367), are by no means enslaved to the hierarchies of value consecrated by universities and literary review editors (Hartley 45-71; Long, *Book Clubs* 116-30). Take two different book groups located in the same part of Nova Scotia.¹⁰ Both groups decided to read one of the 2005 “Canada Reads” books, *Rockbound*, before it won the on-air competition. Members of the “Red Tent group” were motivated to read Frank Parker Day’s 1928 novel by a local CBC Radio-Halifax competition in which book groups in Nova Scotia were invited to demonstrate why their discussion of *Rockbound* should be selected for broadcast. The Red Tent group won the competition and their discussion of the novel was aired on *Maritime Noon*, with extracts broadcast nationally on *Sounds Like Canada*. The other book group, “Judith’s Book Club,” had no direct involvement in the production of either local or national “Canada Reads” programmes. Their “act” of reading *Rockbound* had a different context, although both groups share the same geographic “place” (Cavallo and Chartier 2), and are composed primarily of women ranging in age from 30 to 60. Listening to the groups discussing both

Rockbound and “Canada Reads” offers some fascinating insights into the ways in which readers interpret texts in a face-to-face group discussion. Members are aware of the conventions that frame how literary fiction is represented not only by a national broadcaster but also by academic “experts”; they understand the exigencies of radio as a phatic medium that must engage and hold the attention of the (often-distracted) listener, and they employ and value their local and experiential knowledge as an interpretative resource. It would, therefore, be incorrect and overly simplistic to label their shared reading practice as an example of the “trend” for “personalized” criticism (Taylor R1).

One of the most compelling aspects of the Red Tent discussion is their analysis of how their regular reading practices were changed and mediated by the editing strategies and agendas of the local CBC radio show producers. The group rehearsed; they created a stage-set; they turned the meeting into something of a celebratory ritual featuring food and wine. Their regular social practice as a reading group was transformed into an event. Several non-members were present at the taping, including the writer Donna Morrissey who championed *Rockbound* on “Canada Reads.” Another one-off participant was local CBC Halifax radio host, Don Connelly, who turned out to have some pre-conceived notions of book groups that inflected the questions that he asked, the editing that took place after the recording, and the point at which he stopped the taping. Connelly had asked them, for example, whether they belonged to the book group for primarily social reasons—which they energetically refuted. Here are members of the group recalling how they performed a book group discussion of *Rockbound* for the radio:

Pam: We did *Rockbound*! We did it two nights before [the taping of the radio show]! To rehearse amongst ourselves, just to chat about the book—so that we didn’t sound completely stupid.

Pat: We don’t usually have a meal. We did a meal—we thought, “we’ll roll up the carpet.” It was at Gail’s—we went into Gail’s living room and there was all these huge honking microphones and all the air was just sucked right out of the room. Like there was this gas! And it wasn’t like a normal discussion.

Marlene: Although we’d had lots of normal discussion around the table while we ate. I thought that we had great discussion in the kitchen and we had good talk in the kitchen.

Hilary: We had good wine too!

[laughter]

Pat: And I thought that Don Connelly cut us off just as we were starting to get going. I was ready to go and he said, “that’s a wrap!” We were just starting . . .

(Red Tent)

Not only did the Red Tent feel that their “normal discussion” was cut short and restricted to what they regarded as preliminaries, they also articulated how they allowed the radio-friendly controversy about the reception of *Rockbound* by the inhabitants of Ironbound (the community that Parker Day visited while researching his novel) and Connelly’s directorial agenda to hi-jack their usual textual pre-occupations:

Marlene: [The discussion] was fascinating and we’ve had lots of conversations when we’ve really diverged and gone off on a tangent and we’ve still gotten something out of it at the end of the night. But I remember there was one point when [Don Connelly] said, because we’d been talking about the Ironbounders and this and that and we were very wrapped up in [the controversy] and people’s connections to this, and then he said, “Let’s talk about setting.” And we went “huh?”

[laughter] (Red Tent)

Rather than debate characterization, setting, language, and the historical contexts for the book as they normally do, the Red Tent’s “Canada Reads”-mediated discussion focussed largely on the dramatic controversy surrounding Frank Parker Day’s fictional representation of actual people and events. Admittedly, this is a controversy that still has some force on the South Shore of Nova Scotia 80 years later, and hence knowledge about the local reception of Day’s novel could be referenced by book group members from family and community memories. Talk about the Ironbounders’ upset over Day’s novel in the 1930s thus served the dual purpose of providing engaging radio, and allowing the group members to exchange their local knowledge (drawn not only from local gossip but also from meeting Donna Fink, former Ironbound resident).

Although the context and act of reading *Rockbound* was different for Judith’s Book group, their shared reading practices as a group are well established and not dissimilar to those of the Red Tent group. While Judith’s Book group gave some space to the discussion of the *Rockbound* controversy, its treatment on radio, and their envy of the Red Tent group’s brush with media stardom, they spent most of their time discussing plot, characterization, and the dialect Parker Day employs in the novel. In common with the Red Tent, many members of Judith’s Book group used the “Afterword” (written by Gwen Davies, University of New Brunswick) in order to connect fictional place-names and family names with their local knowledge of the South Shore. They did so as part of their examination of Maritime mores and values, which was prompted by the book’s depiction of a small rural community in which privacy is impossible, the work ethic is predominant,

and moral rule-breaking is punished. They recognized this world from their own experiences, and members of this group exchanged stories about their family history, demonstrating not only a staple of book group talk, but also the trust they have placed in each other (Rehberg Sedo “Badges”). Unlike the Red Tent, some members of Judith’s group appeared to desire a truthful representation, and they pointed up what they see as moral inconsistencies in the fictional world of the novel, by referring to their familial and local knowledge. The readers in this group have confidence in their reading practices. One participant’s comment captured the group’s belief in their interpretive agency as readers—and as possessors of local knowledge:

P8: But this is Frank Parker Day’s gaze on a place, right? This is not necessarily the way it was, this is the way he saw it, but we’re reading the book right? (Judith’s Book group)

This comment helps to contextualize members’ assessment of the use-value that the “Canada Reads” series has for them. They reported that it generates discussion for their meetings, but does not necessarily influence what they select to read together:

P2: I think we have to say our involvement with “Canada Reads” is that we discuss it. Like when “Canada Reads” is going on we have incredible discussions around it.

P1: But only because we’re doing *Rockbound* are we here [laughter and over-talk]. Has “Canada Reads” ever influenced our book group? And, so far, the answer is no. (Judith’s Book group)

However, some members had bought books selected by “Canada Reads” to read outside the group, such as *Whylah Falls* (attracted by the Nova Scotian connection), and *Next Episode* (because it won in 2003). Here, they were relying on the CBC’s well-established cultural authority and its long history as a promoter of Canadian writing (Fuller and Rehberg Sedo 18-9). They were, in fact, using “Canada Reads” and the CBC as a “trusted other”—that is, a resource for finding pleasurable and intellectually stimulating books that they would enjoy (Rehberg Sedo “Badges”). The on-line readers I have discussed often used the show and its website in a similar way, perceiving the CBC to be a trustworthy, although not perfect, cultural authority. As book group members, the Red Tent and Judith’s Book Group also used the “Canada Reads” radio debates to stimulate discussion, but did not necessarily allow themselves to be directed by either the interpretations or reading practices that they heard on-air.

What lessons are to be learned from listening to the on-air, on-line, and

book group readers of “Canada Reads”? With respect to the radio series, the vernacular practices favoured by book groups seem to be combined with selected elements of a more “academic” mode of reading. This mix suggests to me the importance of developing nuanced analyses of non-academic reading practices and theories capable of explaining the pleasures, politics, and social relations that reading practices both shape and resist. Some off-air readers are clearly looking to CanLit for “a kind of mimetic account of national experience” (Hulan 38), and yes, some of them are reading in the “un-politicized” and “personalized” ways that mirror the practices of some on-air celebrity readers (Moss; Taylor). However, not all readers use “Canada Reads” or Canadian Literature in the same way. As my brief consideration of on-line readers suggests, some readers are not simply imagining a unified Canadian community; they are, in many cases, questioning that nationalist construction. Others, like the book group readers, re-embed the series and the books within their established selection procedures and interpretive practices. For the two groups I considered, reading *Rockbound* can involve drawing upon familial and local knowledge as well as familiarity with literary genres and narrative strategies. Gender also appears to be significant: the on-air readers of “Canada Reads” who employed affective reading practices were usually women, as were the majority of members of the two Nova Scotian book groups.

Reading Canadian literature as a shared social practice requires our attention as literary critics. The social dynamics and social rituals of shared reading were briefly illuminated when the Red Tent book group became radio stars. We could also profitably interrogate how far the media of radio, television, and the Internet shape and legitimate the various reading practices demonstrated by the readers of “Canada Reads.” Smaro Kamboureli is right when she argues that the culture of celebrity “remains loudly mute about the ideology of the knowledge it transmits” (46). Rather than laughing anxiously (or dismissively) about celebrities undertaking literary interpretation, scholars need to identify and critique the ideological work that is being performed in the name of reading Canadian literature. More generally, we should examine what “happens” to the interpretation of literary fiction when it moves through the communicative strategies that structure and characterize mass media and the Internet. When we undertake any of the investigations I have suggested, we also need to be self-reflexive about our own position, power, and responsibility within processes of knowledge production and consumption. We need to be prepared to shift our ground out-

side our disciplinary training, and in our relations with and attitude to “non-academic” readers. Investigating and reaching a better understanding of contemporary book cultures and events like “Canada Reads” may enable us as “professional” readers to participate more directly, more provocatively, and more creatively in popular readings of Canadian literature.

NOTES

- 1 The first TransCanada conference—“TransCanada: Literature, Institutions, Citizenship”—was organized by Smaro Kamboureli (University of Guelph) and Roy Miki (Simon Fraser University), and was held in downtown Vancouver at the Morris J. Wosk Centre for Dialogue, 23-26 June 2005.
- 2 The research informing this essay forms part of a collaborative interdisciplinary project, “Beyond the Book: Mass Reading Events and Contemporary Cultures of Reading in the UK, USA and Canada,” funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (UK; grant number 112166). For more information about the project, visit <www.beyondthe-bookproject.org>. I wish to acknowledge the invaluable contributions of my research collaborator, DeNel Rehberg Sedo (Mount Saint Vincent University).
- 3 I believe that Moss is referring to Vanderhaeghe’s comment quoted in a CBC press release announcing the winner of the 3rd series, ‘Canada Reads *The Last Crossing*’ (February 20, 2004): “For me, it was a great pleasure to have the books debated in such a passionate, intelligent, and decidedly *not* sombre fashion.”
- 4 It is helpful to remember that, in the academy, the “scholar’s position of authority within the world of reading” nominated by Long is confirmed and practiced through both oral and written media. With regards to the attainment of prestige, advancing scholarly claims through written discourse is, however, privileged over oral communication within most Euro-American institutions. Scholarly written texts adopt a very different mode of communication from the type of conversational radio discourse we hear on “Canada Reads.” While the on-air panellists do not, of course, reproduce the rhetorical strategies of scholarly written discourse in their broadcast conversations, they employ elements of academic literary discourse in order to demonstrate their own cultural capital and ability to judge literary texts.
- 5 Recordings of the radio broadcasts can be accessed via the “Canada Reads” website: <<http://www.cbc.ca/canadareads>> where former series are archived, e.g. 2004 website <http://www.cbc.ca/canadareads/cr_2004/index.html>.
- 6 I am not claiming that *all* book groups which meet outside the classroom adopt identical modes of social interaction or textual interpretation. Studies by Long and Hartley do, however, indicate that there are some social practices and interpretive strategies that recur among many groups, and I am drawing upon their insights when I discuss colloquial reading practices in this article.
- 7 Also notable was the cultural authority accorded to Carrier as a writer, critic, and “national” figure by the other panellists (all women) who deferred to him, and commented upon his seniority.
- 8 For a list of spin-off activities relating to “Canada Reads” see Fuller and Rehberg Sedo 30-31. Some of the postings are archived on the various “Canada Reads” websites (see n. ii).

- 9 Some examples of readers blogging can be accessed at: <<http://www.chekhovsmistress.com>>; <<http://lbc.typepad.com/blog/>>; <http://noggs.typepad.com/the_reading_experience/>
- 10 The Red Tent discussion was facilitated by DeNel Rehberg Sedo, while Judith's Book group kindly recorded their discussion for us. Quotations are taken from transcripts of recordings. Names of participants have been changed for the Red Tent and removed for Judith's Book group.

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December, Glasgow

Why did I stop, at the top
of Buchanan Street looking down:

at the cold blue lights
the sloped stone walkway
and old rain glowing in the street.

Something to do with the change
in season; something about the early dark
and watching people stroll
up the flood-lit walk

that I think of the last morning
I spent at home: woke up warm
in a large white-frame house
with creaky doors and high windows
miles from here; from the roar

of buses braking hard in turn
and police sirens going off helplessly
in back lanes

and the hum of cheery rough voices
in the crowd
getting louder, for the holidays.



Internalized Racism: Physiology and Abjection in Kerri Sakamoto's *The Electrical Field*

Kerri Sakamoto's first novel confronts the difficulties of narrating trauma, events the narrator cannot register consciously. As readers, dependent upon Asako Saito's narration, we find ourselves placed inside her skin, similarly unaware of the specific traumatic experiences that dictate the events of the novel. I deliberately use the word "skin" to locate our position as readers since Sakamoto's descriptions of the body in *The Electrical Field* illuminate the relations between Asako's corporeality and her psychology. By considering how the barrier demarcating Asako's interior and exterior experiences dissolves, we perceive a similar dissolution of borders separating the personal, social, and political as they interrelate within racist ideology.

Most recent studies of trauma in literature privilege the psychological over the physiological manifestations of traumatic experience.¹ This paper, by contrast, examines physiological responses to psychological trauma to interrogate the complex relations among mind, body, and narrative. Cathy Caruth (1995) recognizes that trauma disrupts mental processes so that recollection of traumatic events occurs belatedly, if at all; however, my goal is to introduce the medical into a discussion of trauma and narrative to inquire how psychological trauma also disrupts the body's narrative.

The Electrical Field won the 1999 Commonwealth Writers Prize for Best First Book (Canada and Caribbean Region) and was short-listed for numerous other literary awards. Coral Ann Howells and Marlene Goldman have written the most sustained studies of the work to date. Howells addresses

monstrosity in the novel and argues that “Asako’s self-perception is tied to the key issues of her gendered and racial identity seen through the distorting lens of her internment experience, which has represented her difference as monstrous to herself” (130). I build on Howells’ work to investigate how racism operates not only on the mind but also on the physical body. I look at how the female body in the novel responds medically to the trauma of internment as it literally begins to don the monstrosity that nationalist discourse fashions for it. Further Goldman, by reading the novel in conjunction with Joy Kogawa’s *Obasan*, explores “how the discourses of loss, mourning, and the role of the victim have been mobilized and reshaped by Canadians of Japanese ancestry” (363). In Goldman’s discussion of melancholy and trauma, she considers both novels’ images of violence to show how “the wounds inflicted to the body represent the hurts of history” (380). In conversation with this scholarship, I argue that the wounds in this particular book are more than representative; rather, they are concrete, physical symptoms of that history.

By viewing the processes of systemic racism and institutionalized violence as they operate on the body, we can see how internalization produces effects that extend beyond the subject’s negative view of the self. Not only does the subject internalize racism psychologically, but she externalizes it physically. In other words, as the subject processes the experience of racism that comes from outside the self, he produces an externalized racism that comes from within, one that the body displays. Such a reading complicates concepts that deem race a wholly social construction. It expands ideas of what constitutes embodied difference. It allows us to see more specifically how one’s experience of physical differentiation and the oftentimes disempowering effects of it are realities of racism for which social construction cannot wholly account. We see internalized racism as a product of both embodied difference and social attitudes. Furthermore, looking at the physiological manifestations of such racism we see the body, as it externalizes that which has been internalized, to be marked both from within and without.

In *The Electrical Field*, Sakamoto portrays a body dislocated physically and temporally as a result of internment. I investigate how the narrator’s simultaneous physiological regression to a pre-pubescent stage and her progression to a menopausal stage represent her body’s separation from traditional processes of aging. Such bodily displacement prevents her from “wearing” such effects on her body and echoes—and potentially produces—the temporal dislocation that only allows her to experience and narrate

trauma belatedly. I use Sigmund Freud's work on the death instinct and Julia Kristeva's on abjection to posit that psychological trauma conflates ethnic identification and monstrosity. Physiological manifestations of trauma embody broader national ideologies that view entire ethnicities as threats to the polity.

Sakamoto sets her novel in small-town Ontario, at the edge of an electrical field, where Nisei (second-generation) Japanese Canadian, Asako Saito, narrates a tale of murder and suicide. The story opens with the murders of Chisako Nakamura and her lover, Mr. Spears, at the hands of Chisako's husband, Yano, who eventually kills their two children (Tam and Kimi) and himself. Asako frames her story with adoring and guilt-ridden recollections of her elder brother, Eiji, who died of pneumonia in an internment camp during World War II. The novel's depictions of Asako's guilt question whether the four murders and Yano's suicide result indirectly from her traumatic experience in the camp, and the narrative reverberates with the after-effects of the Canadian government's racist policy.

Asako's body absorbs the guilt she feels for the deaths of her brother and the Nakamuras and interrupts not only her memory's access to chronology but also her body's. Her reproductive system seems to have shut down after the death of her brother so that during what would be her pubescence she enters apparent early menopause. Conversely, her presumably menopausal age during the novel's narration is marked by a longing for her lost reproductive years and sex life combined with an adolescent understanding of and approach to sexuality in general. Further, as Howells has demonstrated, Asako and other survivors of internment employ a rhetoric of monstrosity in reference to themselves, suggesting that "it is this racialized self-perception with all the connotations of a negative othering that has shaped Asako's sense of herself as an embodied subject, and which may account for her disgust with her own physical body" (128). But I argue that the self-perception extends beyond Asako's *sense* of herself and that the trauma of internment in the camps actually manifests itself physiologically. Hence, there is a particularly (and negatively) embodied understanding of Nisei within Canadian socio-political culture that the survivors produce as well as internalize and project, but that sense of self as "disgusting" can also create actual physical disruptions that are damaging to the self.

In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920), Freud begins with the notion of the pleasure principle, which he believed governed life through its drive to find pleasure and/or to avoid pain. This principle, preoccupied with devel-

opment and change, sustains life. However, Freud asserts that a very different drive pre-exists the pleasure principle and that drive urges the organism toward death. The death drive represents the desire of the organic to return to an inorganic state. Scholars have interpreted this drive as dominating trauma victims as it inhibits their pleasure principle.² Asako's narrative reveals the dominance of the death drive in the traumatized individual.

Freud hypothetically characterizes this drive as "a powerful tendency inherent in every living organism to restore a prior state" (76). He relates the death drive to a repetition-compulsion, a regressive tendency symptomatic of traumatic neurosis, and distinct from the "normal" tendency to repeat found in children. Freud pathologizes the adult compulsion to repeat as representing an attempt to master a situation. In *The Electrical Field*, Asako repeats various versions of two stories to an adolescent girl, Sachi, and to the reader: one story is of her brother's death and the other is of her final conversation with Yano before he committed murder and suicide. Asako's retellings of these two stories are contradictory. We can read her compulsion to repeat them as attempts to master situations resulting in death, situations for which she feels responsible.

As Cathy Caruth notes, with the capacity to remember traumatic experience comes also "the capacity to elide or distort" (156). Asako's retellings elide her role in her brother's death (she repeatedly contradicts herself with claims that she saved him) and similarly erase her part in the murder-suicide (she argues Yano already knew about his wife and Mr. Spears before she told him). Furthermore, we can read Asako's compulsion to repeat as symptomatic of her fetishization of the narrative. James Berger refers to Eric Santner's description of how "narrative itself, the tool of working through, can itself function as a fetish object 'consciously or unconsciously designed to expunge the traces of the trauma or loss that called that narrative into being in the first place'" (27). In this sense, it is possible that Asako's relationship with the pubescent girl, Sachi, is a traumatic symptom: Asako uses the young girl to fetishize the stories of Eiji's death in the camp as an attempt, in Berger's words, to "expunge the traces of the trauma or loss." Beyond expunging the loss, however, Asako also attempts to expunge traces of herself, the person she blames for the loss.

We can read Asako's narrative as an effort to regress—as Freud's notion of the death drive—to an earlier condition; however, we can also posit that her regression is motivated by a desire to return to the time before Eiji died. Her fascination with the young Sachi's developing sexuality speaks to her desire

to turn back time. The narrator notes that around the time of Eiji's death, she "was still young, barely older than Sachi was now" (177). In some ways for Asako, the girl embodies the pleasure principle since Sachi's sexual instincts are central to the narrator's portrayal of her. In many ways, her sexuality underscores how—in Freudian terms—Asako's pleasure principle yielded to her death drive when Eiji died and her physical/sexual development was arrested. Freud argues that the sexual drives "constitute the true life-drives; and the fact that they act *against* the intent of the other drives. . . points to a conflict between them and the rest" (80). Howells has noted that Sachi might represent an "incomplete double for Asako because of [her] individual difference from her" (136), but with regard to Freud's theory, Sachi and Asako also become representative of opposing drives: Sachi's character exudes the sexuality Freud ascribes to the pleasure principle, whereas Asako's emanates barrenness and death.

The latter's virginity is a source of her frustration and shame at having "waited too long instead of not long enough" (60). Despite Asako's lack of sexual experience, however, she remains a sexualized figure. She derives pleasure from participating vicariously in Sachi's sexual play with Yano's son, Tam, during which she provides the girl with Japanese words to describe her body's "private parts." From language, the game proceeds to a game of sexual show and touch. Her interest in Sachi's sexuality suggests that the child may function as a surrogate who experiences what Asako could not. Conflating sex, ethnicity, and language, Sakamoto depicts Asako hiding and watching the game unfold as Sachi uses the new language Asako has bestowed on her. The translation of "private" parts into the Japanese might represent Asako's sexual coyness, as she removes such descriptions from the English she and Sachi use to communicate. However the use of the Japanese language also locates Sachi's sexuality in the culture that Asako seems to find less shameful, somehow more "pure" than that she experiences as one of the Nisei living in Canada.

The narrator recollects that the onset of her period coincided with feelings of shame. Playing seahorse, a game in which she swam onto Eiji's back, she says she'd been "holding too tight, making him go down" (150). Asako felt shame for her actions and explains: "My hands seemed to have grown large and heavy, the fingers thick and swollen. . . . It was that very morning, when I went to my room to change for school, that I saw it: a trickle of blood in the sand on my thigh" (150). To compound the sense of shame Asako associates with the onset of menstruation, she describes how her mother

“pushed [her] away with the repulsion you can only have for one you are obliged to love and care for” (151). She continues, “The last time I bled was just after he died. It didn’t surprise me that it stopped. It didn’t worry me because I knew right then what my life was to be. . . . Wiping the steamed mirror now, I half expected to see that young face of an old soul” (151).

The cessation of her period in response to the trauma of Eiji’s death signifies the regression of her physical development to a pre-pubescent stage and its simultaneous advancement to a menopausal one. Medical opinion might assume that Asako experiences secondary amenorrhea as a result of stress; however, as her period never returns after the initial bleeding, she seems to enter a phase of permanent secondary amenorrhea which occurs after menopause. In this respect, she becomes at once child and aging woman. Accompanying her feeling of shame at clinging too tightly to her brother, she says her hands grew large and heavy, “her fingers thick and swollen.” These are menopausal symptoms she reiterates when comparing herself to the beautiful, youthful Chisako. Asako explains, “My hands loomed grotesquely large in my lap” (201). Such similar descriptions of her hands as an adolescent and as a middle-aged woman, combined with her expectation of seeing “that young face of an old soul” (151), suggest that as a fourteen-year-old girl, she became what she has been ever since, and still is now at age 45.

When Chisako boasts of her sexual relationship with Mr. Spears, Asako tells the reader that Chisako is “ruthless, bringing me face to face with a certain experience of life I’d been denied, rubbing my nose in it” (209). Significantly, the disruption in Asako’s physical development, which she relates to Eiji’s death, causes her to bypass entirely her own reproductive stage. In Asako’s case, traumatic experience seems to have disrupted her body’s narrative and initiated in her a repetition-compulsion which hinders her pleasure principle’s protective and productive capabilities against the death instinct.

From the time of her brother’s death, Asako’s governing instinct has been one of gradual self-effacement. Initially, she stopped eating and sleeping. Asako recalls, “There was nothing my body could take in. It was hateful to me, the thought of my body succumbing to sensation with any relief or pleasure when all I wanted was to be numb. . . . Yet, however deadened, alive to my own misery” (220). At this stage, Asako recalls her preference for self-torture over annihilation. Later, her retelling of stories to Sachi is a traumatic symptom which functions partly as self-torture—as she privileges the

past with Eiji over her present—and partly as a survival mechanism, as she elides her role in his death with each telling.

Not only is the negotiation of time crucial to the survivor of trauma, but its connection to place is also significant. Pamela Sugiman, in her interviews with Nisei women in Canada, notes that “*Place* seemed to bring together or root ‘events’ that had no ‘logical’ sequence or connection” (366). Thus, it is possible that the traumatized individual’s understanding of events in time relies on recollections of her body’s situation in particular places. Asako’s bodily experience of dislocation from place and from a typical process of aging disrupts her recollection of the events that occurred. Eventually, on some level, Sachi recognizes the potentially pathological nature of Asako’s retellings. She says, “You keep telling that story when you know it isn’t true. Can’t you say what really happened?” (275). Asako’s inability to “say what really happened” corresponds physiologically to her inability to menstruate. Such correspondence posits that the disruption in the bodily process, beyond echoing the mind’s inability to recall or retell events chronologically/consistently, might actually produce it. Regardless of which process—verbal or physical—collapsed first, at the border of the electrical field, a place of power generation, Asako Saito is a figure of denial or negation. The title image of the field, in this way, ironically suggests her desire to negate herself.

Sakamoto suggests that the narrator’s psychological and physiological denial of her reproductive potential results from her desire to efface herself, a desire initiated by feelings of guilt over her brother’s death. Her reproductive system’s response to such guilt directly relates to the narrator’s own limited sexual experience and her perception of herself as repulsive. In *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (1982), Julia Kristeva accounts for the subject’s desire to distinguish itself from the abject, the otherness whose expulsion from the subject is necessary for its survival, yet whose presence constantly challenges and undermines the subject. Bodily fluids, for example, which our systems expel, demarcate our subjectivity from the blood, pus, and feces that *are* where we are not. In our progression toward death, however, this border between subject and object dissolves until the border itself becomes an object and the self cannot distinguish between itself and other. She writes, “Such wastes drop so that I might live, until, from loss to loss, nothing remains in me and my entire body falls beyond the limit” (3).

Asako has begun to view herself as abject, as that which must be expelled. Kristeva explains that one experiences abjection at its strongest when the

“subject, weary of fruitless attempts to identify with something on the outside, finds the impossible within; when it finds that the impossible constitutes its very *being*, that it *is* none other than abject” (5). Asako’s mother’s repulsion at her daughter’s menstruation signals a possible start to her identification with the abject. Asako’s body’s refusal to release menstrual blood can be read as a physiological response to this identification. As her body hangs onto that which her mother sees as repulsive, Asako *embodies* that repulsion, contaminates herself from within. She might also have stopped menstruating in order that her mother might see her as other than repulsive. Her body responds to her identification with the abject and refuses to conform to a conventional/linear aging process. Asako’s particularly sex-based—and by extension gendered—notion of her own repulsiveness specifically echoes her association of menstruation with guilt. Her shame at having held Eiji “too tight” and her understanding of his death as a consequence of his near drowning combine with her subsequent menstruation and her mother’s repulsed response to it to compound Asako’s sense of guilt.

This entanglement of the physiological and psychological initiates Asako’s future conflation of bodily, emotional, and mental processes. She exhibits a bodily guilt. Asako’s body manifests her regret by accelerating her sexual development so that she exhibits signs of menopause—namely ceased menstruation and swelling—while she is still at the age of puberty. Such menopausal signs of the abject, particularly marked by the retaining of fluids, correspond with her death instinct since the ultimate example of abjection of self is the corpse, when the border between self and abject completely dissolves. In a premature menopausal state, Asako’s body hastens this dissolution. Furthermore, Asako loves and identifies with her brother, Eiji, who is dead. Both physically and psychologically, Asako anticipates her own death.

Moreover, Sakamoto suggests that Asako’s only direct sexual experiences occurred with her brothers. The most significant—and those that corresponded with her own development—took place with Eiji. Asako describes the feel of his “small lumpy bundle inside his left leg, warming [her] thigh, pulsing through [her] with a tiny rhythm” (166). She notes how she soothed his skin that suffered from his father’s belt as she “inched [her] hand under his pyjama bottom to the welts.” She continues, “At first he pushed me away, but then he gave in” (168). She also reveals that her sexuality frightened him: “Eiji was fearful, I came to understand, of his little ojosan with the soft lumps swelling on her chest and the furry spots sprouting here and there” (220-221). Such encounters reveal Eiji’s significance in Asako’s psychological

process of sexual awakening. Correspondingly, her physical/reproductive development began with physical contact with her older brother and stopped after his death. Therefore Asako's body grieves the loss not only of her brother, but also of a kind of sexual partner, a loss which initiates her desire to efface the self—the body—in shame.

Having realized that she understood the impossible position in which she placed Yano when she told him of Chisako's affair, Asako recalls: "The electrical field in winter glimpsed from my window after a night of snowfall. Almost pristine that December afternoon I'd sat with Chisako at the bus stop, before my walk home, before I sank my footprints into it. And when I did, how I'd wanted to take them back, to somehow erase them" (244). Plainly, this passage signifies her wish to take back her words, which she believes initiated the course of events resulting in four murders and a suicide, but it also implies a desire for total self-effacement. In removing the footprints, she would erase the bodily imprint she made in the snow, the traces of disruption she leaves in her wake. The image of imprinting relates to a similar incident involving the novel's other prominent figure of abjection, Yano, Chisako's husband and murderer.

Yano argues how, "Everything would have been different" (299) had they not been interned. He says, "We would be different people. We might not be here. . . . I'd be educated," and Asako explains, "He was touching his hand to the tops of my things throughout the room, planting his prints in the dust" (299). His prints in the dust remind the reader of the newsprint that Asako describes as staining her hands with a guilty permanence when she reads of the murders. Her fingers subsequently mark with ink whatever they touch, even after washing. Similarly, Sakamoto uses the image of Yano's prints in the dust to remind the reader of the green-tea stain—a substance which the characters repeatedly remark doesn't stain—that Asako left on Chisako's white carpet symbolically contaminating the purity of Japanese-from-Japan Chisako, who never knew the shame of internment.

The narrator's tendency to idealize Japan marks her sense of herself and other Nisei as inferior. Asako's prints in the snow, her inky fingerprints, and Yano's prints in the dust mark both of them as figures of disruption and build on her narrative's previous descriptions of them as abject. Furthermore, her descriptions compound to identify a larger categorization of Nisei as figures of abjection within the Canadian social body. We can read Yano's argument that they were coerced to leave Canada and go to Japan—in his words, "shipped back to where you'd never been" (93)—as a government attempt to

remove the abject. Yano says, “They were hoping we’d all commit hara-kiri in the camps. . . . You know, Saito-san, there were a few who did kill themselves. Out of shame” (258).

Later, Chisako provides an image that contrasts Asako’s childhood idealization of Japan when she discusses the bombings and how “People shut themselves away. It was better they kill themselves, to spare their loved ones the sight of them, day after day” (211). Here the conflation of physical ugliness and shame results in the removal of the ugly from society through hiding or suicide. It is an act of consideration, to avoid shame, to act honourably, selflessly. Yano’s description of the kamikaze points to a similar sense of honour: “The kamikaze cleansed themselves and prayed before they flew off to die for the emperor” (257). The association of Yano with the kamikaze forces the reader to question the role of honour/duty and shame in Yano’s murder of his family and his suicide. The day Yano speaks of the kamikaze, Asako explains that “He was not so ugly to me that day. He wore fresh, clean clothes; even his fingernails, habitually long and dirty, had been clipped. He was a different person. Almost handsome” (257). Following her description, she reveals that at that moment she was helping Chisako to deceive him. We can read Yano’s sudden concern for hygiene and his reference to the cleanliness of the kamikaze as an indication that he already knows about Chisako’s affair and is planning his strike, that he is “dressing” his act in honour. Sakamoto reminds us that suicide can be an act of shame, but it can also be an act of pride, not just defensive, but also offensive.³

The association of honour with Japan and shame with Canada further suggests Asako’s understanding of the Nisei as lacking honourable recourse in the face of injustice because of the shameful position they occupy. Therefore, whereas Japanese people in the novel, in general, wrestle with issues of shame and its associations with physical ugliness, Sakamoto suggests a double bind constrains the Japanese who are living—and specifically those born—in Canada. Yano’s suicide suggests that second-generation Japanese Canadians experience a particularly troubled lack of agency. Though Asako’s Papa (Issei) lies barely alive upstairs, at times in his own waste and thereby exemplifying the abject, he perseveres. Papa’s lack of agency in the novel’s present is mostly a product of his age and though he is perhaps the character most literally identified with the notion of the abject, he seems less associated with the shame Asako and Yano feel. Though Asako describes her father as “nothing now, less than an infant,” her childhood recollections of him invoke images of power (102). She remembers her father as

“strong” and “brutish” and notes how she “sank to the floor outside her papa’s door in the dark . . . silently weeping to be let in, afraid she’d be left alone” (102-103). Her larger sense of cultural dislocation partly reflects the disconnection she experienced and feared even within her own family. The Nisei’s responses to their lack of agency suggest an intergenerational fissure that reveals the second generation as utterly unconnected, lacking a sense of belonging in any physical, psychical and geographical territory but that of absence.

The strident activist character in the novel, Yano—with whom few wish to mobilize to seek reparations—physically carries out the acts of elimination that the novel and history imply the Canadian government sought when they interned people of Asian descent. His death drive is exaggerated and his act finds agency in a destruction that becomes difficult to read as victorious or as a productive act of resistance to institutional oppression. Though Yano invokes the image of the kamikaze, the murders of his family are neither honourable nor dutiful. Unable to seek redress through organized means—largely as a result of his community’s reluctance to join him—Yano eliminates himself and his family from the social fabric that has cast him to its fringe. As Marlene Goldman has pointed out, Sakamoto blurs the line between victim and victimizer. The author complicates Yano’s lack of political agency by tangling it up in domestic violence and murder. Though Goldman posits that Yano’s murder-suicide is potentially influenced by “outside forces” (379), Sakamoto suggests that his actions are ultimately destructive just as Asako believes her revelation to him of Chisako’s affair was. Sakamoto underscores the potentially dangerous/destructive outward manifestations of the self-hatred that racial oppression produces.

Not only does Asako’s instinct toward death function within herself, but she projects it onto others, specifically on Yano with whom she identifies her own sense of self-repulsion. Her descriptions of his poor hygiene, and specifically his odour, clogged chest, and foul breath resonate with her descriptions of herself. She explains, “A scent filled my nostrils; it was a mingling of Yano’s pungent body odour and the not-unfamiliar smell of fried fish and daikon. This . . . disconcerted me; made me flush with shame at our shared habits, our odours” (114). Combined with a perception of Nisei as repulsive, Asako’s trauma manifests itself in a conscious or unconscious desire to harm others within her social context. As Asako projects her sense of self-as-object onto others of her generation, she—like Yano—takes up the project of government policy to expel the object from the Canadian social

body, “to somehow erase them.” Her own death drive bleeds into the social and political realms.

Asako’s physiological response to Eiji’s death, specifically the cessation of her period, physically marks the onset of such potentially self-destructive consequences. It signals her initial sense of guilt and its relation to her sexual identity; it inhibits her reproductive capabilities and generates a contained space where internalized racism gestates. Asako incorporates the racist ideology of Canadian legislation during World War II and, on some level, to her, the Japanese Canadians who stayed in Canada remained inside the national body and contaminated it from within, potentially similar to her own body that refused to release that which is “repulsive.”

When Asako speaks to the detective, she notices a varicose vein on her leg. She says, “It seemed to vibrate grotesquely. Incredibly, it was a part of me, my own body. How long had it been there? It seemed undeniably a sign” (127). Her surprise that something grotesque could be a part of her and her interpretation of the vein as a sign—while she is in the presence of a white Canadian police authority—reinforces her perception of herself as abject. The detective’s Italian name, Rossi, denotes his family’s immigrant history, yet his association with law and order emphasizes the connotation of disorder with which Asako associates Japanese Canadians. Furthermore, her inability to say how long she has had the vein suggests that her recollection of the onset of menopause is blurry, as is her remembrance of her experiences in the camp.

The confluence of her puberty and menopause is symptomatic of the guilt and shame she feels, responses reinforced by the oppression of the camp and the death of her brother. Speaking with the detective, another sense of guilt arises, guilt over her potential role in the Nakamuras’ deaths and again—as was the case with Eiji’s death—her guilt manifests itself physiologically, as she becomes “grotesque.” She associates such impressions of herself with Sachi and all the Nakamuras except Chisako: “I couldn’t tell if I was weeping or sweating or bleeding, if the dress that clung to me was my own weathered, welted skin, if the sludge under my feet had come from my body or the earth. The whole world was leaking and we were a part of it, and so were Tam and Kimi and Yano, wherever they were” (76). Here the boundaries between the self and the abject are totally dissolved in Asako’s mind. As are the dead: Sachi and Asako *are* the abject.

Several times in the novel Asako refers to herself as a monster. After she admits that she told Yano about Chisako’s affair, she says, “What had I done?

A monster, that was what I was, what I'd always been. I could not stop" (239). Asako's rhetoric of monstrosity also calls to mind notions of reproduction, specifically monstrous births. Images of deformity and grotesqueness permeate the text; we can read them as "products" of Asako's narrative, as products of herself. As she fetishizes the narrative with retellings of specific events, she underscores the monstrosity with which she identifies her actions and herself. She believes that her actions and her physiology are monstrous, that she is the asexual reproducer of monstrosity.

The other monstrous figure in the text is Yano. Asako describes the detective saying that he thought Yano "had to be some kind of . . ." Asako finishes his sentence: "Monster" (282). Asako associates herself and Yano with the monstrous and the grotesque, both in action and appearance. They see themselves as beings to be hidden. Yano explains, "We're so full of shame, aren't we, Asako? We hide away, afraid that they'll lock us up again. . . . Chisako saw it in me. . . . It isn't attractive, Asako. Especially in a man. I don't blame her" (231).

Asako and Yano's particularly gendered understandings of themselves produce different destructive behaviours. Sugiman notes that "[w]ith the movement of most men into forced labour camps, the places of internment tended to be feminized" (374).⁴ Yano's shame manifests itself in his mind as emasculation, and he kills his family, his wife's lover, and himself. Asako's shame produces a similar experience of "ungendering," which inhibits her sexual growth and manifests itself in a less-direct reaction in which she believes her betrayal of Chisako's secret resulted in Yano's murder-suicide. We can read Yano's response to shame as projecting itself outward and Asako's as projecting itself inward—furthermore, Asako's body's retention of fluid mimics her internalized response to shame even as it makes itself visible. This reading suggests the potential of a gendered divide in survivors' reactions to experiences of indignity.⁵ Nevertheless, Yano's and Asako's "monstrous" acts signify their ultimate refusal to hide. Their responses illuminate the destructive potential of one's identification with the abject. Asako encapsulates the image of the victim transforming into the victimizer when she describes herself clinging to Eiji in the water: "I'd held on as a drowning person does, drowning another" (183).

Complicating this theory of the victimizing victim, however, is Asako's desire to protect and ultimately save Sachi, the young girl who listens to Asako and who mourns the death of her boyfriend, Tam, Yano's son. The young girl feeds Asako's repetition-compulsion by asking for and listening to her stories of Eiji. Although Asako is critical of Sachi's neglectful mother, Keiko—Nisei like herself and Yano—Asako is more drawn to than repelled

by Sachi whose scabbed hands, the result of self-mutilation, we can read as physically/literally signs of trauma, again unspecified, perhaps even inherited. Goldman reminds us that “Freud repeatedly likens melancholy to ‘an open wound’” and she argues that “[i]n portraying images of wounding, [this novel] appropriate[s] and re-stage[s] the violence and trauma experienced by Canadians of Japanese ancestry—the word ‘trauma’ is, of course, Greek for wound” (380). Thus, Sachi’s wounds function symbolically—showing, as Goldman puts it, that “death and loss continue to mark the identities of the next generation” (380).

Recent work on skin and psychology, however, grants Sachi’s scabs a literal or medical significance beyond the symbolic function Goldman has shown. Jay Prosser notes that “Psychic disturbance can inscribe on the skin traumatic memories according to the hysterical symptomisations of the unconscious” (54). Referring to Didier Anzieu’s theory that “damage to the psychic envelope can be remembered physically” (54), Prosser explains how Anzieu’s study reveals that people “appear to remember[,] in their skin conditions[,] what they cannot consciously express. Self-mutilation . . . take[s] [them] back to a childhood memory or unconscious fantasy too traumatic to become conscious. These skin disorders appear as returns of an unspeakable repressed event” (54). Prosser continues that, “skin memories may remember, not just an individual unconscious, but a cultural one . . . ‘a transgenerational haunting’” (54-59). We can read Sachi’s scabs as a concrete example of such skin memories.

Freud argues that “masochism, the sadism within an individual turning back upon its own ego . . . is in reality a return to an earlier stage of the drive, a regression” (94). In their regressive tendencies, Sakamoto allies the two intergenerational characters. Moreover, following the confirmation of Tam’s death, the narrator describes the self-mutilating Sachi as her “wise child, wizened and old” (244), suggesting a parallel between Asako’s life after Eiji’s death and Sachi’s future after Tam. Both characters experience a confluence of life stages following a loved one’s death. We can read Asako’s attraction to Sachi and her interest in her budding sexuality as a regressive desire to return to her own earlier stage of development, perhaps the stage she was at before Eiji died.

Sachi represents a potential seam, a suturing of Asako’s ruptured development. Sachi can experience what Asako did not and will allow Asako to participate in her process of sexual maturation. Sachi herself is scarred and she scars herself. She is a figure associated with repeated injuring and healing

and Asako repeatedly notices the opening and closing of her cuts. Asako's attraction to Sachi—the receptacle of her repeated stories—is an attempt to remedy her inability “to say what really happened.” Freud himself remains unconvinced, by the end of his book, of the significant connection between “the regressive character of instinct” and “the repetition-compulsion” (76). Perhaps Asako's interest in Sachi is not so much regressive and symptomatic of a death instinct, but partially progressive and productive. Sachi can and does say, “I didn't save Tam and you didn't save your brother” (275). As well, Sachi confesses that she told Tam about his mother's affair, but Asako contradicts her, “admitting” for the first time to someone else that she told Yano about Chisako and Mr. Spears, possibly signifying a “breakthrough” enabling her to “say what happened.” Though Asako uses the girl to try and erase her own traumas, Sachi demands that Asako face them. However, Sachi believes in her own guilt. She retorts, “I know what I did. I know what's true and what's a lie . . . even if you don't” (277).

Therefore, Sakamoto undermines Asako's and Sachi's recollections, binds them in feelings of guilt and links them through masochism and physiological disorders, suggesting that internment produced internalized repercussions, both physiological and psychological, that transcend the generation who experienced the shame of the camps; nevertheless, Asako's envious descriptions of Sachi—whose sexual drives counter her death drives—convey optimism. Despite the psychological and physiological associations between Asako and Sachi, the narrator expresses hope and admiration for the Sansei, Sachi, and her ability to express herself both sexually and verbally. Whether Sachi indeed does know “what really happened” remains unclear, but she is determined to believe in her knowledge. For Asako, such willful determination is cautiously inspiring and admirable.

However, the most hopeful character at the end of the novel is Asako's younger brother, Stum. Having disregarded Yano's repeated advice that the Nisei must “stick together,” Stum, unlike Asako, has found someone to love him back (196), someone who hails from the Philippines. If there is any optimism in the novel, as Goldman has suggested, Sakamoto implies it rests in hybridity, or at least an acceptance of it. Sakamoto suggests that resistance to ethnically hybrid relationships signals the psychical and physical damage of racial oppression and further isolating for the Nisei, as she exemplifies through Yano. But the novel is not so hopeful for Asako who, unlike her brother, is old enough to remember internment. After Stum and his girlfriend, Angel, demonstrate how to “sex” the chicks on the chicken farm,

Asako concludes, “Girls here, boys there. It was simple, really” (305). However, Asako has learned the fate of the chick who fits neither category, or rather fits both, the one who is physiologically “no good” as she watches Angel “[close] her eyes and [squeeze its neck] hard for several seconds” (304).

The congestion of Asako’s sexual life corresponds with the clogging of Eiji’s lungs to suggest that she shares more in common with the “no good” chick that Angel kills than with those that fall naturally into the “cycle of things” (305). The sexing of the chicks at the end of the novel suggests that Asako remains a disruption, the abject. Sakamoto’s return to the image of reproductive physiology reminds us of Asako’s simultaneous pre-pubescent and menopausal physiological manifestations of trauma: she is at once pre- and post-reproductive, no more “productive” than the hermaphroditic chick Angel kills. Sakamoto draws parallels within the Nisei, between Asako who has no children, Keiko who neglects hers, and Yano who murders his. By concluding with the image of the simplistically sexed chicks, the author produces an ending doubtful of the “lost generation’s” possible incorporation into the normative, reproductive Canadian national body, one driven to sustain its own life.

NOTES

I acknowledge the support of the Social Sciences and Research Council of Canada and Health Care, Technology and Place and the Canadian Institutes of Health Research. I would also like to acknowledge the insightful readings and suggestions of Gillian Einstein and Marlene Goldman during the preparation of this article.

- 1 See Fell (2005) and Hughes (2005). Dean Franco’s physiologically centred study (2005) specifically addresses physical trauma.
- 2 See Fell (2005).
- 3 Howells notes that although “[f]rom one perspective Yano’s crime could be seen as honorable . . . it is also an ironic fulfillment of the fate that he had angrily vowed to avoid” (139).
- 4 Further, Paul Lerner traces scholarship on the early twentieth-century relationship between trauma and male hysteria, specifically the illness’s “stigma of femininity” (155).
- 5 Chung, et al. note in their study of Cambodian refugees that “[i]n response to the severity of their premigration trauma, some older Cambodian women developed nonorganic or psychosomatic blindness: they literally can no longer stand to ‘see’ the memories of their distress” (112). The particularity of such symptoms among women support the possibility of gendered physiological responses to traumatic experience. I might further note the potential resonance of Sakamoto’s title with the Cambodian killing fields.

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Late Night

For Carole Galloway

Time to paint the sky behind
the boundary spruce: those thoughtful clouds –
misty quilts, smoky blankets, dusted pillows; the rusty
industry of distance, the instant since of dusk.

Meanwhile that row of fusty nutcrackers
standing in for poplars beyond the end of summer.
Lined up at a certain bar that only serves whiskey
to creatures with whiskers. Giving the wind a break,

forever upstaging each other, trying to remember what
they've meant. Marking time until lucent 'witches knickers'
spook their upper branches, feral hares burrowing below.
So the weather of this world supposes you.

The best of the feeder birds have agreed to stay on
for as long as they're needed. Nobody actually lives here
who can't plan to be somewhere else. And by now you can
see your breath. Everything noted for later remains

unsung. Mirrors shiver
your absence. Silence pretends to refuse to have
its say. Empty rooms clear
their throats. O the wonder of our wondering, lighting

pale candles to draw imaginary angel-moths circling
their own questions while we grin again in recognition.
By chance we take our chances, making something of
the choosing, our undoing done in just in time, doing

the best we can despite it. So much of what we have
is so much less than who we have to be. At least
the kitchen clock you finally leave behind at last
gives up, and the love of your life lets go.

Curious Fame: The Literary Relevance of Alexander Mackenzie Reconsidered

Alexander Mackenzie has a notable place in the history of exploration as the first documented person to cross the continent of North America—a feat achieved fully twelve years before the much better-known Lewis and Clark expedition. His account of this expedition, and of its precursor which took him to the Arctic Ocean, was brought before the public in *Voyages from Montreal, on the River St. Laurence, through the Continent of North America, to the Frozen and Pacific Oceans; in the Years 1789 and 1793*, first published in London in 1801. In this period, travel literature was hugely popular; the “reading elites of Britain . . . took all geography and all history into their consciousness” (St. Clair 233), and travel writing and the “literary” genres of poetry and fiction constantly mixed and shaped one another. Coleridge’s “Kubla Khan,” with its multiple and well-documented debts to printed voyages and travels, is just a colourful instance of a much more widespread literary symbiosis. Yet the footprint of Mackenzie’s remarkable travels on the imaginative literature of the period is all but imperceptible. Much of this essay has to do with asking why this was so, and what Mackenzie’s limited literary impact tells us about the reception of travel writing in the early years of the nineteenth century. In a much-cited article on “The Literary Relevance of Alexander Mackenzie,” published by *Canadian Literature* in 1969, Roy Daniells averred that Mackenzie’s book is “not in the front rank of narratives of exploration” (20), but that it possesses “immense narrative strength, derived directly from the energy of heroic achievement” (23), and that its subject matter approaches the scale and dignity of epic by virtue of its association with the destiny of a nation:

If we follow the delineation of Canada's western boundaries, beginning in 1783 with the Treaty of Paris, we are surprised at the immense stretch of territory involved, more than two million square miles, and our astonishment grows as we come to realize the crucial role played by Mackenzie's two voyages in securing title to this vast empire. (25-26)

As one might expect, the tone and content of Daniells' admiring account have been challenged by more hostile perspectives in recent times. By way of undertaking a fresh appraisal of Mackenzie's "literary relevance," I propose to scrutinize the early (chiefly British) reception of *Voyages from Montreal* in greater detail than has yet been attempted, using the insights of quantitative research into the production and consumption of travel literature in the early nineteenth century, and analyzing such records as exist concerning historical readers and readings of Mackenzie's work.

First, a brief resumé of Mackenzie's life and work is in order. Born in 1762 on the Outer Hebridean island of Lewis, at the age of twelve he and his family joined a mass emigration from the Highlands and Islands to North America, arriving early the next year in New York just months before the American Revolution broke out.¹ Having been relocated to Montreal to escape a conflict in which his father was to die (on the loyalist side), Mackenzie found himself in the headquarters of the Canadian fur trade, which the British had taken over after the conquest of New France in 1763. Initially employed in an office job by one of a number of competing traders, after five years he became a partner in the firm on condition that he move into the Northwest frontier trade as one of the "wintering partners," the leaders of the trade in the interior. This push to the Northwest had taken on new urgency for Montreal traders following the Treaty of Paris, which surrendered all territory south of the Great Lakes to the United States, and put many previously lucrative fur catchment areas and important trading posts into American hands. Mackenzie's company initially competed with the largest trading partnership yet to emerge, the North West Company (which came together in the winter of 1783-84), but a literally deadly confrontation between partners of the two companies in the lawless outer reaches of trading territory led to the merger of the two companies in 1787. It was as successor to the North West Company man implicated in this death, Peter Pond, that Mackenzie went to the Athabasca region, then the western boundary of the fur trade, and from which he set out on his two voyages in 1789 and 1793.

Mackenzie spent the winter of 1787-88 in conversation with Pond, who "first interested [him] in the idea that at Lake Athabasca you were near enough to the Pacific Ocean to attempt to traverse the intervening land"

(Hayes 51), and discover thereby an alternative, via inland waterways, to the fading vision of a marine Northwest Passage—the existence of which earlier naval expeditions, notably Cook’s third voyage (1776–79), had done much to discredit. Based on his own travels, and on a creative interpretation of information from Native sources, Pond’s sometimes fanciful cartography appears to have convinced Mackenzie that a river flowed westwards out of Great Slave Lake and eventually reached the North Pacific at what was then called Cook’s River, south of Anchorage, Alaska. This was the Northwest Passage that Mackenzie set out to discover in 1789. The significance for the fur trade would be in establishing a line of commerce between the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans and opening up the lucrative markets of eastern Asia. (In the long run, as Daniells points out, these commercial goals would have political consequences, in that the area over which the fur trade established itself would be roughly co-extensive with the eventual boundaries of the Dominion of Canada.) Mackenzie’s first voyage took him not to the Pacific but to the Arctic Ocean, along the length of the river to which his name would become permanently attached. His second voyage brought him, via sometimes hazardous whitewater canoeing, arduous portages, and a final gruelling 180-mile trek across the Coast Range using a Native trade route or “grease trail,” to Pacific tidewater at modern-day Dean Channel, where he inscribed a memorial to his achievement on 22 July 1793.² This was just 50 days after George Vancouver had visited and surveyed the same waters on his grand voyage in the North Pacific.

Early the next year Mackenzie left Athabasca, never to return. He devoted the next few years, indeed the rest of his life, to developing the commercial benefits of his exploration—most immediately by extending the territory of the North West Company, but in the longer term promoting his larger vision of a British trading empire centred on fur and fisheries capable of penetrating the markets of Russia, China, and Japan. Mackenzie lobbied persistently for state support for this project, but the British government was too preoccupied with the Napoleonic Wars to give much time or thought to his grand schemes. It was almost as an afterthought to this activity that he set about preparing the journals of his two voyages for publication—a goal eventually achieved, famously, with the assistance of William Combe (author of the picturesque satire, *The Tour of Doctor Syntax*) as ghostwriter, in December 1801. A second British edition, two American editions, and French and German translations followed in short order.³ Less than two months after publication, Mackenzie was knighted.

There is no doubt that Mackenzie desired recognition of his achievements, if only because the prosecution of his commercial aims depended upon it, and the knighthood offers irrefutable evidence of public esteem. The early publishing history of *Voyages from Montreal* is also frequently cited as proof of his celebrity: indeed, scholars typically assert that the book was a “bestseller” (Smith 148), or “was widely read by his contemporaries” (Venema 89), or “sold briskly at every bookstall” (Gough 179), but the basis on which such claims are made is far from plain, and the *Edinburgh Review* is invariably the only journal cited to demonstrate contemporary acclaim. As for Mackenzie’s longer-term reputation, it is hard to fault W. Kaye Lamb’s assessment that after an initial flurry of interest his book “was largely forgotten for the better part of a century” (50), and that it was only in the 1920s, which saw a republication of *Voyages* and three biographical studies, that he decisively resurfaced. In modern times, critical and biographical attention has tended to bifurcate in a manner typical, as Nigel Leask has pointed out, of studies of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century explorers and travellers: that is, either celebrating the protagonist’s heroism and “restating exploded myths of empire,” or over-eagerly “subscribing to post-colonial blame” (4). On the one hand, plenty of accounts celebrate Mackenzie as a father of the nation: only a difference in register and tone separate Roy Daniells’ assessment 38 years ago, which compares Mackenzie’s voyages to the Arctic and Pacific to the mythological voyage of Jason and the Argonauts in search of the Golden Fleece (*Alexander Mackenzie* 198-9), and Barry Gough’s affirmative conclusion in his 1997 biography that Mackenzie was “one of the chief national architects,” a “Giant among a special breed of fur traders” who “opened Canada to its western destiny” (206, 211). On the other hand, a vein of hostile criticism, exemplified by essays by Parker Duchemin and Kathleen Venema, views Mackenzie as a racist imperialist and focuses in particular on his interaction with indigenous peoples and the alleged poverty of his ethnographic constructions, seeing these as vital discursive support for colonial and imperial policies of intervention and exploitation. The contrasting opinions of Euro-American scholars have been triangulated in recent years by the perspectives of First Nations commentators: priceless, if highly mediated, testimony from oral history describes how the Bella Bella people on the coast regarded Mackenzie, giving a much less flattering account than Mackenzie’s of his allegedly aggressive treatment at what he calls “Rascal’s Village” (Hayes 226); while Carrier and Nuxalk people whose ancestors developed the trail system in British Columbia, pointing out that Mackenzie

was successful only because he “followed the advice and expertise he received from the native people along the way” (Birchwater 15), have objected to the establishment of an “Alexander Mackenzie Heritage Trail” on their territory. Historians of the Dene nation, aboriginal inhabitants of the land traversed by Mackenzie on his first voyage, acknowledge that their “reality has since changed because of him and others that shared his interest,” but imagine their ancestors would have “wondered at this strange, pale man in his ridiculous clothes, asking about some great waters he was searching for,” and would “never understand why their river is named after such an insignificant fellow” (*Dehcho* 7, back cover).

Notwithstanding the contrasting perspectives of different interest groups, there is general recognition of the importance of Mackenzie’s expeditions in the context of Canadian and British colonial history, and I have nothing to add to the admirable work in this field of inquiry. My narrower focus is on the early literary reception of Mackenzie’s *Voyages*, and on asking both what appeal the book held for the contemporary reading public, and why the narrative of what now seem historically significant and symbolically resonant travels should have failed to excite the imaginations of the poets and novelists of the period. This story has not been told, and is worth reconstructing in view of the rapid growth of critical interest in travel literature over the last ten to fifteen years.

As a starting point, it seems reasonable to enquire a little more closely into Mackenzie’s alleged “bestseller” status—to establish, that is, the probable size and composition of the actual readership of *Voyages from Montreal*. If Mackenzie’s work was a commercial success, he had undoubtedly had a head start, because his publisher, Cadell and Davies, belonged to the “highest aristocracy of the trade” (Besterman viii), and was regarded by contemporaries as one of the top two or three businesses. Cadell and Davies were efficient—capable, despite the limitations of the obsolescent technology of the hand press, of bringing a book to publication within four months of the author’s original enquiry. Their typical print run was 750 copies for “a serious book of some general interest” (Besterman xxxi), and they marketed to the upper and upper-middle classes. To put this process in a wider context, we now have the benefit of William St. Clair’s systematic quantitative study of book production and reading patterns in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. St. Clair’s data for travel books show that 750 to 1000 copies was the norm for this genre, with most appearing first in an expensive quarto edition, the average price for which was in the region of £2 14s; books

that sold reasonably well in this format were sometimes republished in a cheaper octavo edition in a process St. Clair calls “tranching down.” Mackenzie’s book fits this profile, and was by this measure entirely typical of the genre, though at £1 11s 6d it was cheaper than the average of St. Clair’s sample; insofar as it came out in octavo in 1802, it was from a commercial viewpoint rather at least moderately successful. However, that no further tranching down took place indicates that demand was perceived to have been met, with perhaps a maximum of 2000 copies (and probably fewer) in circulation in Britain. To contextualize the price, St. Clair’s baseline for a gentleman’s weekly income is five pounds: Mackenzie’s *Voyages* would therefore have cost nearly a third of that gentleman’s weekly income, the entire weekly income of a skilled carpenter and three times the weekly income of a lawyer’s clerk. St. Clair’s economic analysis suggests that books—new titles, at any rate—were hugely expensive in this period relative to other commodities, and Mackenzie’s would certainly have been a luxury item within the reach of only the wealthiest individual purchasers.

Mackenzie’s readership would nevertheless have been larger than the 2000 copies in circulation, if one allows for multiple readers of individual copies in large households and copies bought by commercial circulating libraries, private subscription libraries, and book clubs. One (unique) source of hard evidence is the borrowing registers of the Bristol Library Society. These reveal that Mackenzie’s book was purchased on publication, was borrowed 12 times in 1802 and 11 times in 1803; a steep falling-off followed, with the result that in 1806, and again in 1807, the registers record only a solitary borrower.⁴ I infer from this that the interest generated by the book was intense but short-lived. It is safe to assume that the Bristol Library, with its members’ demonstrable enthusiasm for travel literature,⁵ provides an extreme multiplier for individual copies of this work, and that most copies did not enjoy such wide circulation. Nor did collective reading institutions like the Bristol Library, thanks to their subscriptions, admission fees, and borrowing charges, extend reading very far down the social ladder. Research on patterns of reading among lower-income groups has confirmed that travel literature had little reach at these levels of society. Surveys of the reading habits of the working class carried out in the 1830s revealed that cottage libraries might include “the odd volume of travel and exploration,” most likely Cook’s “*Voyages*,” but generally contained little secular writing (Vincent 110). Ideas of travel gleaned by working-class readers were far more likely to come from the widely disseminated *Pilgrim’s Progress* and *Robinson*

Crusoe than from any work in the tradition of Enlightenment travel. Exceptions can, of course, be found, notably among self-taught urban radicals. Francis Place, the tailor and political activist, was fortunate in having a landlady who could acquire books for him from chambers she looked after, and during a period of unemployment in the early 1790s Place, “read many volumes in history, voyages, and travels, politics, law and Philosophy” (119); shoemaker and future Chartist poet, Thomas Cooper, was similarly blessed by circumstances in having access to a wide variety of books, and read “many volumes of travels” (64). But these seem not to be representative cases, and most working-class autobiographies of the period are bare of reference to this species of writing. This is hardly surprising, given punitive prices and the fact that travel works were seldom reissued in smaller and cheaper formats even when copyright had expired,⁶ but it is worth dwelling on the inequalities of access and readership to which a work like Mackenzie’s gave tacit support. St. Clair observes that the explosion in travel writing between 1790 and 1820 encouraged the reading public to appropriate imaginatively “the whole civilized and uncivilized world,” with the result that “there was nothing in the world which the British did not feel was partly their own” (234). But this was an experience, as he makes plain, largely restricted to the elite of readers who had access to the new travel literature in expensive quartos and the new verse romances with their learned notes acknowledging debts to that same body of literature for exotic settings and content; at the popular end of the market, readers’ mental geography would have been far more circumscribed, this audience “mainly staying at home with Thomson, Young, and Cowper” (234) and other out-of-copyright literature purveying a similar blend of patriotism, family values, and natural religion.

In seeking to excavate the historical reception of *Voyages from Montreal*, therefore, I am necessarily focusing on the responses of a wealthy fraction of the reading nation. A number of treatments appear in the literary reviews and a number of allusions in mainly very minor literary works—largely from the 1820s, long after publication of the book and when its survival rested chiefly on anthologized excerpts. The autobiographies, diaries, and collections of letters from the period that I have examined are virtually devoid of reference to Mackenzie. For all their well-recognized dangers as evidence of individual acts of reception,⁷ the reviews demand attention first. These exhibit many similarities in tone and content, a symmetry less remarkable (leaving aside the realistic possibility of unacknowledged debts

of one to another) when their close ideological affiliations are taken into account: the British journals, at any rate, are all Whig, liberal, reform-minded, intellectually progressive organs, and exclude the Tory, High Church publications with which they competed in the periodical wars of the 1790s and early 1800s. Mackenzie could reasonably expect a sympathetic hearing in these journals. His most generous review, judged by length alone, was in the first issue of the *Edinburgh Review*. This was undoubtedly a fillip for the book, given that the *Edinburgh* was more selective in its reviewing policy than any of its predecessors, but its inclusion was consistent with the principles of the new quarterly: in Marilyn Butler's account, high among its priorities for coverage were "matters of national political importance, such as foreign relations, the conduct of the war, geographically informed travels in the distant empire and territories contingent"; "it spoke," moreover, "for the efficient, meritocratic, and socially progressivist Scottish professional class that increasingly either worked for the government and aristocratic opposition in London or built the empire in Canada and India" (131, 136). It is not hard to see how *Voyages from Montreal* addresses this agenda and this constituency.

All the British reviews identify the same personal qualities in the author: his "bold and persevering spirit" (*Monthly Review* 225), his "fortitude, patience, and perseverance" (*London Review and Literary Journal* 116), his "intelligence, his spirit, and perseverance" (*Critical Review* 379), his "diligence and intrepidity . . . temper and perseverance" (*Edinburgh Review* 157). The one word linking these assessments, "perseverance," encapsulates the single-minded determination which, in Mackenzie's narrative, overcomes all threats to his survival and the recalcitrance of his companions, and elevates the completion of his journey into a moral imperative.⁸ The currency of this word also demonstrates how thoroughly the professional reviewers have bought into what T.D. MacLulich calls Mackenzie's "highly selective picture of the explorer as hero" (66), which entails casting himself, against the grain of actuality, as solely responsible for the success or failure of the expedition.

Two other notable points of comparison among the reviews are the degree of interest shown in Mackenzie's portraits of Native customs and beliefs, in his occasional ethnographic interludes; and their judgements on the criteria by which *Voyages* claims the attention of the reading public. The first of these is on the face of it surprising, given that Mackenzie himself appears to set little store by these parts of his book:⁹ referring in his preface to his constant need to "watch the savage who was our guide, or to guard

against those of his tribe who might meditate our destruction” (59) sends an unpromising signal of the extent of his interest in Native peoples. But the *Monthly Review* picks out the description in the second voyage of a murder committed among the Beaver people for reasons of sexual jealousy; the *Annual Review* and the *London Review and Literary Journal*, suspiciously, fasten upon the same passage, despite its occupying a mere two paragraphs: the former includes it among a number of “curious facts respecting the Indians and their country,” finding the “picture of savage life . . . disgusting, and evidently faithful” (28), while the latter generalizes about the similarities between these “Indians” and “the savages of the islands and coasts of the South Seas” (199); the *Critical Review* is particularly interested in the customs of the coastal peoples, especially their treatment of the dead, which it finds “too curious to be overlooked” (376); while the *Edinburgh Review* dwells on Mackenzie’s observations of differences between these indigenes, with their “improving art and civilization” (155), and the Dene people encountered on the first voyage, who have allegedly made no progress in the 200 years since first contact. The *Edinburgh Review* ventures that the fur trade may have kept Native people in a backward state by putting a bounty on “the preservation of barbarism” (147), yet notes the reverse phenomenon of Europeans “going native” (the French-Canadian *coureurs de bois*). Like the other journals, the *Edinburgh Review* finds Mackenzie’s description of first contact between Europeans and Native communities “a spectacle . . . well calculated to excite our curiosity” (141), but goes beyond them in its anxiety to relate new empirical data to the general schema of social progress—the “four stages” theory that primitive hunting cultures developed through intermediate stages of pastoralism and agriculturalism to a modern (and culturally superior) commercial state—that was one of the governing doctrines of the Scottish Enlightenment.¹⁰ In this concern, it exemplifies, as Troy Bickham has shown, the wider interest of Scottish intellectuals in North American “Indians” as “living windows on Europeans’ past” (171).¹¹

The reviews all pronounce, too, on the cumulative yield and significance of Mackenzie’s voyages. The *Monthly Review* praises both their entertainment and information value, and concludes that Mackenzie’s narrative is “of considerable importance to geography and commerce” (347), while the *Monthly Magazine* places Mackenzie “among our first nautical adventurers” and declares that he has “settled, perhaps for ever,” the question of a Northwest Passage. Other reviews are more equivocal. The *London Review* stresses the importance of weighing the perils of exploration against the

“general utility of the objects to be pursued” (113); it finds plenty of interest to the “scientific geographer” in *Voyages*, but although it quotes extensively from the political and economic arguments Mackenzie puts forward as the conclusion to his work, it refuses to evaluate them. The *Edinburgh Review* has no such qualms, freely taking issue with Mackenzie’s proposal to remove the Hudson’s Bay Company’s monopoly, and belittles the practical results of his expeditions, declaring that the regions he has explored are “the least interesting of any with which modern enterprise has made us acquainted” (158). The *Critical Review* goes even further, concluding that Mackenzie has added greatly to geographical knowledge, but only to the effect that these “barren and dreary” dominions, indeed “the whole of this northern continent may be resigned without a sigh, or even the slightest regret” (381). Robert Southey, in the *Annual Review*, finishes by claiming that Mackenzie has neither disproved the existence of a Northwest Passage nor found a practicable commercial route to the Pacific: “What then has the traveller discovered? that going sometimes by land and sometimes by water, it is possible to penetrate from fort Chipewyan to the Pacific. But who ever doubted this?” (30). These negative judgements did not bode well for the success of Mackenzie’s grand design of a single transcontinental fur and fisheries company operating under the aegis of the British government, to which he was to devote many futile years of “knocking on official doors and getting nowhere” (Smith 169).

Sources are far fewer, but many of the features of British responses that I have summarized are present too in North American reviews. The *Port Folio*, announcing the publication of the Philadelphia edition of *Voyages* in 1802, is noteworthy chiefly for its egregious error in identifying Mackenzie as brother to Henry Mackenzie, author of *The Man of Feeling*; but in admiring the “enterprize, intrepidity, and genius of the Scottish character” (2.18: 142), and in simply quoting two paragraphs concerning the Chipewyans’ ideas of creation and the afterlife “to promote the knowledge and popularity of the journal of this very intelligent traveller” (2.19: 148), its reviewer is perfectly consistent with British attitudes. The much more substantial treatment in the *American Review and Literary Journal* of the New York and Philadelphia editions takes considerable interest in Mackenzie’s account of the failure of missionary activity in North America and of the practical operations of the fur trade. Interestingly, it comments on what for modern readers is the narrative highlight of Mackenzie’s voyage, the near-catastrophe on “Bad River” and his subsequent efforts to persuade his crew not to abandon the quest. In

other respects, it follows the established pattern. It considers the book not only “instructive to the merchant” but “amusing to men of general curiosity” (121), and what it finds curiously amusing is mainly information about Native people: Cree smoking rites and feasts, Chipewyan religious beliefs, the way of life of the Dogrib nation, and especially “the condition of the female savages” (135).

Although the focus of this essay is upon the popular and literary reception of Mackenzie’s *Voyages*, it is also worth remembering that in broad historical terms the most significant reader of the book was undoubtedly Thomas Jefferson, whom it propelled into organizing the Lewis and Clark expedition—furthering the United States’ westward expansion and ultimately guaranteeing its transcontinental destiny. While Mackenzie struggled to interest the Colonial Office in his warnings about American ambitions, his book was frequently invoked as Jefferson made arrangements for his own journey of discovery, and in June 1803 he ordered a more portable “8vo edition of McKenzie’s travels with the same maps which are in the 4to edition” (Jackson 56), presumably for Lewis to take with him. Given the expedition’s declared and undeclared aims of finding a trade route to the Pacific, securing the Columbia region from British territorial claims, and facilitating the spread of American settlement into Louisiana, Jefferson’s reading of Mackenzie therefore took its part in events of huge commercial and geopolitical consequence. These aspects of Mackenzie’s work have been amply treated, however,¹² so I turn again to consider the wider impact of his *Voyages* on the literary culture of the period.

Looking for tangible evidence of such impact in the early 1800s is a frustrating business. Among the better-known writers of the period, even those who were avid readers of travel and exploration literature, and even those for whom we have detailed records of their reading, there is an almost complete dearth of reference. A satirical comment by Jane Austen in a letter of 24 January 1813 on a local book club whose members were apparently enthusiasts for travel writing, scoffing at “their Biglands & their Barrows, their Macartneys & Mackenzies” (Austen 199), is unfortunately taken by Austen scholars, largely on the basis of proximity of publication date, to be referring to Sir George Mackenzie, author of *Travels in Iceland* (1811). As so often, however, Coleridge comes to the rescue. Two passages in his *Notebooks* comment on *Voyages*: the first merely observes that a description in John Franklin’s later Arctic *Journey* (1823) of a Chipewyan man allegedly suckling his baby after the death of the mother is a “worthy . . . successor to Hearne’s

and Mackenzie's volumes" (4: 4947); the second occurs in a discussion of the supposed commonness of homosexuality in uncivilized countries, asserting it to be "frightfully prevalent" among North American Indians on the rather dubious evidence of a reference by Mackenzie to the vice of "bestiality" among the Cree (5: 6160). The most striking characteristic of these references, which coheres with the bias of the reviews, is their focus upon details in Mackenzie's ethnographic digressions. The same pattern emerges in the handful of allusions to Mackenzie in imaginative literature that I have located to date. These include mentions in two poems by the popular Irish writer, Tom Moore, and quotations in works by the Christian missionary-turned professional writer, Timothy Flint, the American poets Robert Sands and James Eastburn, and the Canadian poet Adam Kidd.

Tom Moore toured America and Canada in 1804, having quickly tired of his government sinecure in Bermuda. A series of poems prompted by his travels was first published in *Epistles, Odes and Other Poems* in 1806 and later grouped more distinctly as "Poems Relating to America."¹³ In a typically symbiotic relationship between Romantic-period verse and travel literature, these poems make extensive use of travellers' descriptions and observations in the form of learned notes, offsetting the dreamy exoticism of the poetry with a parade of tough scholarship and appealing thereby to both an emotional and an intellectual response. "To the Lady Charlotte Rawdon, from the Banks of the St Lawrence" cites Mackenzie among several different sources regarding the language, customs, and beliefs of Native people. Moore takes Mackenzie's description of his sighting of the Camsell Range of the Rockies, and of "a No. of White Stones upon them which glistens when the Rays of the sun shines upon them" (Mackenzie 180)—called "spirit stones" by local people but assumed by Mackenzie to be talc—and recontextualizes it within the imagined chant of a departed "Indian Spirit":

From the land beyond the sea,
Whither happy spirits flee;
Where, transform'd to sacred doves,
Many a blessed Indian roves
Through the air on wing, as white
As those wond'rous stones of light,
Which the eye of morning counts
On the Appalachian mounts. (lines 57-64)

That the Rockies have morphed into the Appalachians is assumed not to matter: the allusion and accompanying footnote to Mackenzie's *Journal* imports the required note of "scientific" precision to authenticate what

might otherwise appear a mere flight of fancy. A similar strategy is at work in Moore's "Canadian Boat Song," very loosely adapted, according to its elaborate paratext, from a song supposedly sung by *voyageurs* as they set out on their annual journey from Montreal to Grand Portage on the Utawas River. "For an account of this wonderful undertaking," Moore notes, "see Sir Alexander Mackenzie's General History of the Fur Trade, prefixed to his Journal," and a second footnote, to the line "We'll sing at St. Ann's our parting hymn" (line 4), quotes Mackenzie's observation that it is "from this spot the Canadians consider they take their departure, as it possesses the last church on the island, which is dedicated to the tutelar saint of voyagers" (Moore 323). Once again, travel literature is invoked to give historical and geographical veracity to a work of the imagination—rooting "the music of the glee" (Moore xxiii) in recorded experience—although here Moore's appropriation of Mackenzie helps to convey the romance of departure.

A generation later, a similar tactic is observable in Timothy Flint's *Francis Berrian, or The Mexican Patriot* (1826), noted as "the first novel in English set in the American Southwest" (Gale 133). Flint (1780-1840), a man who travelled widely in North America on missionary business and who also produced respectable scholarly work on the geography and history of the western states, evidently had something in common with Mackenzie, even if his fundamental perspective on the West was agrarian rather than commercial. In fact, his eponymous hero, in tracing his restlessness as "a wanderer in . . . distant regions" back to his youthful fantasy of following "the intrepid Clark and Mackenzie over the Rocky Mountains to the Western Sea" (Flint 20), shows a taste for "romantic adventures" of the kind that Mackenzie disowns in his preface (59), but his "presentiment of future wealth, greatness, and happiness to befall me somewhere in that region" (Flint 20) is more in sympathy with Mackenzie's material ambitions.

Robert Sands and James Eastburn met at Columbia College in the 1810s and became associates in a number of editorial and publishing ventures. *Yamoyden* (1820), begun by Eastburn and completed by Sands after his friend's untimely death, is a poem in six cantos on the subject of "King Philip" or Metacomet, leader of the Wampanoag people, who waged war unsuccessfully on the New England colonists in 1675. Sands and Eastburn allude twice to Mackenzie in the course of the poem, footnoting on both occasions a passage from his account of the Chipewyan "Indians" in the "General History." A reference to his eye-catching summary of their beliefs concerning death, judgement, and the afterlife, which pictures "bad" indi-

viduals eternally “up to their chins in water” (Mackenzie 150), in sight of the heavenly island from which they are excluded, is complemented by an invocation of the Chipewyans’ creation myth, featuring in Mackenzie’s telling “a mighty bird, whose eyes were fire, whose glances were lightning,” descending to the primeval ocean and touching the land into existence (149). In line with most other records of reception, here again it is colourful facts concerning the “very singular” (Mackenzie 149) traits of native people that prove most interesting and serviceable to Mackenzie’s literary end-users.

The Irish-Canadian poet, Adam Kidd (1802-1831), took up a literary life after his initial plan for a career in the Anglican ministry collapsed, possibly as a result of an affair with a native woman. Because Kidd was a youthful admirer of the poetry of Byron and Tom Moore, his change of path had a certain logic to it; Kidd became an “unofficial voice” displaying, in D.M.R. Bentley’s words, “an elective affinity for the mistreated native peoples of North America and a personal grudge against the presiding religio-political order in Lower Canada” (Introduction). The title poem of *The Huron Chief, and Other Poems* (1830) is a rambling piece in which the sentimental narrator encounters the elderly chief, Skenandow, and other “remnant[s] of [his] tribe” (Kidd 51) in his wanderings around Lakes Huron and Erie, immerses himself in their way of life, and listens to stories of their conflict with white men, a violent and tragic episode which he eventually witnesses himself. Kidd cites Mackenzie four times in footnotes in the course of the poem, in an apparent effort to claim documentary verisimilitude for his representation of Native people and their culture: the notes quote Mackenzie on the “well proportioned” figures of “Indian women,” on ritual feasts and sacrifices and the use of portable household gods, and on the “fatal consequences” of the spread of alcohol resulting from “communication with the subjects of civilized nations.” However, that all these references are to Mackenzie’s account of the Algonkian-speaking Cree nation (Mackenzie 134-37), rather than any people related ethnically or linguistically to the Iroquoian-speaking Huron, who are the subject of Kidd’s poem, exposes the illusoriness of this favourite authenticating strategy of the exotic romance poem: in contradiction to Bentley’s claim that “Kidd conceives the Huron, Sioux and other races as named and historical collectivities” (Introduction), it seems that any randomly-chosen piece of “Indian” ethnography is equally capable of providing his poem with a skeleton of “facts” on which to hang his primitivist fantasies of the “forest-home” where “nought but nature’s plan / Is felt, and practised, by contented man” (Kidd 34).¹⁴

With certain exceptions, then, Mackenzie's earliest readers consistently focused upon parts of his text that most modern critics, in common with the author, consider peripheral to the main narrative of his heroic quest for a route to the Pacific. Indeed, they were mostly underwhelmed with his achievements in this latter regard, the significance of his expeditions emerging more slowly over time. As for what the *Edinburgh Review* had pointed to as the imaginative appeal of the *Voyages*—"the idea of traversing a vast and unknown continent" is said to give "an agreeable expansion to our conceptions" (141)—little in the record suggests that Mackenzie's readers were affected in this way. A key word in the early reception I have traced, clustering as it does around Mackenzie's occasional passages of ethnographic observation, is "curious" and its cognates, which crop up in most of the reviews. Nigel Leask has demonstrated the importance, as well as the epistemological ambivalences, of the discourse of curiosity in Romantic-period travel literature. Drawing in particular upon Henry Home's *Elements of Criticism* (1762), Leask foregrounds a vital distinction between "positive and negative, rational and vulgar, valences for 'curiosity'" (28), the former aligned with bona fide empirical enquiry, the latter with a superficial and unsystematized, acquisitive or even prurient, pursuit of novelty or singularity. While Mackenzie, in asserting his claim to having extended "the boundaries of geographic science" (57), is clearly appealing to a legitimate "rational" curiosity, the evidence suggests that readers inclined to a more distorted and "vulgar" interest in his book. While there was some effort to relate new anthropological data to the reigning theories of social and historical progress, for the most part reviewers and fellow writers treated *Voyages* as a somewhat trivial "cabinet of curiosities" or selectively misread it for intriguing "facts" about North American "savages." (In so doing, they were arguably reproducing a pattern established in the reception of Samuel Hearne's more sensational *Journey from Prince of Wales's Fort* [1795], the primary point of reference for travels in these remote parts of the continent.)¹⁵ However, as Barbara Benedict has argued, the power to define the other as curious was in this period "a weapon in the competition for cultural eminence, both within Europe and between Europe and the rest of the world" (82), so a merely vulgar curiosity was not inconsistent with Mackenzie's project of extending Britain's commercial sway.

There is no short answer to my opening question as to why a work narrating such stirring and historic feats of European "discovery" seems to have made so little impact on the imaginative writing of the period. It is demon-

strably not true that either the reading public in general, or creative writers in particular, had little interest in North American travels compared to other parts of the world. The issues of price and access I have discussed do not offer sufficient explanation. In conclusion, though, it is worth noting the very real anxiety of reception displayed in Mackenzie's preface, which goes beyond the usual false modesty exuded by first-time authors. In quick succession, Mackenzie apologizes for his probable failure to gratify assorted readerly desires, in terms that help reconstruct the genre-specific horizon of expectations pertinent to travel writing around 1800: he will not, he says, supply the variety, whether of character, setting, or incident, that readers may crave; lacking the scientific credentials, he will not be supplying new information about the flora and fauna of the country; neither will he quench the thirst of those "who love to be astonished" or "are enamoured of romantic adventures"; and anyone looking for "embellished narrative, or animated description" will search his book in vain. Behind these defensive manoeuvres we see the author's awareness of the different subgenres of contemporary travel writing: "philosophical" travel, the imaginary or "marvellous" voyage, the sentimental journey, and the landscape tour. The boundaries between these discourses, in particular the boundary between scientific discourse and the emergent tradition of romantic, internalized travels, were fluid in this period, and writers often strove with greater or lesser success to integrate diverse strands into a single narrative. Mackenzie, unfortunately, was no Humboldt: in appealing to the scientific geographer but not providing enough science; in responding to public demand for knowledge of North America but not delivering on his own promise of practical discoveries; in providing some, but perhaps not enough, "curiosities"; in bringing before readers a wilderness scenery outside their personal experience, but leaving the few passages of colourful landscape description to his ghostwriter;¹⁶ and in telling a story of epic achievement against the odds but writing nothing of his personal feelings, it seems to have been his misfortune—or miscalculation—to have fallen between all the available stools furnished by the contemporary literary marketplace.

For the modern reader, the reception history of Mackenzie's *Voyages* provides particularly rich evidence of how profoundly evaluative criteria have changed, and this recognition inevitably forms part of his enduring "literary relevance," given the current level of critical interest in travel writing. This shift does not mean that *Voyages* is now no more than a historical "curiosity" itself. It is still possible to read its author with appreciation of his monu-

mental “perseverance,” as both explorer and writer: to find in his story “the massive sweep of a heroic tale (MacLulich 61), the fascination of a man “determined to discover what he has hypothesized” (Greenfield 55). Equally, extreme discomfort with the colonialist mentality of earlier times means that, for many readers at least, any pleasure in his narrative is a troubled one—dependent, as Tzvetan Todorov provocatively suggests, on both strengthening and disowning a sense of cultural superiority;¹⁷ and that for some, his words become mere cannon fodder for an unsparing postcolonial critique. Ironically, perhaps, the reading of Mackenzie’s *Voyages* today is a more complex, multilayered experience than it seems to have been for his contemporary audience.

NOTES

- 1 On the unique circumstances of the exodus from Lewis, which seemed at the time to be “in the process of complete depopulation,” see Bailyn 307-12; on the family context, see Gough 9-19.
- 2 For a vivid reconstruction of the two voyages, see Hayes.
- 3 For full bibliographic details see Lamb 531-37. Lamb’s scholarly edition of Mackenzie’s *Voyages* follows the 1801 text for the second expedition and the introductory “General History of the Fur Trade,” but for the first expedition reproduces an extant manuscript copy of Mackenzie’s journal.
- 4 I draw this information from the Bristol Library Society Registers, nos. 19-26, held in Bristol City Reference Library.
- 5 Kaufman’s pioneering research on borrowing patterns in the Bristol Library Society between 1773 and 1784 disclosed this bias—noting, for instance, that Hawkesworth’s *Voyages* and Brydone’s *Tour through Sicily* were the two most frequently borrowed books over this period. My own analysis of borrowings in the sample month of April 1802 reveals that travel literature accounted for 58 out of a total of 365 borrowings.
- 6 Access to this literature in general anthologies was patchy. Mackenzie’s work was included, in a curiously truncated form, in William Mavor’s 28-volume *Collection of Voyages and Travels* of 1809-10, but not in John Pinkerton’s more authoritative 17-volume *General Collection of the Best and Most Interesting Voyages and Travels in all Parts of the World* of 1808-14 (though it is listed in the voluminous catalogue added to the final volume).
- 7 For example, there is no way of knowing how representative they are; they record the responses of the most articulate and opinionated, not the “average,” reader; they borrow freely from other reviews and may lack authenticity as a result; they were written with particular implied audiences in mind and were subject to commercial pressures and institutional (self-)censorship. However, precisely for the latter reason, as St. Clair observes, they can be “valuable sources for reconstructing the historical horizons of expectations against which newly printed texts were perceived” (285).
- 8 The emphasis persists, for example, in Victor Hopwood’s description of Mackenzie as “the very type of pushing Scot who has contributed much to Canadian development,” in his excellent survey article in the *Literary History of Canada* (30).

- 9 I leave aside the question of whether some of these interludes (those contained in the first section, "A General History of the Fur Trade") were written by Mackenzie's cousin Roderic. See Lamb 33.
- 10 On eighteenth-century "stadial history," as expounded in works like John Millar's *Observations Concerning the Distinction of Ranks in Society* (1771) and Lord Kames' *Sketches of the History of Man* (1774), see O'Brien 132-36.
- 11 Bickham's study, which deals with diverse British representations of Native Americans in the second half of the eighteenth century, argues that these were conditioned by the shifting context of imperial politics: at times when the stakes were raised, the discourse was more pragmatic, emphasizing "fact and authenticity over entertainment and generic exoticism" (64). Broadly, Mackenzie's reviews illustrate the reverse tendency.
- 12 See, for example, Daniells, as previously cited, and Gough 163-211.
- 13 For a stimulating account of Moore's Canadian expedition and of his influence on later Canadian poetry, see Bentley, "Thomas Moore."
- 14 Kidd's approach, representative as it is, nonetheless takes its place within a broader spectrum of literary treatments of American "Indians" in the Romantic period, which, Tim Fulford has shown, veer between "standard renditions of noble or ignoble savagery" and more "complex, ambiguous and challenging figures that placed stereotypes in doubt and undermined prejudices" (32).
- 15 Hearne's book, like Mackenzie's, was published by Cadell and Davies, and was favourably reviewed. I.S. MacLaren comments that the "climactic scene" of Hearne's book, the massacre at Bloody Fall, with all its "gothic horror of torture and pathos," became and remains "almost a synecdoche of the frozen North" ("Exploration" 56-57); as he has also demonstrated, the published version of the massacre bears little resemblance to Hearne's field notes, its sadistic and sentimental excesses manufactured to suit the "taste of the age" ("Samuel Hearne's Accounts" 41). Bruce Greenfield argues that, in other ways, the goals of his expedition having proved illusory, the "real fruits" of Hearne's labors were his "invention of the land and people in and of themselves" (40).
- 16 For details, see MacLaren, "Alexander Mackenzie," and Montgomery.
- 17 Todorov writes of the ambivalent appeal of all narratives of colonial journeys, typically finding in them "an image of the traveller with which I identify while at the same time distancing myself from it, and which thus absolves me of all guilt" (295-96).

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Two Crickets

Cool darkness and no peace. In the room's black,
the ceiling swarms with smears of light cast out
from open eyes. Images never quite images,
parts of bodies yet to coalesce
in an always future hell. Outside, one cricket
singing with long still pauses—August is over.
And for the moment no one harries him
or pecks him up, he doesn't despise his own invention,
doesn't worry the song of longing he repeats
is ignorant, failing to know and bring all things
the wise and passionate will ever say of love
to his lady. Listen and you seem to be in his peace
under the leaves of an impatiens flower.
There's dew all over your body and a slight stir
fans it to further cold but you don't shiver. Who knows?
August is over, for the moment no one harries
or eats us, we sing stupidly free of doubt



Wondering into Country: Dionne Brand's *A Map to the Door of No Return*

Dionne Brand's memoir, *A Map to the Door of No Return: Notes to Belonging*, can be read as an elliptical, poetic meditation on a short passage by Eduardo Galeano that Brand cites twice: "I'm nostalgic for a country which doesn't yet exist on a map" (qtd. in *Map* 52, 85). Brand's desired "country," her imagined space of belonging, is not Canada, despite her formal citizenship. Her reflections on her experiences as a black woman and diasporic subject repeatedly exceed the boundaries of the nation as she explores the possibilities of diasporic community, political community, and artistic community. Nonetheless, just after she recounts the experience of reading Galeano in the silence of late night, Brand takes an imagined journey across Canada:

In cities at 4:45 a.m., Toronto or Calgary or Halifax, there are these other inhabitants of silence. Two hundred miles outside, north of any place, or in the middle of it, circumnavigating absence. For a moment it is a sweet country, in that moment you know perhaps someone else is awake reading Galeano. (53)

As she muses on the possibility of a "country" where she might belong, Brand remains keenly attentive to the country she calls "home" (64, 77, 79). She brings the concept of impossible origins that informs her experience as a descendant of African slaves to the definition of Canadian identity, arguing that in the discourse on national belonging "[t]oo much has been made of origins" (69). She goes on to criticize what she describes as "the calcified Canadian nation narrative" (70), contending that national identity has been "drawn constantly to the European shape in its definition. A shape . . . which

obscures its multiplicity” (72). She also challenges the reliance on narratives of origin by Canadian immigrant populations, suggesting that such a tactic simply produces a mirror image of its national counterpart (69). Both arguments, she observes,

must draw very definite borders both to contain their constituencies as well as, in the case of the powerful, to aggressively exclude the other and, in the case of the powerless, to weakly do the same while waving a white flag to the powerful for inclusion. Each of these arguments select and calcify origins. Out of a multiplicity of stories, they cobble together a narrative glossing over accident, opportunism, necessity, and misdirection. (69-70)

In *Map*, Brand herself sometimes falls into the trap set by a narrative of origins, and in so doing implies that the “well worn” paths of such narratives are not easy to abandon (1). However, she also interrogates this entrapment through reflections on the Door of No Return, the symbolic location of departure for Africans sold into slavery. She emphasizes the need to reconfigure her relation to, and understanding of, this symbolic space, and to channel her longing for an impossible origin into imagining possible collective futures not constrained by exclusionary teleological narratives or the ossified social relations such narratives engender. As she charts relations with others that open up the possibility of such a “country,” she repeatedly engages in creative, provisional reterritorializations of spaces within the Canadian nation.

Landing is what people in the diaspora do

In using the term “reterritorialization” to describe Brand’s descriptions of her relations with others, I am responding to Marlene Goldman’s exploration of the trope of “drifting” that runs through *Map* (evident in Brand’s repeated use of maritime imagery) and that informs the memoir’s fragmented, non-linear structure (Goldman 13, 23).¹ Drawing on Paul Gilroy’s and, within a black Canadian context, Rinaldo Walcott’s work on diasporic movement and community, Goldman proposes that in her memoir Brand charts her deterritorialized positioning as a diasporic subject, and in so doing “underscores the inadequacies of the nation-state, particularly in its response to demands for social justice in a global era and in its long-standing practices of exclusion” (13). I agree that Brand displays “the aesthetics and politics of drifting” (Goldman 22), but she also attends to the experience of what she terms “landing.” “Landing,” says Brand, “is what people in the Diaspora do. Landing at ports, docks, bridgings, stocks, borders, out-

posts" (150). Like "drifting," Brand's concept of "landing" is clearly connected to the Middle Passage; moreover, the term is associated with issues of citizenship and national belonging. While Brand employs the word in *Map* to describe her own experience within the structured spaces of (post)colonial territory, the concept of "landing" is not new to her work. In the novel *In Another Place, Not Here*, for example, Brand describes the "landing" of her Caribbean protagonist, Elizete, in the cold, indifferent urban landscape of Toronto. In this earlier work, the experience of landing tends to be removed from agency, and thus seems to counter a politics of drifting. "Landed like a fish or a ship," is Elizete's summary of her arrival in Canada: "More like fish on somebody's line" (47). In *Map*, however, Brand favours the gerund form "landing," which suggests an ongoing process and indicates that she is not interested in mapping a static, universalized landscape. Each time that she "lands" in yet another (post)colonial outpost, she does not simply become reinscribed within its regimes of power; rather, she maps ways of seeing and moving, of making sense of space, that exist in the midst of or despite the systems of power that govern social relations. Brand's "landings"—or what I would describe as creative reterritorializations—take place beyond as well as within the boundaries of the nation. However, as readings of her "landings" in particular Canadian spaces (Toronto, Vancouver, and the small town of Burnt River, Ontario) will demonstrate, her approach allows her to articulate and interrogate her positioning in relation to specific narratives and social structures that shape her experience of Canada.

In *Faking It: Poetics and Hybridity*, Fred Wah offers a discussion of reterritorialization as a potentially subversive tactic for "ethnic" Canadian writers.² Emphasizing the need to interrogate the "monologic" Canadian literary tradition that tends to obscure or exclude difference (54), Wah reconfigures Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's concept of reterritorialization to argue for the ethnic writer's creative articulation of "placement in . . . place" (56), a process that, according to Wah, "knots" difference into the conceptualization of Canadian community (63, 66). While Wah's work provides a Canadian context for Brand's approach, her "landings" seem also to align with the theoretical framework for reterritorialization developed by transnational feminist scholars. In her essay "Feminist Encounters," Chandra Talpade Mohanty emphasizes temporality and situational specificity in her configuration of the relation between personal experience and political

struggle, noting that “[m]ovement between cultures, languages, and complex configurations of meaning and power have always been the territory of the colonized” (42). She explains that

this [ongoing] process, this reterritorialization through struggle[,] . . . allows me a paradoxical continuity of self, mapping and transforming my political location. It suggests a particular notion of political agency, since my location forces and enables specific modes of reading and knowing the dominant. (42)

Caren Kaplan notes that for Mohanty reterritorialization is not an appropriate attempt at asserting a new dominant, but rather is provisional and contingent, involving “critical practices” that enable the intersection of “interests, subjects, and purposes” (182). Key to this approach is an awareness of the ways in which space is organized through the complexity and nuance of social relations. As Henrietta Moore explains, “[t]he organization of space is . . . above all a context developed through practice—that is, through the interaction of individuals. This context, or set of relationships, may have many meanings. These meanings . . . are in fact simultaneous” (117). For Brand, dominant social discourses (of colonialism, of nation, of race, of patriarchy) are played out and perpetuated in social relations, but critical and potentially transformative ways of engaging in these relations, of effecting creative and provisional reterritorializations of particular spaces, are nevertheless possible.

Reflecting, in *Map*, on her project of exploring and charting possible relations of belonging, Brand turns to an observation by David Turnbull in *Maps are Territories*: “In order to find our way successfully, it is not enough just to have a map. We need a cognitive schema as well as practical mastery of way-finding” (Turnbull 51; qtd. in *Map* 16).³ Brand proposes that for blacks in the diaspora the dominant “cognitive schema is captivity” (29), arguing that (post)colonial regimes have generally functioned to domesticate and regulate the space of the black body (35, 37). In attempting to chart her own lived relations with others, Brand challenges the central assumption of colonial mapping—the idea that space can be conceived in universal terms, and that a particular social and symbolic order can be imposed on space (Mavjee 28–9; Goldman 23; Brydon 112). Brand responds to such an approach, which confines racialized subjects to the terms of the colonial order, by setting up the symbolic Door of No Return as her “destination” (1). Such a move challenges the unidirectional thrust of the colonial narrative that makes the Door a starting point only, the beginning of confinement within the colonial order. As Jody Mason observes, the Door functions as “a

trope for fixed forms” (784), which Brand subverts in her assertion that it represents a “fissure between the past and the present,” “the end of traceable beginnings,” and thus the end of teleological narratives (*Map* 5). In other words, the Door is, for Brand, an opening into deterritorialized multiplicity—it becomes a “doorway,” as Mason puts it, rather than a space of static closure.

Still, finding another way—one that seeks to recognize social relations as the intersection of multiple “ways”—does not allow Brand to escape completely the shadow of “mastery,” of authority, that Turnbull assigns to the project of way-finding.⁴ Now, however, the authority is at least partially her own: Brand apprehends and charts social relations from her particular point of view (her doorway still has a frame, we might say), and as a result she cannot help but engage in reterritorialization in Deleuze and Guattari’s sense of the term. In *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, Deleuze and Guattari explain that “[m]ovements of deterritorialization and processes of reterritorialization [are] . . . relative, always connected, tied up in one another” (10). “You may make a rupture, draw a line of flight,” they remark, “yet still there is a danger that you will reencounter organizations that restratify” (9). As I will demonstrate in my readings of particular “landings,” while Brand works to escape the reterritorializing forces of dominant social structures, her descriptions of social relations nevertheless have their own restratifying quality. However, through an attentiveness to the alternative possibilities—and in particular to the potential openness—of spatiality, Brand’s creative, provisional reterritorializations tend to push toward deterritorialization.⁵

Mapping emotion

Integral to Brand’s discovery of a sense of potential openness in her “landings” is her cultivation of a heightened awareness of affective experience. Sara Ahmed, in *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, offers an articulation of how emotions “shape” individual bodies, and of how they function to align those bodies with (or separate them from) others, that can help shed light on this dimension of Brand’s project. Ahmed suggests that emotions operate as “orientations towards objects and others” (15), arguing that “emotions are not simply something ‘I’ or ‘we’ have. Rather, it is through emotions, or how we respond to objects and others, that surfaces or boundaries are made: the ‘I’ and the ‘we’ are shaped by, and even take the shape of, contact with others” (10). Ahmed situates her work within the tradition of scholars who

understand affective experience as involving both bodily feeling and cognition.⁶ She borrows the term “impression” from David Hume in order to describe the combined experience of “bodily sensation, emotion and thought” (6), proposing that “the surfaces of collective [and] individual bodies take shape through such impressions” (10). In *Map*, Brand demonstrates an often self-conscious attentiveness to the ways in which her experiences “impress” her and others, and she describes particular moments when such impressions exceed or subvert the affective relations scripted by dominant tropes or narratives.

In my reading of Brand’s “landings” in various Canadian spaces, I focus in particular on instances where an attentiveness to emotional experience allows Brand to discover the possibility of tentative alignment across socially constructed boundaries, opening up the terms of national belonging. That said, Brand certainly does at times display a rather difficult, even antagonistic persona that might seem to contradict such a reading. George Elliott Clarke is perhaps Brand’s most vocal critic in this regard. In his short review of *Map*, Clarke specifically targets Brand’s relation to the black Canadian community, arguing that she assumes an arrogantly distant positioning, and in so doing succumbs to what he describes as a form of “Naipaulization.” Although I am not convinced that Brand’s shifts in affective orientation always map neatly onto the divide Clarke sets up between the black Canadian community and the (white) Canadian intellectual elite whom, he claims, Brand simply flatters, I do think Clarke is right to attend to the emotional complexities of Brand’s persona. Indeed, I would suggest that *Map* invites a more sustained assessment of Brand’s shifting affective orientation than the limited space of a book review allows. Brand seems to encourage such an assessment in her own discussion of V. S. Naipaul, that notoriously difficult persona to whom Clarke compares her. Reflecting on “In the Middle of the Journey,” an essay by Naipaul about his voyage “home” to India, Brand pays particular attention to the “choices of words and emotions that indicate his state of mind” (*Map* 60). As she attends to the language of Naipaul’s essay, she reflects that

[m]any read Naipaul as spiteful. . . . But in some ways I read Naipaul as spitefully sorrowful. . . . The dread he feels . . . is the dread of the unknown, the unfamiliar, the possibility of rejection— . . . the possibility that in fact one is unwanted back home, perhaps hated, perhaps even forgotten. . . . Fear is repeated so many times in his essay. . . . [T]he essay betrays someone trying to get a grasp of himself; trying to grasp something unfathomable, not in a landscape or in the regularity of abject poverty or slovenly wealth, but in oneself, in one’s connection to

anything. The superior voice of the text is directed to a particular audience in the metropole in which he has a provisional footing; the fear leaks out as an expression of that self-doubting, self-conscious being who is at the core of the discourse—author and autobiographer. (60-62)

In this nuanced interpretation of Naipaul, Brand reads an affective tension that pushes toward home in sorrow, even as it retreats fearfully behind an armour of spite. In effect, Brand discovers outward movement in apparent emotional closure—an interpretation that seems to imply much about her own orientation toward Canada, the place she so ambivalently calls “home” (significantly, Brand’s analysis of Naipaul’s essay introduces a section of *Map* primarily dedicated to the exploration of narratives that fuel the desire for entry into the “home” of the Canadian nation [64-72]). In my view, it is through similarly careful interpretations of emotional experience that Brand, in her Canadian “landings,” finds a way to engage productively in the question of national belonging.

Landing in Burnt River

In assessing Brand’s early work, Rinaldo Walcott proposes that she engages in “the remaking of the racialized, gendered and sexualized (literary) landscape of Canada”:

Moving beyond the discourse and literary tropes of “roughing it in the bush” and “survival” in a barren national landscape (national tropes which deny a First Nations presence), Brand moves through an urban landscape populated with the usual suspects of Canadian migrant cultures. (Walcott 52)

In the later text *Map*, Brand remains engaged in this same writing of difference in Canada’s urban landscapes; however, she also moves out of the city and into the bush, tucking into the middle of *Map* a sequence of fragments in which she reflects on her experience living and writing on the outskirts of the small Ontario town of Burnt River. In writing about her experiences in this rural Canadian space, Brand develops what Randall Roorda terms a “narrative of retreat”—a retreat from human society toward nature (Roorda xiii)—but it is a narrative of retreat with a particular difference: Brand’s is a specifically emotional retreat into the dread that she recognizes in herself, as in Naipaul—an emotion that she traces back to the “tear in the world” effected by the Middle Passage (4), that she locates in her “dreadful [childhood] house” in Trinidad (116), and that remains with her in Canada, where she feels denied full entry into the “home” of the nation (64, 68). In Burnt River, Brand’s retreat takes place largely in response to social scripts that she

feels she cannot escape, even in the comparatively isolated landscape of rural Ontario. However, Brand also describes moments when her emotional state takes on new nuance, allowing her to make sense of her relations in space differently. Significantly, the strategic positioning and mode of observation that she discovers at Burnt River inform other scenes in *Map*, including the urban sequences so central to her oeuvre.

Brand's poetry collection *Land to Light On* serves as an important precursor to *Map*'s Burnt River sequence, as the small Ontario town figures prominently in this slightly earlier work. In *Land to Light On*, Burnt River is the place where "the land is not beautiful, braised / like the back of an animal, burnt in coolness" (45). Brand's experiences in this cold, bleak space are marked by enclosure: "All I could do was turn and go back to the house / and the door that I can't see out of. / My life was supposed to be wider, not so forlorn / and not standing out in this north country bled / like maple" (7). In describing Burnt River, Brand draws on the old national trope of survival in an inhospitable landscape, employing it to interrogate the possibility of her own emotional survival, which at certain points she seems to tie directly to her uncomfortable positioning within the nation. "Maybe this wide country just stretches your life to a thinness just trying to take it in," she says (43), and: "I don't want no fucking country . . . I'm giving up on land to light on, and why not, I can't perfect my own shadow, my violent sorrow" (48). Brand maintains a sense of isolating despair throughout much of the collection, which ends with the image of "a prisoner / circling a cell, / cutting the square smaller and smaller . . . Even if she goes outside the cracks in her throat will break / as slate, her legs still cutting the cell in circles" (103). In *Land to Light On*, Brand apparently remains a captive of the dread and despair that she connects to the Door of No Return, and that continue to inform her experience within the Canadian nation.

Brand returns to this trope of captivity in *Map*, detailing the oppressive social forces that endanger her emotional survival at Burnt River. Significantly, while the foundational literary space of the nation is often problematically unpeopled (as Walcott notes), Brand not only depicts this space as an inhabited one, but also works to chart the relations that play out upon her landing therein.⁷ "This is country where people mind their own business; they are as cold and forbidding as the landscape," she says. "[T]hey guard what they call their 'property' . . . They are suspicious of strangers. I can only imagine nightmarishly what they think of me" (145). This is, of course, also country where the people are almost exclusively white: "I am much more eager to please or not to cause offence in this town," explains

Brand, because the population “is all white except for the Chinese people who took over the restaurant in my last year in the bush” (147). As one of the few racialized subjects in *Burnt River*, Brand finds that the much-storied dangers of the Canadian wilderness are trumped by social peril: “I fear the people more than the elements,” she says, “which are themselves brutal” (143).

Brand uses the *Burnt River* sequence to investigate how the circulation of feelings of fear and dread entrenches inhospitable social relations in this rural Canadian space. Near the beginning of the sequence, she writes:

There are ways of constructing the world—that is, of putting it together each morning, what it should look like piece by piece—and I don’t feel that I share this with the people in my small town. . . . I think we wake up and . . . we make solidity with our eyes and with the matter in our brains. . . . We accumulate information over our lives which brings various things into solidity, into view. What I am afraid of is that waking up in another room, minutes away by car, the mechanic walks up and takes my face for a target, my arm for something to bite, my car for a bear. He cannot see me when I come into the gas station; he sees something else and he might say, “No gas,” or he might simply grunt and leave me there. As if I do not exist. . . . A thing he does not recognize. (141)

Brand’s thoughts in this passage highlight the way that emotions scripted by dominant tropes and narratives give shape to social relations. By repeatedly evoking, throughout the sequence, the image of the shell of her vehicle (which she calls her “armour” [140]), Brand seems to suggest that fear produces and hardens the boundaries that separate her from others—that fear, as Sara Ahmed puts it, “envelops the bodies that feel, as well as constructs such bodies as enveloped, as contained by it” (63).

In contemplating the cultural politics of fear, Ahmed turns to Frantz Fanon’s *Black Skin, White Masks*, and specifically to Fanon’s story of a white child responding in fright to “a Negro,” which in turn results in fear on the part of the black man (Fanon 111-12). Ahmed observes that

the other is only felt to be fearsome through a misreading, a misreading that is returned by the other through its response to fear, as a fear of the white child’s fear. This is not to say that the fear comes from the white child, as if he was the origin of that fear (or even its author); rather the fear opens up past histories of association . . . , which allows the white body to be constructed as apart from the black body in the present. (63)

Brand demonstrates an acute awareness not only of the histories of association that fuel misreadings of her by others, but also of her own past history of association. In the *Burnt River* sequence, she highlights the role of a particular ancestral narrative in shaping and evoking her fear:

I have inherited this fear of people from my grandmother. . . . You would not know it to look at me but I am like my grandmother a person of sure perimeters. . . . I still take the small steps of my grandmother; I lift my eyes only to the immediate area of the house I live in, the small bit of road I can see from the window. (143, 151)⁸

Fear, as Ahmed notes, involves reading the world through tropes and narratives that script openness as vulnerability and the unknown as danger (69). In her “landing” at Burnt River, Brand describes the ways in which a complex interplay of such stories persistently results in withdrawal from the outside world, into the enclosure of the familiar.

In charting social relations at Burnt River, Brand engages in a productive querying of the familiar narratives that shape this space. In both *Land to Light On* and *Map*, she offers a description of “landing” in the rural Canadian landscape that, like Northrop Frye’s garrison mentality, emphasizes enclosure; however, by drawing on the particularity of her experience as a black woman and diasporic subject, she effectively interrogates and reconfigures this classic image of Canadian identity.⁹ More importantly, in *Map*’s Burnt River sequence she also eventually discovers the world opening in possibility beyond both of these familiar stories:

I look intently and I know each dead weep of grass within my view. . . . But in the beginning I did not notice wildflowers. [I was] [s]o intent on the hardship of living out here . . . [u]ntil one day . . . when it was fall and all the grass had turned brown and wilted, I saw something violet. I thought, “What a fool!” struggling up like that with winter coming. . . . Finally I thought, “Well, what else is possible? Nothing but to make a go of it, I suppose.” (151-52)

Recognition of this misreading of her environment, of her own inability to see, causes Brand to alter her relation to the rural space in which she finds herself. Stranded on the road midway between her house and town, fearing to enter into the snowy landscape (and white-as-snow population) in order to seek help, she sits waiting in the “armour” of her car, pondering her own survival; finally she decides to leave her shell—to get out and walk toward Burnt River. She then closes the sequence by rephrasing an old cliché: “[t]he road knows that wherever you find yourself you are” (152). In so doing, she articulates her acceptance of “landing” in Burnt River, an acceptance that she seems to have achieved by opening herself to the potential of the space in which she finds herself. Notably, in her rephrasing, Brand locates understanding in the in-between space of the road, rather than consolidating it within the enclosed, familiar space of the self, of a particular “way. . . of constructing the world” (141). Brand’s response to the question of survival

(affective and otherwise) at the sequence's close can be read as her response to the national (literary) narrative: rather than positioning herself outside of, or simply caught within, an alienating tradition, she seems to conceive of her engagement as an opening into dialogue, while acknowledging the potential for blind spots in her own reading.

Significantly, in her description of the discovery of wildflowers, Brand appears to suggest that a moment of wonder has precipitated her move into this personally and politically enabling position. Wonder, Ahmed explains, involves an “affective opening up of the world” (181)—it is “about seeing the world . . . ‘as if’ for the first time. . . . The capacity for wonder is the space of opening up to the surprise of each combination. . . . [W]onder, with its open faces and open bodies, involves a reorientation of one’s relation to the world” (179, 183). In its capacity to unsettle and reorient, wonder can have politically transformative effects (Ahmed 181), and at Burnt River Brand seems to experience such a shift. She discovers—in fact, she is moved by—the surprising potentiality of landing. Through her Burnt River sequence, Brand stresses the importance of affective openness to her reterritorializing project, while at the same time placing herself in dynamic relation to the Canadian nation.

Landing in Toronto

“Landing” in Toronto is hardly a new subject of investigation in Brand’s writing. Toronto often serves as a cold, oppressive setting in her work, with the early novel *In Another Place, Not Here* offering her most sustained indictment of the city. As Joanna Luft notes, Brand explores, in this novel,

the city’s refusal to credit the existence of [Caribbean female immigrants]. [Her] portrayal of Toronto is informed by white privilege and male aggression that is cloaked by indifference. . . . Brand writes an other story of immigration to, and ethnic life in, Toronto that Canada presents to those whom it refuses to acknowledge as valid players in its national drama. (30)

In *In Another Place, Not Here*, Brand juxtaposes highly sensual, passionate relationships between black immigrant women against the apparent indifference of the city. However, as I have noted, in *Map* Brand cultivates suspicion toward rigidly oppositional narratives. In the Toronto sections of her memoir, she attempts to maintain an affective openness to the people of the city who have tended to remain invisible not only to the nation, but also to her. “There is a city here where I walk to see how others live,” she says, and then, reflecting on Pablo Neruda’s poem “Letter to Miguel Otero Silva, in Caracas,” she emphasizes her necessary implication in those lives: “I could

be unaffected. . . . But Neruda summons me. . . . I cannot ignore my hands ‘stained with garbage and sadness’” (100).¹⁰ Thus, Brand remains committed to writing the marginalized lives of Toronto, but she constantly pushes beyond her stance as simply the voice of “post-national black lesbian feminist space/place” (Walcott 52). When she states that the people she wants to “see” are the “people on the edges of the city,” she refers not only—and at times not at all—to members of the black (female lesbian) immigrant Canadian community with whom she has, in the past, most closely identified, but also to an array of others—the homeless, her neighbours, Canada-born youths negotiating hybrid selves (101). In *Map*, Toronto remains an inhospitable space, as Brand emphasizes through the experience of her uncle, an immigrant whose “fierce” self was, she feels, “parenthesized” by the city (124). However, Brand responds to this dull, insistent threat of “parenthesis”—of loss of self through marginalization in the (post)colonial city—not only through acts of passionate defiance, but also by attempting to sketch, to map, the contours of affected lives within this space. Brand’s shift in approach, in *Map*, is significant. Indeed, her reconceptualization of the “ordinariness” of city life, as well as her querying of her relation to a range of “other” urban citizens, makes *Map* a key transition piece between her earlier work and later texts such as *Thirsty* and *What We All Long For*, in which Brand develops a slightly more positive (though certainly still critical) attitude toward Toronto, and attempts to perceive life in the city through eyes quite different from her own.

In *Map*, when she describes the view from her apartment window, which she refers to as “wonderful,” Brand demonstrates her desire to remain attentive to the often-overlooked ordinariness of other lives (54). She observes intently, “looking at [and recording] the slow, unimportant movement of [her neighbours’] lives—the flowerpots and beer bottles, the evening incandescence of the window frames” (55). Even here, in this summary of her experience, we can see Brand blurring the boundaries of domestic space, of the small squares of city to which she and her neighbours are confined:

Another building filled with windows into other apartments. A middle-aged eastern European woman in flowered dresses; how could I tell she was eastern European. I couldn’t. I assumed by the light frills around her shoulders. The knock-knocks on the windowsill. The not-quite-here feel of her. She could have been from anywhere, really. A man, probably English, with a small hawk’s face, who drank coffee incessantly and looked worriedly out the window. I’d say he had no work; I’d say he was in his forties. He smoked cigarettes to the quick. (54)

Through careful—indeed poetic—attention combined with self-conscious

guesswork, Brand makes a kind of “sense” of her neighbours’ lives. She is more than a voyeur here: prior to this passage, she describes her positioning in a similar apartment, situating herself in relation to the others who inhabit her building through sounds, knowledge of behaviour patterns, and anecdotes. In making an impression on her (and here I use “impression” following Ahmed’s definition, as the combination of “bodily sensation, emotion and thought”), the others exceed their domestic spaces, just as, in engaging in attentive observation and response, Brand exceeds her own. Into a city and a nation that she insists are structured by systems of enclosure, assimilation, and exclusion obscured through the trope of “home,” Brand articulates a conceptualization of relationality that avoids eclipsing or denying difference, and is characterized instead by implication and openness.

While Brand focuses on domestic spaces here, she brings a similar approach to public space when she visits Toronto’s Jarvis Youth Court. Upon entering the courthouse, she registers her status as a bystander while also emphasizing that this role does not exempt her entirely from the regime of power ordering this enclosed space: “[t]o get [in] . . . one has to go through the obligatory metal detector and pass by several policemen. Even though one is merely an observer one cannot help feel an immediate loss of control and a sense of surveillance” (103). She then proceeds to recount a morning in juvenile court, but rather than offering a narrative of events she charts affective interactions:

They are urban children—cool and bored is their emotional attire. . . . And perhaps they *are* cool, bored. . . . I don’t know. . . . I see the children at first tentatively stand, knees weak, and make their way . . . to the bar. Something curious happens to most of them in their walk up the aisle. . . . I see their backs straighten and their heads lift from shame to insolent dignity. Inside they’re making some decision—some resistance—“this is what I am then.” . . . [Their] emotions changing now from insolent dignity to ennui, the clerks who seem Caribbean in origin . . . look at [them] like disgusted relatives. . . . The bleached-blond Chinese boy, the red-streaked Indian girl take on these looks and swagger off, smirking. (107)

Of three girls with apparently hybrid origins, Brand says, “[t]hey keep each other company in the desolate courtroom in the desolate city, this transatlantic space trio. But those are my words, my sentiments. For them, the city is beautiful and reckless. . . . [I]n the hallway [they] giggle about how awesome it was” (107). In her observations, Brand tracks the performance of public discipline and shaming played out by the clerks, and the attitude of “insolent dignity” that allows the children a moment of self-respect, a degree of resistance. At the same time, Brand again questions her readings, correct-

ing her assumptions as she hesitantly attempts to discover the children's worlds in the looks they offer. In so doing, Brand maps the emotions circulating within this manifestation of the nation-state regime, attempting, in the process, to bear witness (in her repeated "I see . . .") to the larger scope of the children's lives in the moment of circumscription, of domestication by the state. Significantly, Brand aligns herself across established identity categories: she works to "see" the Canada-born youths (105), whereas the clerks, who are Caribbean-Canadian black women like Brand, remain caught, in her eye, in the system's imposed script.

"What holds poetry together in this city," reflects Brand, "is the knowledge that I cannot resist seeing; what holds me is the real look of things. If I see someone I see the ghost of them, the air around them, and where they've been" (100). As in her observations of her neighbours, Brand manages to sketch, in the courtroom scene, the "living ghostliness—the stray looks, the dying hands" of the children she observes (100). However, the courtroom scene also highlights the necessary limitations—and certainly the restratifying dimension—of Brand's approach. She "cannot resist seeing," as she says, but she also cannot help bringing her vision into a degree of focus, and when she does, certain elements fade to the edges of the scene, slipping into blind spots. And so in the courtroom scene, the black female clerks, when juxtaposed against the attentively observed children, seem reduced, through Brand's reading, to mere cogs in the machinery of the nation-state, ghostless.

Landing in Vancouver

Toward the end of *Map*, Brand offers a brief sketch of a trip she and a friend take on Vancouver's Granville bus. She describes the bus driver—a black man—and then takes notice when "[t]wo stops along a Salish woman gets on" and, as Brand and the friend have just done, asks the bus driver for directions (219). Brand observes and reflects:

This jutting of land through which this path travels has lost its true name. It is now surrounded by English Bay, False Creek, and Burrard Inlet. And Granville Street, whose sure name has vanished, once was or was not a path through. That woman asking directions might have known these names several hundred years ago. Today . . . she is lost. She looks into the face of another, a man who surely must be lost, too, but who knows the way newly mapped, superimposed on this piece of land. . . . It is only the Granville bus, surely. But a bus where a ragged mirage of histories comes into a momentary realization. (219-221)

Brand reminds us that "landing" in Vancouver—or almost anywhere in the

so-called New World, for that matter—involves negotiation of a (post)colonial order haunted by histories of usurpation and the trauma of loss. Nevertheless, the space of landing still holds the potential for the momentary discovery of connection. In the act of querying her relation to others with obscured or unknown histories, Brand refuses to think and feel within divisive narratives of origin, and instead charts provisional alignment via the recognition of non-identical experiences of loss:

The four of us . . . have perfected something—each of us something different. One drives through lost paths, one asks the way redundantly, one floats and looks, one looks and floats—all marvel at their ability to learn and forget the way of lost maps. We all feign ignorance at the rupture in mind and body, in place, in time. We all feel it. (221)

Again, the experience of wonder (or, as Brand puts it here, “marvel”) seems to lie at the heart of this moment of intersection. Ahmed suggests that

what moves us, what makes us feel, is also that which holds us in place, or gives us a dwelling place. Hence movement does not cut the body off from the “where” of its inhabitation, but connects bodies to other bodies: attachment takes place through movement, through being moved by the proximity of others. (11)

Ahmed proposes that “[t]he politics of . . . activism as a way of ‘being moved,’ is bound up with wonder, with engendering a sense of surprise about how it is that the world has come to take the shape it has” (182). On the Granville bus, wondering at one’s displaced positioning, at landing in the spaces where multiple cartographies overlap, appears to initiate, for Brand, a moment of dwelling.

At the same time, the restratifying quality of Brand’s observations, seemingly unacknowledged in the Toronto courtroom scene, is explicit on the Granville bus: “The bus is full, but there are really only four of us on it. The driver through lost paths stops and lets someone on and someone off, people who don’t realize that the bus is empty but for the four of us” (221). In this foregrounding of blind spots, the need for provisionality in Brand’s creative reterritorializations is clear. Here, *Map*’s fragmented, “drifting” style comes into play: the scene on the Granville bus ends with unsettling abruptness as Brand shifts her focus to another space of landing, elsewhere. In the process, the “map” that the four passengers “perfect” is displaced, made conditional, deterritorialized.

The relation between drifting and landing is integral to Brand’s project in *Map*. Her text fragments; her narrative loses its way and discovers another. When it does, Brand works to describe the space in which she finds herself,

employing as cognitive and affective schema a careful interrogation of social relations that—for a moment—can open up the possibility of alignment across socially constructed boundaries. Reflecting on how we might begin to make sense of Canadian community differently, Brand insists that “[w]hat we have to ask ourselves is, as everyone else in the nation should ask themselves also, nation predicated on what?” (68). In wandering and wondering her way into her desired country, she suggests that the answer lies in a particular kind of asking—in a sustained, attentive querying of the contours of belonging.

NOTES

I would like to thank Jeremiah Ziak, Kit Dobson, Sneja Gunew, and Susan Fisher for their insight and support at various stages of the writing process. I gratefully acknowledge the assistance of the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada. This paper is for Jeremiah.

- 1 Goldman complements this reading of *Map* with a similar interpretation of Brand’s novel, *At the Full and Change of the Moon*.
- 2 Wah offers the following background for his use of the term “ethnic”:

the term “ethnic” has been shunned as “incorrect” or “unusable” as a description of non-mainstream, visible/invisible minority, marginalized, race, origin, native, or otherwise “Other.” Linda Hutcheon, for example, argues for the use of the term “multicultural” as a more inclusive term instead of “ethnic” which “always has to do with the social positioning of the ‘other,’ and is thus never free of relations of power and value” (2). To me, her rationale is similar to Atwood’s view of a generic immigrant experience. (54)
- For Wah, social positioning is key to the poetics he proposes, which involves the work of complicating (rather than obscuring) difference, in part through a “figuring out” of where one is positioned, and how one moves and dwells in the place where one lives (56-57).
- 3 Turnbull makes this comment in a chapter on “Maps—A Way of Ordering Our Environment,” in which he explains that the bird’s-eye view characteristic of European mapping tends to carry with it the illusion that a map, while useful for way-finding, has not been produced by a subject engaged in the work of finding his or her way. Of course, all maps, he notes, do in fact have what he describes as an indexical dimension, produced as they are through particular methods of navigating and interpreting space (50-51).
- 4 I am grateful to a particularly helpful anonymous reader for encouraging me to return to this other important dimension of Turnbull’s observation.
- 5 In an article on Brand’s novel *What We All Long For*, Kit Dobson responds to recent Deleuzian analyses of deterritorialization in Brand’s work—including Goldman’s discussion of “drifting” in *Map* and Ellen Quigley’s examination of rhizomatic forms of political struggle in *In Another Place, Not Here*—by recalling the connection between deterritorialization and reterritorialization in Deleuze and Guattari’s thinking. Dobson makes the important argument that because “[m]ovements to decode or decolonize the self . . . have the potential . . . to leave the individual open to being recoded or recolonized by the emerging dominant structures of society,” decolonizing the self must therefore be an ongoing project, “constantly renewing [itself]” (88). In my analysis of *Map*, I

foreground Brand's negotiation of the ever-present threat of reterritorialization by dominant systems of power; however, in emphasizing that Brand necessarily marks herself in space (however creatively and provisionally), and in suggesting that, consequently, her "landings" involve re-stratifications of social relations, I am also querying the tendency to conceptualize reterritorialization only as a recoding of individuals by larger social forces. In other words, I am interested in the ways in which the practices of individual agents are, in themselves, reterritorializing.

- 6 Ahmed notes that the cognitivist view of emotion can be traced back to Aristotle's *Rhetoric*; in her survey of the recent scholarly literature on the relationship between cognition, emotion, and bodily sensation she highlights in particular the work of Alison M. Jaggar and Elizabeth V. Spelman (5-7; 17n10).
- 7 Notably, Brand acknowledges a First Nations presence, suggesting that it still haunts Burnt River:

sleeping in the upstairs of my house someone had a dream of something with a great wing passing over the house. The next morning one of those friends who was Six Nations asked, "Whose land is this, I wonder?" Whoever's it was, they had passed over the house. I thought of this winged being when I was alone. Sometimes at night I felt it pass and linger. . . . It was not a peaceful thing, though it meant no harm to me, I think. (150-51)
- 8 Brand later unsettles her embeddedness in this particular history of association by locating the source of her fear elsewhere, in her memories of the American invasion of Grenada, which took place while she was working on the island (155). In this way, Brand's experience as a diasporic subject proves repeatedly deterritorializing, making her readings of particular spaces, at particular points in time, provisional and contingent.
- 9 I am grateful to Patricia Smart for her insight regarding the relation of Frye's garrison mentality to *Map*.
- 10 In "Letter to Miguel Otero Silva, in Caracas (1948)," from Section XII of the *Canto General*, Neruda recalls how he found his hands "stained with garbage and sadness" after observing the working conditions of miners, and in so doing connects the act of witnessing to a sense of implication.

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Theory of Addition

It must begin before itself, with want
of want, from something slightly lighter
than longing. Think of moonrise—
No: think of a musician folding silence
into herself like a black sheet
before shaking her voice into
a room. Now think of the moon
passing its borrowed light from window
to window, and of moonflowers
turning their cold heads
to watch its snow-fed path
through night. When a man is starved of air
his cheeks borrow otherwise concealed shades of red
from the room he's in. When he exhales,
something is given to the sea, one part
promise, one part lie.



Skin's Edge

(excerpt)

LXIII

Between god and no-god is the safety of the universe.
Nothing that belongs to the all can be discarded by it, says Plotinus.
The universe is trustworthy; we depend upon it.

The insect eating her way through the magnolia leaves and I
belong to this magnificence: the garden shone upon
by a red sun through smoky skies, by
a low-hung white moon, by striped Leonid showers.

I must remember.

Despair keeps me
on the edge of the bed
feet dangling midnight and cold
mountain air cooling the house
for another hot day tomorrow.

This body is a crucible of dust
my soul its spark of belonging.



Born-Digital Humanities

Marcel O’Gorman

E-Crit: Digital Media, Critical Theory, and the Humanities. U of Toronto P \$50.00

Reviewed by Alan Galey

Marcel O’Gorman’s subtitle sets a great burden upon his book. Given the continuing proliferation of new media, the debate about whether theory has passed, and the perception of a crisis in the humanities, few topics are more fraught than the three he names. *E-Crit* calls humanities scholars to recognize the real difficulty of making the methodological leap from a print-oriented academy into the digital humanities, and to see opportunity in that difficulty.

O’Gorman’s book reacts to such challenges as the one set by Jerome McGann in his 2002 Lyman Award acceptance speech: “*In the next 50 years the entirety of our inherited archive of cultural works will have to be re-edited within a network of digital storage, access, and dissemination*” (McGann’s emphasis). *E-Crit*, like its namesake Electronic Critique interdisciplinary degree program at the University of Detroit Mercy, advances its own set of intellectual methods and academic practices for digitally immersed pedagogy. According to O’Gorman, the program’s Frankfurt school and poststructuralist sensibility positions “resistance and vigilant critique as the cornerstones in a new media studies curriculum that opposes the compartmentalization of knowledge.” *E-Crit* demonstrates the

value of nuanced critical responses to the archival tradition’s call to arms, responses that would interrogate not only the obvious terms in McGann’s statement, such as “network,” “digital,” and “dissemination,” but also the words that quietly deploy imaginative power: “archive,” “inherited,” and most of all, the pronoun “our.”

In response to academic crises on many fronts, O’Gorman advances a worthwhile project: “It is time for the humanities to go digital (beyond archiving printed texts), and time for theory to go digital (beyond observing its own apotheosis in hypertext).” Such a philosophy will be a welcome change for readers experiencing hypertext fatigue (brought on by 1990s triumphalism), or progress fatigue (brought on by humanities computing’s sense of a project-driven onward march); O’Gorman’s writing refreshingly avoids both. *E-Crit* will be of interest to anyone teaching new media, developing new media curricula, or working on image-text dynamics in any medium. The humanities in Canada are exceptionally strong in these areas.

What does it mean to “go digital” in the humanities? O’Gorman’s five chapters offer many specific answers though he cautions that his book offers not a model but a “relay for curricular innovators.” (The *E-Crit* program was only five years old at the time of writing.) Chapter 1 seeks to reimagine scholarly discourse for the digital humanities by examining, as its title signals, “The Canon, the Archive, and the Remainder.” Only the latter term, however, receives

thoroughgoing treatment in the chapter, which provides examples of structural, material, and representational remainders: modes of discourse, such as puns and images, that prove difficult to integrate into rationalist, hierarchical, academic prose. The second chapter is heavily indebted to Friedrich Kittler and W.J.T. Mitchell in its argument for a pictorial turn in academic discourse to reflect the hypervisuality of culture generally. Throughout, O’Gorman’s prose riffs on the surreal art of Stephen Gibb in much the same way that Donna Haraway’s *Modest_Witness@Second_Millennium* weaves its analysis with the art of Lynn Randolph. *E-Crit*’s most engaging image-text-theory interplay appears in connection with the book’s oldest and most canonical material, where the third chapter sees O’Gorman testing his counter-hermeneutic method of “hypericonomy” against the examples of Peter Ramus and William Blake. The second and third chapters are easily the best parts of *E-Crit*. Chapter four, by contrast, loses focus as it shifts topics to Web projects in higher education. O’Gorman here positions his approach next to that of Katharine Hayles, whose material-specific critique he would pair with “material-specific pedagogy, starting with the materiality of the Web.” A compelling idea, but the Web O’Gorman presents here looks more like 1996 than 2006, and, as academic presses should know by now, printed depictions of Web sites rarely work; the static, greyscale screenshots die on the page. (See marcelogorman.net for a better look at O’Gorman’s multimedia projects.) A lively discussion of the postmodern curriculum appears in the fifth chapter, which describes in specific, methodological terms the E-Crit program’s exciting work at Detroit Mercy.

Provisionality is a strategy in O’Gorman’s methods and analysis, one he combines with an *avant-garde* style that varies between playfulness and confrontation. It is one thing to be provisional around a seminar table, and another in a \$50.00 hardcover

monograph from a respected academic press. *E-Crit*’s most serious shortcoming is that its length does not reflect its scope. Given the book’s ambitions, readers may be surprised that its introduction, five chapters, and notes barely exceed 125 pages. (Contrast Alan Liu’s generous, 500-page-plus *The Laws of Cool: Knowledge Work and the Culture of Information*.) Other forms of provisionality have the effect of blunting O’Gorman’s own critique. He repeatedly uses the label “Republic of Scholars” (borrowed from Kittler and the German *Gelehrtenrepublik*) to categorize his intellectual opponents without having to engage their ideas, much as Harold Bloom uses the label “School of Resentment” and Bill O’Reilly uses “secular-progressives.” In a similar tonal misfire, O’Gorman’s opening chapter illustrates the concept of the remainder by expecting the reader to side with him, against sparsely quoted referees for an unnamed electronic journal that once rejected an experimental essay of his. Readers may resent having their sympathies claimed in this manner. *E-Crit* too often seeks to justify where it should persuade.

The unassimilated remainders of O’Gorman’s own book are the conversations it avoids—between new media theorists and archive-minded computing humanists, and between those who have gone digital and those working to get there. Other recent work has staged that conversation with a provisionality similar to O’Gorman’s, but also with due diligence for details. The granular, media-specific analyses of Hayles, Kirschenbaum, Liu, Manovich, and McGann are successful precisely because of a rigour not unlike that which O’Gorman (following John Guillory) rejects. Good theory embraces detail. McGann, in his forecast for the next half-century, points out a goal toward which the digital humanities may or may not progress; *E-Crit*, at its best, prompts us to step back and ask what, and how, “progress” means.

Leaving You with More

Cynthia Zimmerman, ed.

Sharon Pollock: Collected Works, Volume One.

Playwrights Canada \$46.95

Reviewed by George Belliveau

This welcome volume of Sharon Pollock plays edited by Cynthia Zimmerman continues the wonderful trend of exposing the work of Canada's finest playwrights through anthologies. *Sharon Pollock: Collected Works, Volume One* is part of a three-volume set in which Zimmerman highlights a number of Pollock's most important plays. In this first volume, eight plays are presented that mark her early playwriting career. The volume includes her most produced and successful play, *Blood Relations*, which theatrically explores events surrounding Lizzie Borden and the unresolved murder of her parents. Two other plays included are *Walsh* and *The Komagata Maru Incident*, which both trace historical events in Canada depicting moral dilemmas and questionable actions by government officials. *Walsh* examines how Canada (mis)handled the Sitting Bull and Sioux retreat into the Canadian prairies. In *The Komagata Maru Incident*, Pollock takes her audience to Vancouver where Canadian officials turn away a boatload of East Indian immigrants with devastating effects. Pollock's interest in revisiting historical events continues in *One Tiger to a Hill* in which the playwright dramatizes an actual event that saw a classification officer shot to death during a hostage-taking in a British Columbia prison. *Generations* centers on family history, as Pollock explores the challenges of rural life and the meaning of land within an Alberta family. These six Pollock plays have all been previously published and, for the most part, are familiar to those interested in Canadian drama; however, the remaining two plays are lesser known. *Wreck of the National Line* represents one of many youth-targeted plays written by Pollock that have unfortunately remained

unpublished. This particular play examines the tensions within Canadian politics through a musical, light-hearted piece set on the railway line. Pollock also wrote radio dramas, and *Sweet Land of Liberty* represents a fine example of her ability in this medium. In this award-winning play, we witness the deterioration of a Vietnam deserter whose war experiences and family life perpetually haunt him.

In addition to the eight plays, Zimmerman has written a comprehensive introduction about Pollock and her work. She offers thoughtful insights into the playwright's work and shares the critical and academic reception of the plays. The introduction highlights key issues and themes explored in Pollock's oeuvre, which enables the reader to better grasp the complexity and richness of arguably Canada's most important female playwright. A memoir written by Pollock is also included, providing the voice of the strong-minded artist as she shares glimpses of her life in the theatre. A chronology of important dates marks key moments in Pollock's theatre work, such as publications and openings of her major productions. *Sharon Pollock: Collected Works, Volume One* is an important collection of plays for scholars, educators, students and the general public who have interest in Canadian drama, history, feminism, social issues, and fiction. This volume, along with the two forthcoming ones on Pollock's later work, showcases the diversity and depth of a socially driven and internationally acclaimed playwright. Pollock once said that she wants her audiences "to leave with more than what they had when they entered the theatre." I think most readers will leave this collected volume with more than what they had when they first opened the book.



Has History or Hadwin Won?

John Vaillant

The Golden Spruce: A True Story of Myth, Madness and Greed. Vintage Canada \$21.00

Reviewed by Travis V. Mason

All fascination, like love, undermines what the world calls reason. —George Whalley

When George Whalley wrote *The Legend of John Hornby* in 1962, he was responding to a number of cultural factors on the way to critiquing the legendary status of an enigmatic Englishman who starved to death in 1927 on the Thelon River. If Whalley didn't exactly claim to believe the stories he encountered via archival research and anecdotal evidence—that Hornby ran from Edmonton to Athabasca Landing in less than 24 hours, for example—the time that had already passed between the (questionable) events of Hornby's life in Canada and Whalley's documenting of them itself lent an air of legend to the process.

John Vaillant attempts a similar exploration in the well-researched, richly imagined *The Golden Spruce: A True Story of Myth, Madness, and Greed*. While there are parallels, to be sure, between Whalley's Hornby and Vaillant's Grant Hadwin, the differences are what make *The Golden Spruce* a more accessible and timely examination of irrational fascination. Vaillant offers a far less critical account of Hadwin's legendary status than Whalley does of Hornby's, in part because Hadwin's story resonates so poignantly, if frustratingly, with current environmental crises. (*The Golden Spruce* is also a cautionary tale about the results of clear-cutting and capitalistic hubris.) Despite the fact that, with his particular knowledge of wilderness road layout and logging, he could have made a fortune, Hadwin remained out of step with his times, "advocating restraint and modera-

tion at a time [the 1980s] when the logging industry was entering one of its most aggressive phases ever."

What came to be known as the golden spruce (*Picea sitchensis* 'Aurea') began its life, like all other Sitka spruces, as a seed "shaped like a tear drop and about the size of a grain of sand." Somehow, this one seed "with its strange [DNA] message beat [the] abysmal odds" faced by all seeds and "managed to take root," growing for 300 years along Haida Gwaii's Yakoun River between Masset and Skidegate into an impressively healthy sixteen-storey, six-metre-round botanical wonder.

Vaillant has produced much more than a story of a man and the tree he surreptitiously chopped down one rainy night in January 1997. Since the relative closeness of the event does not allow for as focused an exploration of the man, Vaillant wisely and expertly—if, at first glance, unevenly—weaves multiple stories into a narrative equal parts historical (social and natural), biographical, tragic, mythic, cultural, and political. This book is as much about the coastal temperate rainforest along the coasts of mainland British Columbia, Vancouver Island, and Haida Gwaii, a place where "the trail of a person, or the thread of a story, is easily lost." Vaillant's careful reconstruction of the events leading up to that fateful day in January aims not so much to pick up on Hadwin's trail or tie up the story's loose ends but to present seemingly disparate moments, events, and people with a mind to producing a single, comprehensible narrative. It works.

By way of contextualizing Hadwin's act, Vaillant effectively composes biographies of the man and the tree. Among many things, *The Golden Spruce* might be part of a new genre, arbobiography, exemplified perhaps by David Suzuki and Wayne Grady's recent *Tree: A Life Story*. Vaillant also provides histories of European contact with Northwest Coast natives, the West's unsustainable dependence on wood, and the logging

industry's subsequent rise (especially in British Columbia) in the context of technological advances (chainsaws, feller bunchers, log barges). It is also a natural history of chlorosis, the condition marked by yellowing as a result of depleted chlorophyll and a concomitant inability to photosynthesize properly, which explains the golden spruce's rare beauty, if not its ability to survive as long as it did.

In the end, for better or worse, Vaillant offers Hadwin and the sitka spruce he felled as doubles, their uniqueness paralleled in myriad ways. Both organisms were (and in some ways remain) products of a series of chance reactions to chance actions, so much so that eventually, "science and the mathematics of chance fall short" and "myth, faith, or simple wonder must fill the void."

Belonging and Identity

Lisa Grekul

Leaving Shadows: Literature in English by Canada's Ukrainians. U of Alberta P \$34.95

Reviewed by Helen Potrebenco

The phrase "Canada's Ukrainians" might imply that Canada owns a bunch of them, but this book turns out to be an analysis of Ukrainian Canadians writing in English about Ukrainian Canadians. To this end, Grekul examines the literature from the early 1900s to about 1998. She gives a great deal of space to Lysenko, Haas, Ryga, Suknaski, Kulyk Keefer, and Kostash, while pretty much ignoring Jars Balan. She discusses the effects of multiculturalism on funding and publishing, and the tendency for Ukrainian culture to be trimmed down to dancing, singing, perohi, and pysanky.

I wrote my book *No Streets of Gold* because at the time there was a gap in Canadian history regarding the contributions of various immigrant groups. I wrote about the one I was most familiar with. According to Grekul, such ventures had other motivations. The purpose of such

endeavours seems to have something to do with finding their roots or identity or sense of belonging. They feel different, these people, and rush off to find something—sameness? They write about it. It seems hard to believe that people would spend time and money travelling across the country and around the world in order to write about themselves.

Perhaps Grekul's summaries and analysis give me a wrong impression. Grekul's analysis of Sonia Mycak's analysis of one of my stories leaves me knowing nothing of what the story was about. Or perhaps the problem is in analysis itself. Story telling and other forms of art seem to be basic human needs like food and clothing and shelter. A great number of stories are simply stories.

Possibly for the same reasons, I found that Grekul (and other critics) who have dismissed the "bold pioneer" and folklorist view of Ukrainian Canadian history, when presented with descriptions of the actual community, including its internal problems, find it equally unacceptable. Lysenko is dismissed as having internalized negative racist attitudes in her portrayal of life in a Ukrainian Canadian community. Grekul remarks on the lack of romanticization in Kostash's *All of Baba's Children* and my book and how this outraged some Ukrainian Canadians. All of us are described as ambivalent.

There is no discussion of religion and politics. Perhaps the current writers do not write about such topics, but even that seems to me something to remark upon. There is much talk of history but surely you don't have to be Ukrainian to learn of pogroms, forced collectivization, famines, Babi Yar, or Chernobyl.

I noticed with growing disbelief that these writers went "home" to identify and seek their ethnic rewards without knowing the language. Ukrainian is a difficult language for English speaking people to learn and, by the same token, few of the first immigrants ever became fluent in English.

Grekul advises that Kostash decided she must learn Ukrainian but it seems that after four years of study, she still speaks in “broken, stammering syllables.” Being a tourist is great, although Kostash and Kulyk Keefer apparently look beyond the tourist experience, but I can’t think what kinship one could develop without speaking Ukrainian. It seems amazing that Grekul does not comment on this remarkable phenomenon; that she herself speaks only “rudimentary” Ukrainian might account for it.

A further problem is that although Grekul refers to the first Ukrainian immigrants to Canada as “marginalized,” she does not remark on their poverty. Consideration of economics seems pertinent to understanding what being marginalized means. Certain people are less important than other people and if this means that you’re not allowed to sing at the wedding or don’t have the right shoes for each of your daily activities, then it is trivial. But if being marginalized means lacking food and shelter, it is quite another matter. Only in relation to the Canadians travelling to Ukraine, does she remark on the relative poverty of the Ukrainians and the barriers this presents to belonging or identity.

Along with George Ryga, I wish to be defined as a writer without the various hyphens but have found as little success writing about office work as writing about my mother. While Grekul complains that Ukrainian Canadian literature is ignored within the Canadian literary institutions, she should be aware that the problem might be explained by class rather than ethnicity.

Grekul ends by saying that Andrew Suknaski and Myrna Kostash “are the two writers who emerge from this book as the most promising avatars of the future of Ukrainian Canadian literature because they emphasize the notion that reinvention is the key to maintaining ties to their ethnic roots.” Reinvention? This can mean a lot of things including validating the early descriptions of Ukrainian immigrants as

subhuman. In the context, Grekul possibly means that a writer could be both Canadian and Ukrainian without having to travel to a distant poor country, or learning its language.

There has been progress. Recently I took a copy of *No Streets of Gold* to a used bookstore—the proprietor said happily: “Oh good, there’s always a market for Canadian history.”

Memorable Characters on Road to Nowhere

Liza Potvin

The Traveller’s Hat. Raincoast \$21.95

Reviewed by Kathryn Carter

Writer Liza Potvin is best remembered for her 1992 memoir *White Lies (for my Mother)*, which won the Edna Staebler award for creative non-fiction. The conceit in her recent collection of short stories, her first such collection, is the idea that all of us are travellers of one sort or another. Potvin signals her intention by beginning the collection with lengthy quotations from Hesiod and Homer and a shorter one from Socrates: “Let him that would move the world first move himself.” Although the book features memorable characters who do travel in time (through memory) and through space, their destinations remain persistently and frustratingly obscure.

Like the collection itself, several of the stories are prefaced by epigraphs meant to be illuminating. Generally I am happy as a reader to hold onto even the most tenuous connection between epigraph and story. In one instance, the title makes the connection: “Wings” refers both to instruments of flight and to the chicken wings served in a bar. However, my quest to make connections, seemingly encouraged by the author, was often rebuffed. Take for example the story “Open Skies,” a six-page narrative that amounts to a tone poem taking reference from a snippet of poetry by Elizabeth

Smart. The story culminates in a moving image when she describes the inevitability of divorce as a storm: "For some time I thought I might avert the storm or avoid it entirely if I merely changed my perspective. Now I saw that I would need to stand directly in its path and let it pass through me and then watch it slowly move past me." I want some slender thread to connect the story to Smart's poem describing women's pain in spatial terms.

In general, the characters are no strangers to women's pain. Kathryn, for example, is abandoned by her husband; Joan is abandoned by her husband; a twelve-year-old narrator is trapped with a single mother and a colicky infant brother; Mary Louise suffers alone with an unwanted pregnancy at Christmas in a foreign land; Patricia is trapped in a cycle of unending work made complicated by caring for her handicapped son; Linda is raped. Although the characters face difficult times with their own flawed natures, the strength of this collection lies in the sympathy the reader develops for them. For this reason, I was especially dismayed to see that the characters were left spinning out into the ether on the wheels of cliché. The epiphanies routinely expected at the ends of short stories are deferred, left suspended. Several endings defy resolution; the characters are not delivered from their situations. This, too, is fine and even gratifying if the reader gets to share in some larger perspective that the characters cannot access.

Because transcendence is deferred, the final story has much to deliver; it seems to promise that larger perspective; at its best, it could reveal the unobserved golden thread shot through the previous stories. The final story, "The Traveller's Hat," begins boldly enough by taking the form of letters between Hermes and Pandora, (prefaced—again confusingly—by Pierre Trudeau's comments on the pleasures of travelling by canoe). But its promise is not realized as the

story becomes too amused by its own cleverness in riffing off of excerpts from a travel guide. It ends with Pandora's declaration of romantic love, "not one other face or story could ever win my heart away from you," a declaration that is distinctly at odds with the denunciations of romance in earlier stories. Is there a message here? If so, it is muted.

Potvin would do best to follow the advice from one of the characters: "Tsk. Tsk. Stay present. . . . You are here, she says to herself. You are here." Let's hope the next collection of stories untangles itself from conceptual experimentalism and becomes free to travel in human depths, to put its feet down on the solid and tangled ground of "here."

If Women Wrote Them

Marjorie Anderson, ed.

Dropped Threads 3: Beyond the Small Circle.
Vintage Canada \$24.95

Reviewed by Roberta Birks

In "Believe You Me," contributor Lorri Neilsen Glenn invokes the Wife of Bath's claim that "all [the] tales were written by men and scholars—now if women wrote them very different they would be." And the essays in *Dropped Threads 3: Beyond the Small Circle* are different: they offer us different ways of understanding as they challenge our certainty about what we've been taught is "truth."

In this, the third *Dropped Threads* collection, Marjorie Anderson resumes the telling of women's stories she began with Carol Shields in *Dropped Threads: What We Aren't Told* (2001) and *Dropped Threads 2: More of What We Aren't Told* (2003). Here, though, rather than asking contributors to talk about the secrets that have haunted their lives, Anderson has asked them "to write about their significant discoveries of meaning, to pass on what they *have to tell*." So they do: they tell about their own hard-won truths.

In the Foreword, Anderson remembers a moment when “truth and meaning became provisional,” when “the gap between language and complete understanding vanished.” She finds that women’s narratives, their “individual . . . discover[ies] of meaning,” coalesce into a whole that helps fill the gap, helps propel her beyond her own “small circle” of understanding. Ann-Marie MacDonald eloquently introduces the stories, explaining that in order to reach beyond our small circles, in order to be compassionate, “we . . . must imagine ourselves into one another’s points of view”; we must listen.

These different points of view are divided into four sections, the title for each derived from its first story. The first section, “A Kind of Benediction,” draws its title from Margaret Atwood’s discussion in “Polonia” of Polonius’ advice to Laertes: she cautions the reader that young people may reject parental advice but will welcome the blessing that accompanies it. Contributors in this section offer both advice and benediction; among them, Natalie Fingerhut talks about the advantages of daring to be different (“In Praise of Misfits”); Jodi Lundgren shares what she has learned about self-esteem, risk-taking, and security (“Pitch: A Dancer’s Journal”); and Patricia Pearson worries about the effects of early feminism on sexual attitudes among young women today (“Notes on a Counterrevolution”).

The second section, “A Clarity of Vision,” borrows its title from “Barefoot in the Snow,” in which Beth Powning considers the lessons of menopause, aging and time, concluding that aging facilitates new ways of understanding the world. Authors in this section reveal how new contexts have influenced their vision, and many focus on what these new perspectives have taught them about family. Barbara Mitchell talks about creating a place for herself in the “luminescent” family of her famous father-in-law, W.O. Mitchell; (“Finding My Way”); Judy Rebeck charts her growth from a well-behaved child

through teenage rebellion to recognition of the role of collaboration in resisting oppressions (“Rebellion and Beyond”); Barbara Scott (“Tethers”), Tracey Ann Coveart (“I Am a Mother”), and Silken Laumann (“Uncharted Waters”) all examine the changing but ever-powerful bonds of daughters and mothers.

The third section takes its title from Aritha van Herk’s “Work and its Dubious Delights,” in which she points out that moments from the past—in her case the challenges of being a woman in academia—transmit “a long echo” into the present. Among the stories about the past’s effects on the present, both Barbara McLean (“From the Ashes”) and Maggie de Vries (“The Only Way Past”) struggle with the silence around the deaths of their sisters that caused them years of pain and uncertainty; Janice Williamson remembers the distances she and her adopted Chinese daughter traversed to come together (“Fú: The Turning Point”); and Heather Mallick warns us against allowing the negative judgements of others to echo in our beliefs about ourselves (“The Inoculation”).

“Conspicuous Voices,” Frances Itani’s recollection of how the “adults of [her] world . . . bestowed love and laughter, gifts beyond reckoning,” provides the final section’s title “Gifts Beyond Reckoning.” Here authors count their blessings and pass them on to the reader. For instance, Andrea Curtis explains how the women of the “writing circle” she guided at a women’s shelter, by sharing their hopes and fears, infused her with new strength (“The Writers’ Circle”), and Susan Riley shares what she learned about dignity from her uncle, who died incarcerated, having chosen to confess to a crime committed by his son (“Larry’s Last Resort”).

The stories in *Dropped Threads 3* encourage women to be confident, to challenge what they have been taught, to recognize that they are not alone. Sitting down with the book is, indeed, like wrapping yourself in a big, generous, warm, collaborative quilt.

Sounding Some Poems

Derek Beaulieu

Fractal Economies. Talonbooks \$15.95

Sharon Thesen

The Good Bacteria. Anansi \$18.95

Ken Babstock

Airstream Land Yacht. Anansi \$18.95

Reviewed by Christine Stewart

In Derek Beaulieu's *Fractal Economies*, language regards itself, stalks itself, begins, slowly, to eat itself. The poems devour words and shred meaning. In the first section, "surface," in "velvet touch lettering," the technology of Letraset (the slim chances of its smooth application to the page) ensures that intention and meaning are disturbed. The second page bears a creased and crumbling *t* and *h* and possibly an *r* or a tilting, falling *i*. The fourth letter could be a backward *i* (or a shard of *n*). Under the fragmented line on which the letters balance there is (possibly) a corroded *z*. I read *thriz*—with a faint thrill. But the letters could mean almost anything—or nothing at all. Beaulieu's use of Letraset is exemplary of his poetic "where the author function is fulfilled by both the biological 'author' of the text and the technology by which it is created." The maimed Letraset manifests the mortality of signification. Meaning's demise quickens after "summer skies" (which is inexplicably beautiful) when there is a shift to typed text and then to the edge of a Xerox smudge. Page 39 is a faded rectangular shape of points of ink. The focus is tight; the reader is faced with the basics of print technology: black ink, white page. At the end of the book, perhaps anticipating readerly difficulty, Beaulieu provides an "afterward after words" that defines his concrete poetry as rhizomatic writing. The "afterward" is interesting, but as justification of the poetry it is unnecessary. For a poem to pare down to its basic elements is sensible. To show how meaning is made is the work

of any poem. In *Fractal Economies*, we must face meaning, its shifting points and inky guts.

Sharon Thesen's *The Good Bacteria* is also a work of surfaces. Layers of shoes, nostalgia, homunculus, time, Sweet Marie, hair, grief, Scratch and Win, fire, bills, cigarettes, sky, mist are that which comprise us: "You are abducted by aliens from outer space / who remove the steel pin from your hip and the silver hoop / from your sidekick's left earlobe" ("Sidekicks"). We are our carapaces, hinged, pinned—not whole, but absurd. And mundane. "Again" begins with the texture of bleached hair: "fried and dry / after April's appointment / to go blond." "Bike Ride to the Rib House" turns on a blue tin roof that is actually an awning and not a glimpse of the lake at all. The possibility of depth, the promise of a transition from the quotidian to an epiphany is withheld. Surface denies depth; humour refuses seriousness. The destination of the bike ride is the Rib House: meat, bones, and sauce. Even in "Weeping Willow" (first published by Nomados), an elegy to Angela, a dear and lost friend, the expectation of depth is thwarted. "Angela" the speaker laments "I can't write love poems." "That's alright" Angela says. And it is alright because "Weeping Willow" is a love poem, as they all are—in the same way that the poems of William Carlos Williams and Lorine Niedecker are love poems: words attending to the surfaces of word and world.

Airstream Land Yacht by Ken Babstock is a different matter: dense lyric and bloody clever—set in four sections (Air, Stream, Land, Yacht). Wallace Stevens introduces Air: "An Arctic effulgence flaring on the frame / Of everything he is." Like Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*; or, *The Modern Prometheus*—the monstrous hand-stitched subject longs for home. The shifting edges of the searching poetic I lights and configures a subjectivity that I, as reader, recognize and think I want. Exerting a

gravitational pull, the poems absorb the reader into the grief of seeking, beyond surface: "On the surface / of the earth are us, who look in error, and only seem." "Subject, with Rhyme, Riding a Swell" confesses, claims depth, yearns to illuminate our dark, to catch our slipping, our seeming: "I tethered there unoptioned stayed to no coming no visit no / gloried knowing to sing of carried on backward at darkening / like the thing sightlessness wants of its own." The text's I wants and wants: "One wants to be in love / but, moreover, one wants to be one, narratively speaking . . ." And boats figure strongly, perhaps as place, the metaphysics of an in between, a composed and floating story "to tether" the searching subject to meaning's departure, to find something real: "a smell that seize[s] you by the sinuses." Looking for a real, "I'd attached my name / to a plate then attached the plate to me." Seeking an appellation, "trying to appear whole." Longing to be, to not look "in error, and only seem," the poems offer up a gorgeous yearning that admits but cannot find ease in what Beaulieu and Thesen (differently) provoke and adore: "What's here, now, for a time / was something else entirely."

Overheard in Dreams

Nicole Brossard; Susan Rudy, ed.;
Ann-Marie Wheeler, trans.

Fluid Arguments. Mercury \$19.95

Catherine Lake and Nairne Holtz, eds.

No Margins: Writing Canadian Fiction in Lesbian.
Insomniac \$21.95

Reviewed by Jes Battis

Along with Anne Carson, Nicole Brossard was the first Canadian writer and critic who convinced me to become a doctoral student. I had been fumbling through my MA in literature, trying frantically to keep up with the growing stacks of post-structuralist theory, when I encountered Carson's *Autobiography of Red* and Brossard's *Mauve Desert* in a graduate course. I was so

enthralled by a repetitive phrase throughout *Mauve Desert*, "there are memories for digging into words without defiling graves / I cannot get close to any you," that I would hear it in dreams. It is therefore a distinctive honour and pleasure for me to compose a review of *Fluid Arguments*, the latest edition of Brossard's critical essays, as well as of *No Margins*, the recent collection of Canadian lesbian fiction compiled by Catherine Lake and Nairne Holtz.

Brossard first proposed a queer-inflected perspective for women in literature, an "aerial" perspective, in her 1983 *Aerial Letter*, building upon her poetic work during the 1970s (*A Book, Le Centre blanc*) and such essays as "Redefining Literary Criticism" (1979). Since then, she has coined terms such as *scribelle* and *herotics*, published critical work on Djuna Barnes and other revolutionary lesbian writers, and produced a canon of Queer-Québécoise (*Queerbéquoise?*) literature that continues to impact humanities and cultural studies across the globe. *Mauve Desert* saved my life as a baby-queer grad student and emerging scholar, and much of the work compiled for *Fluid Arguments* is just as contentious, savagely political, and fabulously impertinent. And sexy. Brossard herself connects lesbian desire with intelligence, with a desire for "the woman who makes sense to us," and just as her work dazzles us intellectually, it also turns us on. Having just watched the film *Shortbus* by John Cameron Mitchell, I keep thinking about the character James' lament: "I know that I'm surrounded by love, but it all ends at my skin. Nothing gets in." Brossard's writing gets in.

Fluid Arguments presents writing from approximately 1975 to the present, including the eponymous essay that incorporates fragments from earlier and later works—a fitting ambi-textual centrefold for Brossard's body of work. Beginning with her 1979 essay, we are told that "redefining literary criticism has nothing to do with criticism. It has to do with changes in reality," a reality

that Brossard, in her epigraph, also calls “fictional.” This is a paradox, a sense of negative capability, that Brossard encourages throughout her work. In “Poetic Politics,” she admits that “my basic intention [early on] was to make trouble,” and she continues to be a luminary troublemaker, to trouble both gender and sexuality through her own pre-Butler politics of the performative. “Understanding the intimacy of things has cost me enormous energy and despair,” she says, “[but] everything’s fine because there’s a text. And that fills up a life so well.”

Throughout 25 critical essays and excerpts, Brossard tackles Plato and Sappho, anti-feminist language, what she calls the “male management” of sexual difference, Djuna Barnes and early-lesbian fiction, the massacre of 14 women at the École Polytechnique of the Université de Montréal on December 6, 1989, and geopolitics post-9/11. “The ideology we live in is not against imagination . . . it even markets it.” In “Fluid Arguments,” a hybrid poem-song, she offers her own review of the collection-to-come: “I would want this text in action, full of fire.” The translations by Anne-Marie Wheeler, Susanne de Lotbinière-Harwood, and Brossard herself are equally “full of fire,” riding the hyphenate tension between French, English, and Québécois as a delicate and fluid linkage, a hinge, or perhaps its own *fluid argument*.

Like bodies, she says, “manuscripts are always threatened by time, humidity, dust and fire.” The text of *Fluid Arguments* is riddled with sly signifiers and deictic markers, scrawled corrections in the margins of some essays, images of Brossard herself overlaid with barely discernible text, and autobiographical material that blurs and bleeds into the most strident political essays, poetic jeremiads, and cries into the dark. Brossard writes in constant tension between the cultural imagination and what she calls “the maginary,” the manuscript or palimpsest of the operable world that global technology

and invasive colonialism have produced. And into this maginary come other queer texts—the works of Dionne Brand, Daphne Marlatt, and other lesbian-Canadian authors whose writing is compiled in *No Margins*.

Lake and Holtz asked their contributors to think about “recurrent themes born from a lesbian identity and a Canadian geography.” Oddly enough, the authors’ responses are included in separate epigraphs, rather than presented or inflected through their choice of literary excerpts. Although the texts in *No Margins* share certain synergies, they are not organized thematically or historically. Dionne Brand’s excerpt from *In Another Place, Not Here* is immediately followed by a snippet from Brossard’s *Baroque At Dawn*, but then Larissa Lai and Lydia Kwa are grouped together as Asian-Canadian writers. Some of the most provocative “Canadian fiction in lesbian” is mentioned only in the book’s annotated bibliography, such as Phyllis Webb’s *Naked Poems* and the recent work of Helen Humphreys. (*Leaving Earth and Wild Dogs* are not even referenced.) I understand that a single volume cannot possibly present a complete canon of Canadian lesbian fiction, nor would the consolidation of such a canon even prove politically positive, but the slim volume *No Margins* can not possibly focus on indexical forces as broad as “lesbian” and “geography” without failing to deliver a complete spectrum of queer-Canadian writing.

That said, the excerpts are diverse and powerful—everything from Brand’s classic *In Another Place, Not Here* (although wouldn’t a more recent choice be *At the Full and Change of the Moon?*) to “The Sewing Box,” a short story written by Larissa Lai (I expected an excerpt from *Salt Fish Girl*). Knutson claims cheerfully in the introduction that “fiction by Canadian lesbian writers is today being read in airports, living rooms . . . and universities,” which sounds

suspiciously like an editorial note from *Canadian Living* magazine. Knutson also goes on to say that “Lesbian literature is new, as genres go,” a phrase which should have been frantically deleted by any vigilant copy-editor. Virginia Woolf, Radcliffe Hall, Djuna Barnes, Jeanette Winterson? Not to mention the queer cultural criticism pioneered by Mary McIntosh and Esther Newton, Eve Sedgwick and Judith Butler, as well as critic-writers such as Audre Lorde, Adrienne Rich, Brossard, and Brand. *No Margins* leaves a lot out, but it does offer at least a collection of important and recent lesbian-Canadian fiction, along with a useful bibliography for curious and hungry readers.

Poetry Weather

Sylvia Legris

Nerve Squall. Coach House \$16.95

Mark Abley

The Silver Palace Restaurant. McGill-Queen's UP \$16.95

Diana Hartog

Ink Monkey. Brick \$18.00

sheri-d wilson

Re:Zoom. Frontenac \$15.95

Reviewed by Meredith Quartermain

Grumpiness as a major trope is hard to pull off over the length of an entire book. In *Nerve Squall*, which won the prestigious 2006 Griffin Prize, Sylvia Legris sustains this perspective with considerable panache. Through the lexicon of electrical storms, migraines, and Hitchcock-like threatening birds, Legris invokes an irritable world, full of foreboding and anxiety. One is inclined to think it is the world we actually inhabit with its global crises of overpopulation, wage slavery, biosphere destruction, climate change, and interminable ugly wars. These poems seem to mimic the mood of our times—the colossal headache of the planet which humans have unleashed, though

Legris does not make this connection particularly explicit.

Fish are an important motif in this disturbed world. “Barbed” is the title of the first section, which includes drawings by Legris of fish swept in by wind currents into the air, and a series called “Fishblood Sky,” which makes the whole atmosphere into a watery world. “Falling fish; wounded fish; carp carp carp,” she writes, ever playful with subtextual connections, “Stench of cod liver and creosote. / Everything slips.” The last section of the book, entitled “Truncated,” begins with a telling quotation, “The cameraman has tried to make an amputee whole again”; it closes with a drawing called “Fish / stump” showing a dead fish on a sawed-off tree.

In the middle section, entitled “Ornithological Tautologies,” birds reign supreme, in poems entitled “Ravenousness” (referring to “run-of-the-kill carrion”), “Strange Birds; Twitching Birds,” “Birds (An Apocalyptic Poem?),” and “Agitated Sky Etiology.” The poems are liberally peppered with bird calls, screeches, and hollers, and words mimicking or describing bird-like sounds:

Kittiwake Kittiwake Kittiwake (*getaway-getaway-getaway*).

Thorny nerves and bird-suspended bridges. O *frigate frigate* frigatebirds—even pelicans won't look you in the eye. The sky creepy with rooks and here you are, condemned, to the wrong side of the board walk—
checkcheckcheckcheckcheckcheckcheck—
a never ending game you are destined to bungle.

Legris is intensely playful with puns, half-rhymes, rhythmic echoes, and onomatopoeia—at times rather formulaically, but often very subtly. Her poems rise like wind squalls in gusts of words, whirling insomniac dithyrambs; but there is much method in this Dionysian madness.

Mark Abley, in contrast, is a quietly ironic

writer with a fondness for conventional rhyme and transferred epithets (“stammering river,” “spreadeagled land”), which he puts to good use. A delightful series, “After Pinocchio,” poignantly explores the education of young boys, and calls for rewriting the story:

Allow him his raucous innocence,
his rude brand of fun.
Allow him to keep his father
if Geppetto accepts a son

who may not follow orders
and won't be whittled away
by anyone who sees pleasure
as the herald of decay.

The high point of the collection is a sequence of 23 prose poems, “Food: A Travelling Quartet,” which brilliantly juxtaposes four voices: three describing travels in Croatia, Grand Manan, and Hong Kong, and a fourth telling the Innu story “How Wolverine Got Stuck in a Bear’s Skull.” In other sections of the book, we find Abley enjoys poking fun: at himself having a vasectomy; at Canadians photographing mountains or fly-fishing in the Bow River; at Italian phrase-book notions of the world. The poem that gives the book its title “The Guangzhou Engineering Student: A Letter” concerns a young woman telling her father she won’t be coming home for new year celebrations:

... her name is Lo Chung,
and for seven months she has served the public
in the Silver Palace Restaurant. Father,
you have been young, can you please imagine
the joy of wandering a city with my friends
on a Saturday night, not discussing metal-
lurgy.

Abley is also an angry poet, who uses humour to address pressing social and environmental issues. In “Labrador Duck,” a museum duck has a thing or two to say about its presumed extinction, and “Dominion” takes issue with Biblical decrees giving humans dominion over the earth.

Ink monkeys, Diana Hartog explains, are 200-gram monkeys who slept in desk drawers or brush pots and were “once kept by

scholars to prepare ink, pass brushes and turn pages.” In the title poem of this collection an ink monkey dips his tail and begins its own poems, commenting “the best lot for a poet” is to be ignored. Perhaps the ink monkey’s action implies that the best poems emerge when the poet relinquishes control and the poem itself, inhabited by its own spirit, determines its course—as in Hartog’s very fine series in this collection, entitled “Japanese Prints,” based on woodblock landscapes of the Tokaido Road by the Japanese master Utagawa Hiroshige. With haiku-like brevity and startling contrasts, the poems in this series are drawn with simple and powerful brush-strokes, along the way contemplating a Japanese tradition, the “Farewell Poem,” “to be intoned on the eve of one’s death” after being “carried about for years in the head of the poet.” In another series, “The Jellyfish Suite,” Hartog uses the image of the jellyfish to think through human perception and dream, likening the mind’s eye to a Portuguese man-of-war glistening, “near-invisible, adrift on the surface tension while dangling fathoms down, a hidden agenda of stinging cells.” There’s lots of wry humour and quiet observation in this collection, where at one moment you will hear about a lynx crossing a forest clearing and the next will consider the moon over Hollywood.

All titles in *Re:Zoom* begin with “Re:” creating amusing puns such as “Re:finery of Bella Donna” or “Re: Re: Re:member Snapshot” as in the subject line of numerous email replies. Founder and Artistic Director of the Calgary International Spoken Word Festival, sheri-d wilson writes for entertaining, public performance, a chatty style of verse. At her best, as in an attack on US imperialism in “Re: We Are the Domesticators,” wilson’s poems are witty and pointed. Readers who prefer poetry written for the page will likely find *Re:Zoom* somewhat wordy and burdened with rap-like doggerel (“cry of the loon on the harvest moon”).

Targets and Referents

Rey Chow

The Age of the World Target: Self-Referentiality in War, Theory, and Comparative Work. Duke UP
\$24.95

Reviewed by Lily Cho

The Age of the World Target asks us to return again to thinking about how we know what we think we know. Through a series of three loosely connected essays, Rey Chow tracks a double movement wherein language has become increasingly insecure while knowledge production has become increasingly bound to the imperatives of military security. Chow suggests that post-structuralism has dislodged the security of the way in which language can refer to things. This loosening of the relation between words and things results in an interiority, a turning in, so that language has become self-referential.

Riffing on the philosophical concept of self-referentiality, Chow uses the term to mark the ways in which language has lost power and thus must gain power by referring to itself again and again: "Having lost its age-old agency, language can now derive its strength only, and paradoxically, from its own powerlessness. In what Foucault calls 'the Mallarméan discovery of the word in its impotent power,' literature perpetuates itself by referencing itself, ad infinitum, and in that manner takes on the import of a *deep interior*." Chow connects this interiority to a move from the Heideggerian idea of the world as picture to the world as target, to a critique of theory, and to a critique of comparative literature. Ultimately, she wants to follow Deleuze's reading of Foucault and highlight the "illusory interiority in order to restore words and things to their constitutive exteriority."

In her discussion of a move toward understanding the world as a target, Chow focuses specifically on area studies and its role in a form of knowledge production which is not innocent. War and peace are

the obverse and reverse of each other. For Chow, area studies, the work of learning and knowing the cultural other (think of the repeated calls for internationalization in various university strategic plans), functions as one way in which not only to see the world, but also to target it. Echoing Harry Harootian's charge that area studies failed to become a "genuinely alternative site of knowledge production" in its failure to take up Edward Said's critique of Orientalism, Chow argues that the discipline has instead become complicit with a "*strategic logic*" of knowledge production that is "fully inscribed into the politics and ideology of war." In missing the opportunity provided by Said, area studies left the work of post-colonialism to English and the study of British colonialism rather than initiating a comparative study of colonialism and its aftermath. Understanding this targeting of the world as xenophobia functioning under the alibi of knowledge production and higher learning, Chow also notes the violence of the inward turn of this strategic logic. Pointing to the 1995 Oklahoma City bombing, she notes that the "worst domestic terrorist incident in US history . . . took place with the force of an emblem: the vicious circle of the-world-as-target had returned to its point of origin." In this instance, self-referentiality contains its own violence.

In the second essay, Chow turns to the work of language in the aftermath of post-structuralism. She focuses on the figure of the woodcutter in Roland Barthes' *Mythologies*. Noting that Barthes invests that figure with fixity, she suggests that this figure of fixity girds and haunts the unmooring of language from its referents, which is the hallmark of post-structuralist theory. Chow recognizes that this unmooring enables many of the interventions in identity politics while also acknowledging that these interventions are haunted by the figure of the woodcutter (or what we might still think of as essentialism). Identity politics thus mim-

ics the self-referentiality of literature by turning in on itself and referring endlessly to problems such as resistance in the form of hybridity. Suggesting a turn away from the “banalized and bankrupt language of resistance,” Chow argues instead for understanding referentiality “as a limit.”

The final essay in the volume examines the continuing Eurocentrism in the discipline of comparative literature. Chow suggests that comparativism is not guaranteed by a multiplicity of languages. She argues that, for non-European projects, there is an inherent engagement with European literature and theory which is inescapable but which also makes those projects already comparative even when they seem to be just about one region, language, or literature. She gives the example of Chatterjee’s engagement with Indian nationalism, which seems to attend only to the problem of nationalism in postcolonial India, but which nonetheless engages in a critique of European models of nations and nationalism. Chow thus identifies the farce of an understanding of comparative literature which insists on dismissing such projects as not comparative. According to Chow, comparative literature projects which engage only with Europe are deeply self-referential. And non-European projects that may seem deeply self-referential (single region, literature, language) are profoundly comparative.

Taken together, these essays offer a trenchant call to look outward, to embrace the possibility of a security between words and things, to risk holding references to their referents.



Voyages et migrations

Guylaine Massoutre

Escale océan. Le Noroît 18,95 \$

Antonio D’Alfonso

En italiques: Réflexions sur l’ethnicité. L’Interligne 17,95 \$

Compte rendu par Catherine Khordoc

Rappelant à la fois le récit de voyage et la biographie littéraire, les neuf textes de Massoutre rassemblés dans ce petit volume, parus précédemment dans *Le Devoir en 2002*, sont consacrés à la visite d’une demeure d’écrivain. Celle qui a écrit *L’Atelier de danse* (Fides 2004) et édité *Hubert Aquin. Point de fuite* (Leméac 1995), pose cette fois-ci son regard sur le lieu de création d’auteurs qui ne semblent pas avoir grand-chose en commun si ce n’est qu’ils sont des auteurs du 20^e siècle: Gabrielle Roy, Anne Hébert, Marie-Claire Blais, Marguerite Yourcenar, Julien Gracq, Pierre Loti, Marcel Proust, Gabriele D’Annunzio et Nikos Kazantzakis. Ces textes relativement courts évoquent non seulement le lieu où l’écrivain s’est assis pour écrire mais aussi la poésie du lieu qui était peut-être source d’inspiration, tissant l’espace physique aux textes qui y ont été créés. On ressent à la lecture de ces textes une profonde admiration pour ces auteurs ainsi qu’une fascination pour le processus de création. Il est certes difficile d’établir ce qui, dans un décor ou un paysage, a pu donner lieu aux mots, aux phrases, aux récits de ces auteurs, mais là n’est pas le but de Massoutre. Il s’agit plutôt de se laisser bercer dans le « décor [...] envoûtant. Il devenait impossible de différencier la perception de la réalité, les souvenirs, les rêves et la connaissance des œuvres. » Un ouvrage qui ne se veut ni scientifique ni critique, mais qui renoue agréablement les liens entre auteur, œuvre et lecteur.

En italiques de Antonio D’Alfonso rassemble une dizaine d’articles publiés d’abord dans diverses revues, puis dans une première édition en anglais en 1996 chez Guernica, la

maison d'édition fondée et dirigée par D'Alfonso (*In Italics: In Defense of Ethnicity*) ainsi qu'en français chez Balzac en 2000. Toujours est-il que les questions portant sur l'identité plurielle de l'individu qui a immigré et des communautés diasporales au cœur de ces essais demeurent pertinentes. D'Alfonso fonde ses réflexions sur sa propre situation personnelle d'Italien né à Montréal pour introduire la notion d'identité « italique », qui serait le « dénominateur commun » unissant les Italiens qui vivent en Italie ainsi que la diaspora italienne dispersée un peu partout dans le monde. Il convient sans doute d'avoir recours à un terme qui permet d'identifier et le peuple italien vivant toujours en Italie et les diasporas italiennes, et le choix du mot « italique » a certainement quelque chose de séduisant. Cependant, ce que cette notion implique demeure vague; D'Alfonso avoue d'ailleurs la « difficulté de définir convenablement la culture italique ». Si l'auteur remet en question un nationalisme menaçant et dangereux, il revendique par contre une affirmation ethnique qui semble quelque peu paradoxale. Or, les questions que soulève D'Alfonso sur les communautés diasporales et sur la réalisation d'un état pluriculturel méritent notre attention puisque les enjeux touchent de près la société dans laquelle nous vivons, la forme qu'elle prendra et comment ceux qui y vivent conceptualisent leur appartenance à cette société.

Intertexte et identité

André Lamontagne

Le roman québécois contemporain : les voix sous les mots. Fides 29,95 \$

Compte rendu par Marilyn Randall

L'ouvrage d'André Lamontagne a pour objectif de « décrire la façon dont le roman québécois, à une période cruciale de son histoire [1970-1993], convoque consciemment des textes littéraires » et postule « que l'inter-

textualité du roman québécois traduit son évolution et porte les signes de sa différence. » On constate, d'une part, une « québéciation » des références intertextuelles et, d'autre part, leur diversification, signalant, dans le premier cas, l'autonomisation de l'institution littéraire québécoise et, dans le deuxième, son ouverture non seulement envers l'autre, mais à une conception nouvelle et plurielle de soi.

Les études de cas sont menées avec finesse et intelligence et rassemblent des textes d'horizons divers qui échappent souvent au canon critique. Chaque chapitre, consacré à un roman individuel, peut se lire en isolation, mais la cohérence du tout est assurée par la thématique intertextuelle et par l'intérêt constant pour découvrir « la poétique et le fonctionnement interprétatif de l'intertextualité ». Cette poétique et ce fonctionnement sont infléchis communément par la problématique identitaire où les narrateurs-scripteurs évoluent sous l'influence des multiples mémoires—individuelle et collective, nationale et internationale, littéraire, populaire et sociale—qui les informent de même qu'elles les dépassent, les déforment. Dans *L'Amélanchier* et dans *Don Quichotte de la Démanche*, un mouvement semblable : la quête de soi et du pays sont une « plongée vers l'ailleurs » et un « récit de fondation qui s'ouvre à jamais au récit de l'autre ». Dans *Maryse*, roman post-moderne et féministe, la quête d'une femme, d'un peuple et du roman québécois passe par une désacralisation institutionnelle qui replace la culture dans le quotidien. *La Québécoïte* et *Comment faire l'amour avec un Nègre* . . . renversent le rapport à l'Autre qui marquait le « roman national » québécois, la migration et l'altérité articulant une « tension de l'identitaire et de l'hétérogène » (L'Hérault). Dans *La rage* et *La tournée d'automne*, finalement, la ré-appropriation territoriale et l'américanité s'expriment par un nomadisme literal, littéraire; un métissage culturel, linguistique et textuel. La problé-

matique identitaire des romans de la période est partout axée sur une réflexion sur l'identité littéraire.

Il ne faudrait pas s'attendre à un développement théorique sur l'intertextualité, cet objectif occupant une partie importante d'un ouvrage précédent (*Les mots des autres. La poétique intertextuelle des oeuvres de Hubert Aquin*, 1992). Ici, l'auteur s'appuie sur l'évocation des principaux théoriciens du concept afin de mieux écarter le débat sur la frontière à établir entre l'intertextualité et l'interdiscursivité, cette dernière jugée trop générale, malgré les « avancées intéressantes » qu'elle propose, pour être opératoire. Ce débat aurait pu fournir l'occasion d'un renouveau du concept sur le plan théorique, surtout que de nombreux exemples évoqués par l'auteur chevauchent cette frontière et appellent une mise au point du champ intertextuel.

Concept donc à la fois vaste et pointu, « fédératif » et impérialiste, ancien, moderne et post-moderne, l'intertextualité mérite d'être revisitée en profondeur et relue à la mesure de l'évolution des pratiques. Pourquoi, alors, faut-il faire l'économie du terme dans un titre dont le vague sert mal l'intérêt des propos? Serait-ce pour écarter un concept devenu, selon certains, trop général pour être opératoire? Une simple référence à « l'intertextualité » aurait mieux servi le texte et orienté la lecture dans le bon sens. De même, l'insistance dans le titre sur le roman québécois « contemporain » crée des attentes qu'un corpus remontant à 1970 doit nécessairement décevoir.

Or c'est justement la fonction de l'intertextualité à négocier les multiples relations entre mémoire et identité qui distingue le corpus étudié de celui évoqué dans la conclusion qui, elle, s'ouvre sur un corpus plus récent, correspondant plus étroitement à la notion de littérature « contemporaine ». Ici se pose la question de la disparition de la littérature québécoise—non seulement comme référence intertextuelle importante

au sein des oeuvres, mais aussi comme paradigme interprétatif d'une littérature devenue, selon Nepveu, « post-québécoise ». L'étude de l'intertextualité dans le roman « post-québécois » se fait attendre, et André Lamontagne est la personne désignée pour l'entreprendre.

Splendeurs et misères du naufrage

Vittorio Frigerio

Naufragé en terre ferme. Prise de Parole 25,00\$

Compte rendu par Nicole Côté

Le titre est inspirant; de même, la jaquette d'Olivier Lasser, et l'intrigue, très particulière : un journaliste pantoufflard, Gene, demande à son ami Ned, traducteur de son métier, de jouer au détective pour découvrir qui est le blond et athlétique amnésique repêché dans les eaux du lac Ontario. Ned retrouve l'amnésique dans les jardins de l'hôpital psychiatrique, accompagné d'un vieillard à l'air frêle mais au robuste intellect. Tous les jours de l'été, puis de l'automne, Ned s'assoit avec l'étrange duo et écoute les discours intarissables du vieux en espérant ainsi s'approcher du jeune homme déstabilisant par sa façon d'y être tout en n'y étant pas. Ce dernier, vraisemblablement aphone, n'est pas de taille à limiter les soliloques incroyablement variés, mais impeccablement structurés, du vieux; les ripostes du traducteur Ned, que le deuil de sa femme aimée a laissé dépressif, ne font pas le poids non plus : l'essentiel du roman est ainsi occupé par les monologues du vieux. Comme Ned, la lectrice, soupçonnant que les tirades du vieux sur divers problèmes de la société ont quelque chose à voir avec le mystère du beau blond repêché, prend son mal en patience, d'autant plus que ces tirades donnent à réfléchir et qu'elles sont bien écrites. Cependant, le dénouement est si précipité et est déployé avec tant d'économie qu'il laisse sur son appétit.

Roman à la langue truculente, aux idées intéressantes, *Naufagé en terre ferme* n'emporte toutefois pas l'adhésion totale en raison de la structure narrative relâchée. De la même manière qu'on peut s'attendre à ce que les monologues d'un personnage soient plus courts, moins polis que la narration, on peut s'attendre à ce que la narration focalisée par un personnage soit limitée.

Toutefois, la narration est omnisciente, quoiqu'elle soit le fait de la psychiatre, problème qui fait ressortir celui de la vraisemblance.

Roman qui se veut à la fois introspectif et rocambolesque, sérieux et fantaisiste, qui semble parfois emprunter à des univers aussi différents, par sa magie et son exploration de nombreux plans de réalité, que ceux de romans comme *Le Loup des Steppes* (Herman Hesse), *L'inférieure machine à désir du Dr Hoffmann* (Angela Carter), de films comme *Mulholland Drive* (David Lynch) ou *Night Passage* (Trinh Minh-Ha), *Naufagé en terre ferme* se présente néanmoins comme n'ayant pas toujours les moyens de ses ambitions. L'agréable atmosphère d'anticipation créée par le mystère du jeune amnésique, les stimulants discours échevelés du vieux, qui ouvrent des mondes, mènent de fausse piste en fausse piste—marque d'une écriture sachant maintenir le suspense—vers le cul-de-sac d'une résolution néanmoins trop simple. Peu de cas est fait, au moment du dénouement, de la pertinence de tous ces détails qui devaient coïncider pour que ce dénouement soit savouré. Tout se passe comme si l'auteur lui-même, ayant accumulé trop de notions, trop de discours au cours de sa traversée romanesque, échouait sur le sable, à quelques pas de la destination.



Staging Social Welfare

Lucia Frangione

Cariboo Magi. Talonbooks \$15.95

Ann-Marie MacDonald

Belle Moral: A Natural History. Playwrights Canada \$16.95

John Mighton

Half Life. Playwrights Canada \$15.95

Morris Panych

The Dishwashers. Talonbooks \$16.95

Drew Hayden Taylor

400 Kilometres. Talonbooks \$16.95

Michel Tremblay; Linda Gaboriau, trans.

The Driving Force. Talonbooks \$15.95

Reviewed by Joanne Tompkins

This collection of plays shows that a broad spectrum of concerns continues to preoccupy Canadian theatre: from historical explorations complete with complex intertextualities, to the aftershocks of the “scoop-up” of Native children, to the latest family angst drama by Michel Tremblay, these plays articulate the strength of contemporary theatre. They break into two groupings—historical plays and contemporary plays—although connections between them exist, since all six investigate aspects of social welfare and well-being.

The historical plays *Cariboo Magi* and *Belle Moral* are both highly intertextual in their explorations of the territory of the past. Lucia Frangione's *Cariboo Magi* is an entertaining romp through post-Klondike history. Madame Fanny DuBeau, a possibly Parisian hotel owner with a questionable sense of living within the law, presses into service everyone around her to make a living by performing for goldminers in 1870 versions of *Hamlet*, *A Christmas Carol*, and *The Last of the Mohicans*. As the play's title suggests, the performance ultimately given to the eager audience is not Shakespeare or Dickens or Cooper, but the nativity scene from the Gospel of Luke, suitably performed on Christmas Eve. The cast of characters

includes a variety of misfits and failures who foreshadow the cultural mosaic that will become Canada: Joe Mackey, a founding of Chinese and British heritage, is a would-be Confederation Poet who also purports to be a Mohican chief; his eventual wife, Marta, is an exploited German child star of vaudeville-style performance; the Reverend William Teller is a broken-down Anglican priest who has lost his calling, his mission, and his sobriety. Each character is as improbable as the next, but the quick-paced farcical action would make the improbability fade away on stage. This amusing play merges the incongruity of a camel acting as a packhorse with the promise of seeing Fanny's dubious theatrical expertise in action.

Belle Moral, by Ann-Marie MacDonald, takes place several decades later (1899) in a Scotland replete with the markers of the Victorian novel and a few remnants of the gothic. This play, originally performed as *The Arab's Mouth* in 1990, was substantially reworked for a production at the Shaw Festival in 2005. The themes of this play re-emerge in her most famous play, *Goodnight Desdemona (Good Morning Juliet)* (1988) and in her novels, *Fall on your Knees* (1996) and *The Way the Crow Flies* (2003). Yet the most significant aspect of *Belle Moral* is the profound contribution of women to society, even if their place is constantly circumscribed and compromised. Pearl MacIsaac is a scientist who intends to sign her next paper "Percival MacIsaac" in the hopes that it may achieve more recognition than previous papers that had her female gendered name attached.

At times this play reads as clever homage to the theatre and literature of the day. At other times, its tongue firmly in cheek, the contemporary theatrical impulse creeps in, as with the almost human dog, Puppy, played by a human in the original, but played by a puppet with a flat head for patting in the revised version. The Gaelic language and references to mythical systems from the Egyptians to the Greeks fill out this lengthy

play. Full of family secrets, scandals, suicides, madness, and the emerging study of psychiatry, *Belle Moral* witnesses phantom pregnancies, children with canine ears, and ghosts.

The most important ghost is the "child" locked in the attic who turns out to be as material as any of the other characters: she is actually Pearl's 27-year-old sister, Claire. When Pearl discovers Claire, she rectifies the old family painting that has an incongruous gap—room was left for the anticipated birth of Claire but was left with a curious "hole" when Claire was born with an ear "abnormality"—by taking a new family photo. The skeptical family doctor protests, "This is not a family, this is . . . a menagerie." This sprawling play about the power of the imagination succeeds in the same way that Victorian novels do: the threads are tied off but they also expose the mannered, conventional nature with which the ending occurs. *Belle Moral* may be the name of Pearl's family house, but this play provides an attractive moral about the independence of women and the integrity of all humans, regardless of their perceived imperfections.

Three of the plays under review examine the inability to understand the mad, or those who are "different," despite the best intentions. From a hidden dependant to the elder parent to the child who needs constant care, we move from *Belle Moral* to the more naturalistic *Half Life* and *The Driving Force*. John Mighton's *Half Life* explores territory increasingly familiar to audiences: parents suffering from Alzheimer's disease and now living in institutions, sometimes with dubious degrees of care. The half life of the title refers not only to the reduced quality of life experienced by the patients, but also to a sort of fall out associated with love and sex among the elderly. Clara and Patrick meet in a home for Alzheimer's sufferers and feel that they may have met in a previous life, but their children, thinking more of themselves, fear the consequences and implications of a marriage or sexual relationship in their parents' later years.

Michel Tremblay's *The Driving Force* deals with the devastation of Alzheimer's in a more theatrically productive manner. This two-hander returns to Alex and Claude, two characters in Tremblay's earlier play, *The Real World?* (1988). The typical Tremblay-esque dysfunctional family scenario takes a turn in *The Driving Force*, in which Claude comes to reluctantly care for his father, Alex, who is now virtually incapacitated and silenced by Alzheimer's. The first half of the play sees a silent Alex take a verbal battering from his son, who cares for his father's physical being with much more tenderness than the over-worked nurses of the home. The physical care Claude gives to his father, three times a week, jars with his words to his unresponsive father. These two men have never got along: Alex long before rejected his son's career as successful playwright; Claude has never forgiven his father's burning of his first manuscript and, more significantly, has long treated his father as a fool. The verbal abuse Claude inflicts upon his father is extremely well written and strangely compelling, but the play's second half shifts significantly, forcing the reader to rethink the earlier action. In part two, the 77-year-old father becomes reluctant care-giver for his 55-year-old son, who is now incapacitated in the wheel chair, stricken with the same cruel disease. Now the equally bitter Alex has his opportunity to rail against the son who never understood his love for his long-dead wife. Both men live to hate the other: this hatred is, each realizes, the driving force in their lives.

As a result of the careful structuring of the two halves and the startling repetition of certain scenes, *The Driving Force* has a depth of emotion not found in *Half Life*. This play is in a way typical of Tremblay's explorations of the substantial disharmonies beneath the veneer of the family institution, but the performative power of the monologue—and the repetition of selected speeches from the other perspective, some even word for word—would make this a very powerful play in performance.

Drew Hayden Taylor's *400 Kilometres* also pursues the family focus, although the multiplication of "family" for Janice/Grace is the basis of her difficulties. The third in a trilogy, *400 Kilometres* follows the story of Janice who discovers her birth mother in *Someday* (1993) and continues her exploration of her indigenous heritage in *Only Drunks and Children Tell the Truth* (1998). In *400 Kilometres*, Janice (originally named Grace by her now-dead Ojibway mother) finds herself pregnant and determined to come to terms with the dreams she has of her birth mother, who speaks to her about her own birth. "Scooped up" by white authorities, who felt that her mother, Anne, was unfit and unable to care properly for her daughter, and raised by a loving family in London, Ontario, Janice has become a successful lawyer. Her adoptive parents feel rejected by her interest in her birth family and heritage but learn a lesson in reconciliation, and in indigenous culture from Tonto, Janice's partner. The eponymous 400 kilometres is the distance between London, Ontario, and Otter Lake, where Janice was taken from Anne. Otter Lake appears more as a memory than a realized location in this play.

400 Kilometres completes the trilogy, but lacks the theatrical edge needed for a performance with impact. The play appears to suffer from the fate of many plays that are third in a trilogy: it completes the three-part action rather than operating as an independent play in its own right. Without a comic edge, the full-circle of travelling for this new mother and her spiritual connection to her own birth mother is incomplete. Janice's family comes to accept Tonto as the father of their grandchild and make an effort to learn about Ojibway cultures, but their interactions are only gently comic and bolder cultural statements that could move *400 Kilometres* beyond being "just" the "third play in a trilogy" are missing.

The final play brings us back to a strange collection of people forced together by circumstance rather than familial relationship.

The Dishwashers, by Morris Panych, begins similarly to a Seinfeld episode: set in the dishwashing basement of an expensive restaurant, not much is happening. The canny structure of the play relaxes audiences into what appears to be a light comedy, but later comments on industrial practices and on the thwarting of human dreams, depths that may be initially overlooked. In its exploration of the menial jobs that are as necessary in the economy as their grander counterparts, it argues the case of the people whose plans for their lives may not have been realized. As such, it acts as a suitable summary for all these plays, which argue in different ways for the necessity of maintaining human integrity and love.

Visions of Love

Charlotte Gill

Ladykiller. Thomas Allen \$24.95

Reviewed by Janet Melo-Thais

Ladykiller is a debut work by Charlotte Gill, a writer based in Vancouver and influenced by her life on the West Coast. This collection contains seven stories, each concerned with human relationships and family. Running throughout all of these dark tales is the overwhelming futility of overcoming human alienation and isolation. As the title suggests, these stories look to the difficulties that plague heterosexual relationships, including the stereotypes which define and distort perceptions of gender.

Gill effectively challenges stereotypical portrayals of male machismo and begins to do so with the book's doubly charged title. According to the *OED*, a lady-killer is a "man who is credited with dangerous power of fascination over women." So, on the one hand, ladykiller refers to stereotypical notions of men as being able to manipulate women. And this notion of maleness is what the reader gets in the first story, "You Drive." The plot revolves around a nameless couple on their annual journey to unload his stash

of marijuana. Like all of the other relationships in these stories, this one is troubled and violent. Furthermore, these two characters seem to fit into stereotypical roles: he the macho, violent lover and she, the passive female willing to take his abuse. For example, she thinks at one point, "He said sexy things and hurtful things, and the trouble was that she lived and died by what fell out of his mouth." Still, Gill's examination of male-female relations is two-pronged. Thus while she begins by examining the dynamics of an abusive relationship where each figure is trapped in a stereotypical role, in "Open Water: A Brief Romance," the male protagonist fails at any attempts to maintain his macho persona. In this way, while "ladykiller" refers to men who can attract women, it is also a term used ironically. As the *OED* also suggests, this is a "humorous term." "Ladykiller," then, becomes a term that gestures to the impotence of the male figures in all the stories in this collection. Ultimately, the collection works to deconstruct stereotypical portrayals of male strength and dominance. Instead, the men in these stories are weak—unable to find a way to overcome their own isolation. Any attempts to do so are futile and ultimately end in failure. Indeed, the collection's perspective on human relationships is both bleak and violent. None of the stories presents a successful relationship. Rather, the stories are populated with men and women who use and betray one another.

Through the various relationships that this collection presents, themes of loneliness and isolation are effectively explored. In the story entitled "Homology," the main characters are twin sisters travelling in Thailand looking for sex. The narrative is dominated by a double voice as the twin sisters experience their travels: "We are flying over the globe . . . We could fall out of the sky . . . We drop down." Furthermore, as the story relates, these twins "make individuality look terrible." Not even these twins can bridge the isolation of the individual as this story too

ends in violence, the final scene portraying the failed attempt of the twins to connect.

Zsuzsi Gartner has referred to these stories as “shockingly unsentimental,” and perhaps this is what leaves the reader feeling on edge. Through its use of violent imagery and diction (sunshine is “knife-edged” and characters “skewer” one another with their hatred), the collection underscores the utter futility of intimacy. All attempts to become intimate in these stories result in isolation, violence, betrayal and loneliness. This unrelenting undercurrent of violence is almost tedious and by the end of the collection, predictable. Furthermore, the use of metaphor and simile can be rather melodramatic at first, especially in the first story “You Drive” where highways are compared to “tapeworms” and a policeman approaches “like a white shark.” However, Gill brings a dynamic and different perspective to human interaction and in so doing, demonstrates a raw vision and energy that can not be ignored. She is able to articulate aspects of relationships that have an unabashedly real quality to them, and she writes of love without cliché. Ultimately, any writer who can speak of love like this is certainly a writer to watch.

Wanted: New Readers

Al Purdy; Robert Budde, ed.

The More Easily Kept Illusions: The Poetry of Al Purdy. Wilfrid Laurier UP \$14.95

Di Brandt; Tanis MacDonald, ed.

Speaking of Power: The Poetry of Di Brandt. Wilfrid Laurier UP \$14.95

Don McKay; Méira Cook, ed.

Field Marks: The Poetry of Don McKay. Wilfrid Laurier UP \$14.95

Reviewed by Paul Milton

There is a noble tradition of trying to garner a wider audience for good poetry; we've seen poems on the buses, inexpensive popular anthologies, slam poetry evenings, and poetry at rock festivals. At my institution,

students have taken to posting student work randomly in public places. It doesn't always work, but it's always worth a try.

A recent effort comes to us courtesy of Wilfrid Laurier University Press, which, in September 2005, undertook to provide a series of slim, inexpensive selections of the work of established contemporary poets in an effort to broaden the audience for poetry in this country. Its first volume featured the work of Lorna Crozier. These newest volumes continue that project with three attractively packaged selections, each of which comes in at fewer than 100 pages.

In keeping with the populist project of the series, each volume is introduced by its editor, a poet-critic with clear sympathy for the subject of the selection. The volumes also conclude with a reflection by the poet which adds context to the reading. The selection of poets in this trio of volumes provides an interesting variety of voices to represent contemporary poetry.

The inclusion of Al Purdy among contemporary poets seems a little unusual given that he died in 2000, but his presence here signals the editor's sense that Purdy enjoys a lasting appeal after a writing career that extended beyond five decades. In his introduction to the selection, Robert Budde characterizes Purdy as a “favourite uncle, the one that shocks your parents and teaches you how to smoke,” one with a sense of mischief, but also with an unsavoury side that needs to be controlled in public.

For the most part, Budde's selection recirculates the familiar anthologized pieces: “Lament for the Dorsets,” “Wilderness Gothic,” “Trees at the Arctic Circle.” In fact, he professes his awareness that he is merely introducing a well known figure. Purdy's populist appeal certainly derives in part from his anti-poetic persona, his crotchety common man who is likely to say just about anything. I'm sure that for many of us, the initial appeal of Purdy's verse came in lines such as “Keep your ass out of my beer!” or “My

ambition / . . . / was always / to make love vulgarly and immensely / as the vulgar elephant doth.” Then later, we learn to appreciate the delicacies of Purdy’s observational verse with its wide geographical scope and its intimations of a voracious appetite for knowledge. He may be just a ragtag relative, but he’s been everywhere and had a good look at everything. And he’s not too shy to share his experiences as well as his smokes.

Budde makes much of Purdy’s persona and of his independence from fashionable poetics. But he also takes a moment to distance himself from racist and sexist elements in Purdy’s works, elements that he has taken the liberty of expunging here. In short, Budde’s Purdy is a Purdy for the post-politically correct era we now occupy.

But where Purdy perhaps needs to be amended for contemporary readers, Di Brandt reflects a consciousness of the very political milieu that might pronounce Purdy antiquated at times. As the volume title *Speaking of Power* suggests, Brandt’s poetry meditates on power as it operates between genders and generations, within traditional communities, and as a function of global capitalism. Her exploration of the clash between the traditional Mennonite community of her upbringing and the modernizing influences of public education positions her as a border figure, a trickster who draws on the visionary spirituality of her religious traditions in her poetry while remaining conscious that the act of writing may be a form of betrayal. Tanis MacDonald has selected many affecting poems here, among them a personal elegy for the victims of the 1989 Montreal massacre. Another strong offering is the sequence “Dog Days at Maribor,” which employs the ghazal form to comment on the ecological impact of late capitalism.

Don McKay’s nature poetry will also find its readership among a generation of new readers who have grown up with deepening concern about global warming just as McKay’s own generation grew to adulthood under the threat of nuclear annihilation. McKay’s

unsentimental and informed naturalism produces a wilderness in poetry that escapes the transcendentalist’s symbolic appropriations and the developer’s dominations.

Not unlike Purdy, McKay presents a friendly persona who guides us through the natural world knowledgeable, while paying attention to the wanderer’s imaginative response to the surroundings. His defamiliarizing metaphors (dusk as the time “when the ground begins to eat its figures”) display a wit worthy of Hermes, the trickster-god whose lyre McKay professes in his *Afterword* to favour over those of Apollo and Orpheus. That lyre sounds the notes in editor Méira Cook’s selection of poems such as “Meditation on Shovels” or “How to Imagine an Albatross” with its description of the aftermath of a gas explosion in a local neighbourhood: “Stoves / turned into dragons and expressed / their secret passions all along the ordinary street.”

The quest for a wider reading audience for poetry may be quixotic, but this series makes a serious attempt to present attractive, affordable selections that speak to contemporary interests and topics that might engage a younger generation of readers. Yet it does not condescend, preferring to provide substantial and sophisticated poets to these new readers. At the very least, these slim volumes will make very useful introductory teaching texts in post-secondary classrooms because they whet the appetite without overwhelming.

Voix d’outre-monde

Robert Lalonde

Que vais-je devenir jusqu’à ce que je meure? Boréal 19,95 \$

Ying Chen

Le Mangeur. Boréal 18,95 \$

Compte rendu par Maïté Snauwaert

Ying Chen et Robert Lalonde donnent la voix à une première personne, l’une pour le récit rétrospectif d’une jeune narratrice qui, après avoir été ni plus ni moins qu’absorbée

par son père, revisite son ancienne vie depuis sa réincarnation; l'autre pour la quête de sens d'un jeune garçon tendu vers un avenir difficilement imaginable depuis l'adolescence. Dans ces récits d'initiation le lien au monde est problématique, filtré par un lien familial ambigu et un point de vue solitaire. Leur horizon salutaire réside dans une tension vers l'art conçu comme un espoir : la peinture héritée de son père pour la fille de cet ogre moderne qui donne au texte sa coloration de conte ou de fable; l'écriture pour cet enfant du silence et du secret qui, au sein de l'univers carcéral du collège, cache dans ses poches de petits carrés de poèmes.

Deux autarcies mais aussi deux émancipations pour ces narrateurs du seuil entre deux âges dont « l'imaginaire de la fin », pour reprendre Bertrand Gervais, est aussi celui d'un recommencement, d'une mutation positive, qui n'hésite pas chez Chen à approcher du surnaturel, moins du côté du fantastique que du fabulaire. Évoquant différentes vies successives que l'on reconnaît pour les avoir lues dans les précédents romans de l'auteure, le principe de réincarnation sur lequel repose le récit apparaît comme une extrapolation de ce que fabrique une mémoire d'ordre transgénérationnel. Simplement, au lieu d'être généalogique, cette mémoire composite est incarnée en une seule descendante, fille de son père autant que de ses propres œuvres. Déplacement de la figure du dévoreur d'enfants des contes, *Le Mangeur* permet à la narratrice continuée de Chen, déployée d'œuvre en œuvre sous de nouveaux états, de se pencher sur le père, plutôt absent des précédents romans. La mort passagère, omniprésente dans son œuvre, donne ici encore au récit son horizon comme son initiation. Le point de vue, qui ne saurait être d'outre-tombe puisqu'il n'y a pas de sépulture, est pourtant d'après-trépas, cependant que le donneur de vie et de mort est non la mère mais le père, grand pourvoyeur d'une nourriture marine par laquelle il rejoint du côté de sa propre mère son ancêtre-poisson.

Par ces jeux littéraires sur la fabulation, par cette littéralisation d'un amour dévorant, on retrouve l'ironie douce-amère de Chen et sa lucidité corrosive à l'égard des liens supposément naturels, critique subtile des discours tout faits qui en passent par un déplacement de l'enjeu des actions. La narration se construit sur de faux événements, toujours déjà produits, le récit exacerbant sa dimension rétrospective et les actions même les plus finales étant annoncées dès le commencement du texte. D'où vient alors qu'un semblant de suspense nous tient tout au long en haleine, suspendus comme devant un tableau, selon une contradiction temporelle résumée de façon programmatique dans les premiers moments du texte, qui évoque : « l'aspect troublant de ce chemin toujours calme et comme fixé dans un tableau, où apparemment rien ne se passe, parce qu'on n'y voit ni ce qui suit ni ce qui précède »?

Chez Lalonde aussi, ce père que l'on dit absent de la littérature québécoise fait retour. Quoique discret, il est plus présent que la mère dans le récit de cette adolescence, sous la forme d'une menace diffuse en même temps que d'un être aimé. Mais ce qui occupe ce narrateur empreint d'un lien plus direct avec son grand-père mort, c'est le problème du sens de son existence, comme orientation et comme signification. *Que vais-je devenir jusqu'à ce que je meure?*, question superbe dont on voudrait féliciter Robert Lalonde, vient d'un poème d'Hugo cité dans le texte, qui donne de l'ensemble de ce roman en forme de questionnement une synthèse adéquate. Le devenir végétal de sa préhension du monde par le jeune héros fournit au texte certains de ses plus beaux moments : « Je n'en finissais pas d'afficher ma parenté avec les végétaux du gros livre. Je poussais, moi aussi », de même que la définition de l'adolescence comme cette quête lente aux soubresauts pleins d'effroi : « j'étais transitoire moi aussi et brûlais d'un tout petit incendie incertain. J'avais mal de vivre encore, j'étais content d'exister

toujours et je roulais dans le mystère de la nuit. » L'histoire d'une (re)venue au monde se déploie avec lucidité et tendresse dans sa complexité et ses contradictions. À travers ce monologue d'un jeune garçon rêveur qui évoque quelquefois le *Jakob fils de Jakob* d'Alain Gagnon, l'écriture soignée de Robert Lalonde offre une réflexion philosophique tout en justesse et en pudeur.

Looking Inward

F.G. Paci

Hard Edge. Guernica \$15.00

France Théoret; Luise von Flotow, trans.

Girls Closed In. Guernica \$15.00

Reviewed by Marie Carrière

F.G. Paci's *Hard Edge* is a novel about artistic aspirations and relations during the 1970s in New York, Toronto, and Paris, with the main focus on the tenuous relationship of teacher/writer, Mark Trecroci ("Croach"), and his girlfriend Lisa, a talented young painter. Interestingly, the publisher, on the back cover of *Hard Edge*, characterizes Paci's second novel, *Black Madonna*, as "a powerful feminist novel. Perhaps the present work of fiction needs such a disclaimer to launch its objectifying renditions of women and their needs, albeit subjected to the gaze of the main protagonist and narrator, whose often self-deprecating internal dialogues with his "daemon," nineteenth-century moralist philosopher Kierkegaard, yield to the portrayal of the lost, confused though introspective artist as a young man. Are readers meant to find Croach's manipulative mission to sleep with and then disregard the attractive women he meets a rather pathetic phase of prolonged and vengeful adolescence? Are they being called upon to remind themselves that, Kierkegaard or no Kierkegaard, boys will be boys? The unfortunate fact remains that women's bodies "purr" under our protagonist's touch, one conquest "glow[s]" whenever compli-

mented by him, and another is favoured for showing "miles of leg." The reductive, at times misogynist, terms of our hero's relations with women are not the only problem with Paci's novel. Despite the 1970s setting, the veritable point of this backward view of women and men is the most mystifying aspect of the entire endeavour. Moreover, the prose, overwhelmed by too many clichés and contrived descriptions, takes over what might otherwise have resulted in an interesting, perhaps even ironic, novel about human failure and self-delusion. In the end, *Hard Edge* is hard to take.

France Théoret's *Girls Closed In*, translated by Luise von Flotow from the original French, *Huis clos entre jeunes filles*, also deals, like Paci's novel, with the issue of introspection, this time with the "deadly" inward-looking of a young boarder in a Quebec Catholic school for future schoolmistresses. A familiar subject in Théoret's writing, which has been self-avowedly feminist for the past 30 years, the internalized, destructive "other" that regulates a young woman's development as an individual is the focus of this novel. Through her fiction, Théoret presents a scathing critique of the mediocre and monotonous religious education made available to young women in 1950s Quebec as well as of their limited choices outside the domestic sphere, constraints imposed by the conservative clerical society of the period. Despite moments of awkwardness—perhaps caused by the difficulty of rendering Théoret's dense and intimate French prose into English—von Flotow's translation is commendable, as it exposes the work of this important Québécois fiction writer, poet and theorist to an Anglophone readership. Readers will appreciate the claustrophobic, indeed *huis clos* atmosphere of this first-person account of the struggle both for individual sufficiency and for personal connections with others. For the shy narrator, who has deeply internalized such elements of her religious

upbringing as constant self-deprecation and self-censorship, female friendship proves to be a complex, painful struggle between the need for closeness and detachment, between mutual understanding and solitude.

Another familiar preoccupation in Théoret's work is that of writing itself, especially as a very self-conscious, personal, and difficult act, which reveals both the cultural oppression that her female speakers suffer from as well as their attempts at transgressing the imposed social order. The narrator of *Girls Closed In* keeps a journal that she insists be written "without deletions," an objective which underlines the very paradox of the writing act throughout Théoret's work: writing as always subject to some form of censorship and constraint, but also, as a liberating and autonomous form of self-realization. In the end, Théoret's heroine stands independent and mostly solitary, but the price paid for this autonomy seems to be an inescapable solitude as well the failure to truly understand another person.

Apocalyptic Consumption

Sinclair Dumontais; Patricia Claxton, trans.

The Parachute. Key Porter \$19.95

Katrina Onstad

How Happy to Be. McClelland & Stewart \$24.99

Barry Webster

The Sounds of All Flesh. Porcupine's Quill \$19.95

Reviewed by Beverley Haun

While these books are vastly different in form—an extended satiric monologue, a first person novel, a collection of short stories—all three explore, to some degree, the folly of our continuing preoccupation with marketing and consuming products and people, and ultimately the planet.

The Parachute echoes Jonathan Swift's "A Modest Proposal" in form and structure, if not in length. Both are monologues addressing the privileged and powerful and offering solutions to economic problems

that threaten to be social burdens. Both protagonists describe themselves as having spent a lifetime proposing visionary solutions, and both see themselves and their contributions as being worthy of praise and fame. Both offer an outrageous proposition that exposes the cold-blooded drive for profits at any expense. Swift speaks to the eighteenth-century English landlords who drain the wealth from the Irish countryside and impoverish the Irish who are their tenants. Dumontais speaks to the head of a multinational shoe company that outsources production at slave wages to children in third world countries, and by implication, the heads of all multinationals. In the guise of offering further sources of profit or benefit, both expose the greed and lack of human fellow feeling behind the powerful institutions of their times. And both, in outlining the horrors of the practices of those in power, also outline countermeasures that could be engaged by the victims of these institutions to redress the balance of power. Here the similarity ends. What Swift accomplishes in six pages, Dumontais spins out to 136 pages. To be fair, much of the writing in Dumontais is concerned with the ravages to the planet as well as to people that result from the unchecked excesses of multinationals, and warranted attention is drawn to these excesses in an effort to raise awareness and to emphasize countermeasures. But much of the extra verbiage in Dumontais is just that, padding and digressions that fit the egotistical and long-winded persona of his protagonist, but should have been pruned in the editing process as a courtesy if not a convenience to the reader.

I was struck early on while reading *How Happy to Be* by what was not there. While published in 2006, I knew by page eight that the novel begins in February 2001 in Toronto, and I expected the narrative to anticipate the events of the following September. But the novel ends a few weeks

after it begins in early spring on Gambier Island, a boat ride from Vancouver, still innocent of our current terrorized dispensation. The past of the narrative and not the near future drives the plot, and as the protagonist Maxine says, “the past can be bossy.” That bossy past is Maxine’s own. It so profoundly shapes and continues to filter her present that she “can’t imagine any life but this one,” and describes herself as being “stabbed to death” by her own “point of view.” This is alienating her from committing to her personal life while driving a career she finds increasingly pointless. Max’s mother died when she was only eight, and her father settled in a Gambier Island communal experiment to try to create a family environment for his daughter, an environment that Max has been resisting ever since. In fact she gravitates toward the gloss of movies and celebrity in reaction to the earnestness and general grungy failure of the commune life. When the book begins, Max is a 34-year-old entertainment writer for *The Daily*, an undisguised stand-in for *The National Post* run by a British minor aristocrat called Baby Baron. A long term personal relationship has recently ended for Max and she is trying to get fired from her insubstantial job, torn as she is between the emotional, ideological, and material discomfitures of her upbringing and the manufactured vapidity of the celebrity über-branding and promotion by which she now earns her living. Serious as the themes of this narrative sound, they are in fact told in a wickedly funny, quickly flowing style that is a pleasure to read as Onstad peels back the tape that holds so much of the star system taut, and shows the matching shallowness of the media hype that feeds on and values that system. Into Max’s dysfunctional and empty media-driven life come two alternative voices of reason, one reminding her of the values of her past, and one demonstrating values in an alternative future from the one she is cur-

rently navigating. Both voices represent a vision of creativity and social contribution within a context of relationships, commitment, and love. As Max’s crisis develops she returns to Gambier seeking some form of resolution. One anomaly in this final section is perplexing. The light hand with which Onstad has written up to this point serves the narrative well. But here she puts Max into a canoe, to navigate through the shoals of choices before her. So far so good. However, without any precedent of blatant symbolism earlier in the narrative, Onstad has Max literally lace on her father’s heavy hiking boots, and then climb rather stupidly into the stern of the canoe without a life jacket and head to the sea and into a sudden storm from which she must struggle to return. The heavy-handed transparency of her metaphor does not do justice to the rest of this finely crafted snapshot and critique of the shallow and frenzied contemporary media machine.

There are two key aspects to the stories in *The Sound of All Flesh* that make them well worth reading; the lyrical prose in which they are written and the often unusual and thought-provoking contexts for the forms of alienation with which the stories grapple. These stories work best when Webster toys with language and metaphor and gives his imagination free play, such as in “Earthquakes on the Far Side of the World” where his protagonist’s identity as a geologist and northern lover brings snow to Zurich in July when he throws himself into a Swiss relationship, and where tearing himself away to return to Canada causes the earth to heave and re-form back home. The intensity and riveting point of view in “Laughing Forever” has altered my relationship to clowns forever. And “The Royal Conservatory of Music” is a tour de force that shatters conventional narrative form and then uses the resulting bits in ones, in twos, and through repetition to build a layered narrative confection. His prose

becomes poetry, takes on rhythm and through duplication, multiplication, inversion, and repetition turns the initial narrative fragments into their own musical piece. Aside from these three gems of extravagant prose, there are stories that explore contemporary Canadian urban concerns: pollution, the inherent danger of architectural design flaws, and consumerism run amok. In “Bicycle Dreams” a committed environmentalist discovers the uneasy truth that he cannot maintain his evangelical green posture without keeping the industrialized causes of his eco concerns firmly rooted in his own life to foster his zeal. In “Enough,” a sexual relationship is only able to flourish if enough money has been spent, before each encounter, on enough designer costumes to manifest the role of desirable urbanite. Another set of stories focus on the Canadian abroad, navigating relationships in unfamiliar cultures. “The Modesty Wrap” demonstrates the powers and weaknesses of the flesh in Turkey. “Capturing Varanasi” creates a female protagonist discovering both the freedoms and restraints of Hindu India. In “Believing in Paris” a protagonist comes to terms with the fact that his friend with AIDS has lied about his health to many sexual partners. In “A Piano Shudders” a gifted piano student must reconcile the differing advice of two music teachers. These latter two fall somewhat short, while “Circles” is more of a lyrical exercise than a full blown story. None of these three pieces really achieves the impact of the other stories, but the other stories definitely make *The Sound of All Flesh* worth reading as his lyrical prose evokes both the frailties and robustness of the human condition.

Dumontais warns us of the apocalyptic consequences of the direction that multinationals are taking the world of consumption, Onstad, shows us the consequences of that consumption for the group of people who create and maintain the media machine that shapes consumer desires. Webster hears the

dissonant sound of the apocalyptic rumblings and explores myriad ramifications that it has on different individuals. Three very different voices, three very different but overlapping moral visions, each pushing the possibilities of very different genre conventions: each, characteristic of all good writing, both disturbing and pleasurable.

Meaning in Excess

Jason Anderson

Showbiz. ECW \$18.95

B. Glen Rotchin

The Rent Collector. Véhicule \$19.95

Reviewed by Ronald Granofsky

What these two otherwise very different books by Canadian authors have in common is an interest in excessive meaning, but while one successfully ironizes that concern, the other is weakened by it. Glen Rotchin's book portrays the world and mentality of an ultra-Orthodox Jewish rent collector and his obsessive search for and perception of divine meaning in all things. Jason Anderson, in a more entertaining if perhaps less profound fashion, delves into the murky world of conspiracy theory, where the paranoid frame of mind distorts significance into a predetermined meaning. Both books finally and inevitably conclude in indecision, although Anderson's ironic distance from his meaning-seeking protagonist seems preferable to Rotchin's tendency to inhabit his.

It is Anderson, in fact, who deals with the idea of one personality taking over another—a possible reference to the writing process itself—in a conscious and explicit manner. His character Jimmy Wynn is a thinly-disguised version of the real-life Vaughn Meader, whose meteoric career as a John F. Kennedy impersonator crashed and burned in Dallas in November 1963 (displaced by Anderson to New Orleans in August 1963). Wynn impersonates the

President (here called Teddy Cannon) from the inside out, so to speak, intuitively understanding his every move and expression to the extent that he creates a void within himself that the President's persona can inhabit. In the course of this relentlessly plot-driven and funny novel, there are so many instances of disguise, mistaken or secret identity, ambiguous motives, so many layers of conspiracy or putative conspiracy that by the end it is impossible to know who did what to whom and why. Even the possibility that Cannon himself took advantage of the cult of impersonation surrounding his image to avoid assassination by using a decoy is tantalizingly broached. Hot on the trail of Jimmy Wynn in time present is Nathan Grant, our protagonist and narrator, an enterprising if self-deprecating young Canadian journalist trying to break into the tough New York journalism market by interesting the *Betsey*, a journal devoted to Cannon fodder, in his story about the long-forgotten Wynn. As Grant moves ever closer to finding the elusive erstwhile impersonator, the plot enters the territory of Pynchonesque paranoia and develops a satire on the entertainment industry. Anderson even imaginatively resurrects Lenny Bruce, who famously brought down the house shortly after the Kennedy assassination by proclaiming "Is Vaughn Meader ever screwed!" or words to that effect. Just as Wynn once strove to enter the personality of his meal ticket in the heyday of the early 1960s, Grant must try to imagine the thinking of his quarry the better to track him down, while shadowy and menacing figures follow him in turn. We have, then, multiple levels of perspective, identity, and meaning, and it is a neat trick to pull this off as successfully as Anderson does.

The Rent Collector, by comparison, is intriguingly short on plot. Its detailing of Montreal's garment district brings to mind Philip Roth's evocation of the Newark glove trade in *American Pastoral*, while the structure it adopts somewhat resembles Primo

Levi's memoir *The Periodic Table*, where chapters are keyed on argon, hydrogen, zinc, and so on. Where the chemist Levi's thoughts and details of his past life are fittingly concentrated through the focus of chemical elements, Rotchin's structure is locative. The focus here is a Montreal address: 99 Chabanel is a building housing mostly garment businesses and owned by Sholem Stein, a Holocaust survivor and father of Gershon, the perceiving consciousness for most of the novel. Gershon Stein is a likable man who wants to do the right thing above all. Rotchin describes his marriage with Ruhama and his relationships with his father and brother as well as two crises in his life: his strong infatuation with Michelle Labelle, a mysterious woman who works in the building, and his father's stroke.

As Gershon goes through his day-to-day chores, we get a picaresque view of the characters inhabiting the building, but the narrative is keyed on the building itself. Thus there are chapters titled "Electricity" and "Basement." The device works reasonably well at times to suggest a universe in which all things are related because they emanate from one divine source, at least in the mind of a believer, but the connections can also seem forced. In the chapter "Plumbing," for example, there is an implied correspondence among the building's plumbing system, the human digestive system (one of Gershon's children is being toilet trained and is frequently constipated), sexual withholding (Gershon's obsession with Michelle leads him to ignore his wife in bed), crying, and watering plants.

But the larger significance is never clear except as a reflection of a way of thinking. At worst, the method descends to ponderous metaphorizing seemingly for its own sake. But the greatest weakness in the novel is its wobbly focalization. Gershon's point of view (and occasionally that of other characters) is adopted through the liberal use of free indirect discourse, among other methods. However, problems arise when what

are clearly supposed to be the thoughts of a highly religious businessman sound suspiciously like those of a secular writer preoccupied with words and concerned that his readers understand his meaning. This occurs mostly when Yiddish expressions or religious concepts are explained at times when we are supposedly following Gershon's train of thought and he would have no reason to explain these things in his own mind. At times the protagonist comes across more as Gertrude than Gershon Stein; he is obsessed with words and their origins in a way that suggests the poet-author of the novel rather than the character in it. The novel is poetic and thoughtful, but its fictiveness is undermined at times by those very qualities, as metaphor implies a burden of meaning the text does not support and character gives way to an unconsciously intrusive narrator.

Future of the Family

Marci Denesiuk

The Far Away Home. NeWest \$18.95

John Lent

So It Won't Go Away. Thistledown \$16.95

Aaron Bushkowsky

The Vanishing Man. Cormorant \$22.95

Reviewed by Paul Denham

Three books of stories by Western Canadian writers indicate the range and energy of the short story in Canada. A lot of movement exists in these stories—though people occasionally move south, north, or even east, most of the time Eastern Canadians move west and Western Canadians move farther west. But west is an ambiguous direction for Canadians, leading sometimes to freedom and hope, sometimes (particularly in Aaron Bushkowsky's book) to darkness and death. Families figure largely in all three books, and ambiguity characterizes the family.

John Lent's is the most difficult of the three collections, both to categorize and to

respond to. The front cover calls it "connected fictions" and the back cover calls it "short fiction." So it appears to be in the Canadian tradition of "linked stories" such as Munro's *Lives of Girls and Women* and Laurence's *A Bird in the House*. Well, it is and it isn't. Of the 12 stories (or chapters), only one, the title story, feels as if it could comfortably stand alone. And in the Acknowledgements, Lent twice refers to the book as "this piece," a phrase which implies a unity of conception.

Like Laurence and Munro, Lent brings his book close to autobiography. His character and sometime narrator Rick, middle-aged writer, jazz fan, teacher, and resident of Vernon, BC, seems to represent Lent. But there are also passages in which Lent speaks in the authorial first person about his character Rick, or narrates stories of Rick's siblings Neil and Jane in the third person. He is playing with notions of the relation between the author and his material.

Nevertheless, puzzling over the appropriate label for Lent's book distracts from its real emotional power of a story (or series of stories, if you prefer) about the joy and pain of being a family. The parents of Rick, Neil, and Jane moved the family from New Brunswick to Edmonton in the 1950s, a wrenching experience intended to secure a more promising future for the children. Their intention succeeded, but at a cost. The father, now dead, became an alcoholic for reasons the children clearly do not understand—we may guess it has something to do with the distance from his original home—but the emotional absence created by his alcoholism continues to affect his children in the present and to mark them with addictive personalities: they either drink too much, smoke too much, work too hard, or have brief, meaningless affairs. They also quit drinking, quit smoking, and gratify one another's successes when they do. When the three siblings holiday together in France in the final chapter,

the experience appears to be one of the most pleasurable and fulfilling of their lives.

Bushkowsky's stories are also linked, though much more loosely, and like Lent's are connected by the subject of family. They follow (though not chronologically) an unnamed narrator from childhood in a strict Baptist family in either Manitoba, Saskatchewan, or Alberta (the stories are not consistent about this) in the 1960s to middle age as a writer and teacher in present-day Vancouver. In some ways the stories of the narrator's childhood are the least satisfactory; his parents and grandparents—or at least the grandmothers—are too relentlessly caricatured to be of much interest.

More fully realized are the depictions of the narrator as an adult, his disastrous marriages, and his relationships with other members of his family, particularly his Uncle Morey and his younger brother Derek. Each of the latter two gets a story, told mostly from the perspective of the adult narrator. Neither fits the Baptist parental model; Morey, the "vanishing man" of the title story, turns out to be gay as well as schizophrenic. Derek, who wanted to play hockey but couldn't skate, has fled to California, partly, we assume, because of paternal disapproval: "Dad's getting older," the narrator tells Derek over beer in an outdoor café in Sacramento, "and I think he's sorry about all the things he did and said . . . I really think he's sorry." We are left to imagine what things he might have done and said, and it's far from clear that he really is sorry. Bushkowsky hints that Derek, though initially presented as a comic character (skating like "a wounded giraffe") and a jolly extrovert, is deeply hurt, probably an alcoholic, and in need of reassurance from the older brother who once idolized him for his strength and confidence.

Bushkowsky is a keenly comic writer, but is also aware that comedy has its limitations, as a remembered exchange between the nar-

rator and his mother indicates:

Everything is a joke to you, she always said.

What's wrong with that? I laughed.

I'm not laughing now.

In spite of the laughter, then, the effect of the book as a whole is dark and tragic. The significantly titled opening story, "The Dead Man's Float," makes a swimming lesson a metaphor for the life of the persona, suspended just under the surface of his life: "I suppose I've been under long enough." The last story takes place in a cemetery. In between are divorces, the alienation of family, madness, suicide, and various forms of vanishing. A brief meeting on a ferry between the narrator and a beautiful but self-centred woman in "The Ferry Girl" leads to the following conclusion: "When they find me, I will be floating belly up, my eyes turned to the stars and I'll be all bloated and white like the bottom of a halibut and they will say, There, that's what happens when you fall for somebody like that all right." In this book, that's what happens when you do just about anything.

The title of Marci Denesiuk's collection *The Far Away Home* also suggests alienation and exile, and in many of the stories, sex is the alienating force. In the opening story, "Pieces," Jody, a resident of Victoria for a decade, has "only Sal," who is described as a "fuck buddy" rather than a lover. She receives a phone call from the mother of her old friend William, a schizophrenic, in her home town of Calgary, to tell her that William has tried to castrate himself. "How empty her home [in Victoria] is," she thinks as she dreams of returning to Calgary not so that she can comfort William but so that he can comfort her. In "Cold Sleep," a woman from Edmonton transplanted to the Canadian Arctic after marrying a Mountie finds herself slipping into a possibly fatal depression as the sun disappears for the winter. In "Insomnia," we're back in southern Canada, but some of the imagery is the

same as in the north (“the nights begin early and last a long time”) and the mood of depression is similar: Katherine’s various sexual escapades lead her nowhere: “She closes her eyes. She opens her eyes. It makes no difference.”

In the longest story, “Close to Home,” a story which looks as if it might be partly autobiographical and whose title seems to offer a counterweight to the title of the book, Karen returns to Edmonton from Montreal after several years away to visit her parents, her sister, and some of her old friends. The family seems to be a fairly happy one; her parents are warm and loving, her relationship with her sister is good, and she’s glad to be back. Yet the story is haunted by mortality; Karen herself is convalescing from an operation for cervical cancer, an operation she does not reveal to her parents, and during her visit she discovers that her father has recently had a “minor” heart attack. Her old boyfriend Joe jokingly proposes marriage: “If we don’t meet anyone by the time we’re sixty, will you marry me?” Jokingly, she accepts. A friend of her sister’s talks about “the clock running down” on her chances to have a baby. Karen’s job in Montreal is picking up road-kill on the highways. At the end of the story, she recalls her mother telling her that, in giving birth to her, she momentarily died. Death is necessary for life, but the images of death in this story are not balanced by images of renewed life. Marriage and family are for the aged, while the youth clean up road-kill in distant cities.

Denesiuk also offers us moments of triumph and hope. In “Two Feet in Texas,” another story with strong sexual undercurrents, fat, unattractive Pina finds herself challenged to a poker game by three cocky young male students, during which one of the men proposes that they play for each other’s souls. They assume they will humiliate her, but they don’t (she has learned her liberating poker skills from her father), and

the Faustian bargain for souls, which she wins, makes her into neither Mephistopheles nor Helen of Troy, but a newly confident woman who walks away and “raised her head to the sky.” In “The Corner of Star Star,” 30-year-old Tory, immobilized for years by domineering parents, secretly acquires a car, learns how to drive, and one morning simply takes off west from Toronto. When her car breaks down near a small town on the prairies, the process of getting a tow-truck opens up new possibilities—possibilities which include driving “straight into the sky” and grasping “great handfuls of air.” How much of this new sense of freedom results from sharing the cab of the tow truck with a charming young male mechanic is left uncertain, but as they drive into town, Tory notices “the town’s one billboard that exclaims, *Testicle festival, have a ball!*” It seems clear enough where that truck is going.

Women and Other Aliens

Martine Desjardins; Fred A. Reed and David Homel, trans.

All That Glitters. Talonbooks \$17.95

Max Foran

The Madonna List. Brindle & Glass \$24.95

Terrence Heath

Casualties. Coteau \$19.95

Reviewed by Shelley Hulan

Historical fiction continues its run as the dominant prose form in Canadian literature. As these three recent arrivals demonstrate, imagining the past raises questions unexpectedly relevant to the contemporary world.

All That Glitters by Martine Desjardins tells the story of Simon Dulac, a World War I Canadian soldier who regards the conflict in Europe as an opportunity to search for the legendary treasure that the medieval Knights Templar concealed in Flanders. The war seems to him the perfect time to embark on

his quest because the Belgian theatre has torn up the land around Ypres and Arras. It is not so much the treasure itself, the narrator-protagonist assures readers, but rather the prospect “of succeeding where so many others had failed” that spurs him on, and why he “would not have missed the war for an empire” (21). Catastrophic human suffering and destruction provide the mere backdrop to an extensive series of coincidences associated with Simon’s tremendous good luck. Other troublesome episodes are treated dismissively, even offensively, as in the following sentence: “It took almost an entire week for the horde of aboriginals transported from the far corners of the Empire to unload our vessels.” No further reference is made to this “horde.” Readers never learn where exactly “home” is to its constituent members; they count only as an insignificant moment in Simon’s adventures.

Owing to the prominence in *All That Glitters* of a semi-secret Catholic order (the Knights Templar), readers may be tempted to compare this novel to *The Da Vinci Code*. The text they should really keep in mind is Rudyard Kipling’s *Kim* and its “great game of empire”; indeed, Simon refers to his activities as a “great game” several times, even as he must surely step past soldiers’ dead bodies in search of the treasure he desires. Perhaps the novel’s finale reflects critically on Simon’s motives. Yet the depiction to the very end of the sole female character as a monster and a siren leaves this possibility ambiguous.

The Madonna List by Max Foran develops in two different historical periods on three different continents. In its beginning, the dying Dominic Guzman, thirteenth-century founder of the Dominican Order of Preachers, has a vision of the Virgin Mary. Subsequently he records and conceals three names that come to play an integral part in the story.

The two protagonists’ experiences take place in 1830s Rome, Lower Canada, and eventually Australia. A Dominican priest

named Bernard Birous, believes he is destined to found a new faith that will replace Christianity all over the world. What might in a less accomplished novel be a tedious contest between good and evil (though one centred on a brilliantly-drawn protagonist whose mind pirouettes between total insanity and Machiavellian cunning) becomes more than a Manichean contest because some of Bernard’s Dominican superiors and other Catholic authorities immediately perceive his dangerous arrogance and fascist tendencies. A major theme of the novel is judgement—how best to interpret evidence, and what to do when that evidence points toward a colleague’s madness.

This novel is also a quest story, but it’s a quest that emphasizes the dangers of interpreting signs and wonders alone, without any guidance beyond one’s own thoughts and desires. More than that, the narrative invites criticism of the very *notion* of the quest. The idea of women as obstacles blocking the protagonist’s course manifests itself in this story just as it does in *All That Glitters*. But here, its inherent misogyny is foregrounded as part of Bernard’s overriding and delusional ambition. The dispatch with which Bernard transforms every female into either an agent of his own greatness or an Eve who must die produces some terrifically ironic passages. When his actions generate one of the female character’s deaths, the only conclusion he draws is that “clearly he is to father the new Messiah.”

How Bernard manages to enthrall the novel’s other protagonist is thoroughly convincing in the context of the historical events in which Foran situates this narrative. In the guileless Martin Goyette, Foran speculates about why good, sensible people might follow a charismatic madman, a question as compelling today as it has ever been. What Martin decides to “follow” is not so much Bernard personally as a questioning of religious orthodoxy in which he has really been engaged since his days as a reluctant

Patriote in Lower Canada's doomed 1838 Rebellion. This is by far the most erudite and well-researched of these three novels, and the only one that blends the fictional narrative seamlessly into the history it amplifies.

Casualties by Terrence Heath begins with the death of banker Peter "Chuck" Stemichuk and his widow Clara's discovery of a murder confession in his jacket pocket. The note is signed "Thomas Pennan." As Clara searches for Thomas in the present, a narrative set in the past follows Thomas' and Chuck's friendship in Regina during the Depression years. After the Regina Riot, the main characters travel to Spain to join the international volunteer brigade fighting Franco. In the meantime, the part of the story set in the contemporary world describes Clara's sleuthing expeditions to Vancouver, Regina, and eventually England in search of their story.

Generally, the characters in this novel behave erratically, not because of the pressures that plot events or the history in which they participate put on them, but because they are inconsistently drawn. Thus it can be difficult to know what to make of the narrative's treatment of various social issues. The story seems at one point inexplicably to conflate race and class. When a friendly uniformed Mountie helps Clara with her suitcase at the Regina Airport, she observes that "this one, if she was not mistaken, was actually an Indian, or aboriginal, or whatever they called themselves now." The only other time Clara encounters any Native people is shortly afterwards, as she walks through a rundown Regina neighbourhood. Since her experience there challenges a stereotype running through her mind, one wonders whether these episodes are meant to suggest some imminent expansion of her consciousness to include people ordinarily invisible to (or possibly not tolerated by) her. They may be, but if so, why does she never question her own casual racism, or for that matter critique her own snobbery and

relentlessly patronizing attitude? Readers never learn just what the connection between race and economic hardship, which seems implicit in the second encounter, is supposed to be, nor do they learn what this "whatever they called themselves now" is supposed to mean.

More than the imagined pasts that these novels portray, I find myself thinking about the imagined readers whom they address. Because it involves the past so deeply in its narratives, historical fiction often emphasizes the phenomena of change and growth. In two of these novels, the real insight may be that some ideas remain dishearteningly constant.

Military Culture

Allan D. English

Understanding Military Culture. McGill-Queen's UP \$29.95

Reviewed by Chris Leach

Understanding Military Culture systematically defines the general concepts of culture and then places these characteristics into the military context. The book then dedicates a little more than half of its 159 pages to analyzing both the American and Canadian military cultures, ultimately comparing the two. Beyond its theoretical overview, the author's intent is to define Canadian military culture and consider the US impact on it. While the physical and organizational characteristics of the Canadian military become more "Americanized," its distinct culture could be at risk. English's concern over this trend is explicit, but is somewhat mitigated by the recognition that all military cultures change, including the American military culture currently changing in response to a new post-9/11 world context, a context that might benefit the endurance of the Canadian military culture that seems—largely by default—to have anticipated the

new requirements of military action in the twenty-first century. Nevertheless, the external and internal pressures of Americanization warrant, according to English, the close study of Canadian military culture so as to retain its best qualities while inevitably integrating influences from the US.

To navigate the complex inter-relations that define culture, English uses a multi-disciplinary approach. The front half of the book is full of theoretical jargon borrowed from sociology, psychology, political science, and history and used to grapple with concepts such as culture, values, values-in-use, beliefs, profession, and ethos. All of this theory could be quite overwhelming and is sometimes rendered awkward by the many sub-sections; however, English, a 25-year veteran of the Canadian Armed Forces, effectively primes the reader for the more engaging chapters that follow addressing and comparing both the Canadian and US military cultures.

The professional military cultures of Canada and the US are becoming less vocational and more occupational; officers are more concerned about their career aspirations than service to the state. English describes this professional transformation and puts it into the context of the seemingly dramatic changes associated with the technological and human effects of the “Revolution in Military Affairs,” which assumes the heightened importance of electronic warfare supporting a small professional military. The US military culture is particularly unsuited to shift gears given the nature of its tradition-bound civil-military relations and predisposition to fight conventional decisive battles. Interestingly, for all the problems associated with the 1968 unification of the three services, the 1972 establishment of the “civilianized” National Defence Headquarters, and the close ties between military culture and the broader society, these same characteristics might

make the Canadian Forces better prepared for the non-traditional deployments it will likely face in the future. Canadians expect a military that reflects their values, and as much as this expectation can challenge conventional military thinking about making war, the Canadian Forces has readily performed unconventional missions such as peacekeeping and built these into its cultural identity.

Writing this study for the Department of National Defence, English asserts that the US could learn from Canada’s military culture. The US too must adjust to a new environment of conflict that emphasizes political, economic, and social reconstruction as much as fighting battles. However, the history of cooperation, the shared geography, and the attractiveness of US military doctrines—especially the pull of technologies—gives reason for wariness in regards to the maintenance of a distinct Canadian military culture. English has addressed this topic of culture in an effective manner, introducing the reader to complex concepts and important issues. Canadians should be aware of these issues since they reflect something of the broader process of Americanization beyond the seemingly isolated culture of the military.

Diverse Explorations

Louise Dupré; Antonio D’Alfonso, trans.

The Blueness of Light. Guernica \$15.00

B.W. Powe

The Unsaid Passing. Guernica \$20.00

Karen Shenfeld

The Fertile Crescent. Guernica \$15.00

Reviewed by Neil Querengesser

The poems in Louise Dupré’s *The Blueness of Light*, the first edition of her poetry in English, selected by the author and translated by Antonio D’Alfonso, are intensely introverted, the majority of them in prose. They focus on minute details of the speak-

er's consciousness, the personal pronoun often shifting from first to second to third person as she probes the different facets of her awareness of herself and relationships with her partner and environment. She views ordinary activities, such as a morning stroll in the garden, through complex lenses of almost painful introspection, as in these lines from "Voice Over": "I bury my brain under the leaves near me, and wait. My head like a dead tree trunk, torn off; my eyelids completely useless. I can't hear a sound. Later, I'll make my way to you." Such vivid imagery is the norm, and while I found myself appreciating similar instances of this technique, I longed at times for a more objective perspective as a respite from the constant inwardness, especially in the final section, "Notes on Survival." Here, the poet reacts to the news that the man she loves has a potentially fatal disease, never named, but involving "cells gone wrong." There are few events in life that focus one's attention so dramatically, and what follows is a sensitive, heartfelt examination of her hopes and fears, and her ultimate recognition of the powerlessness of poetry in such situations. Consequently, although the section ends with a resilient affirmation of poetry after the doctor's good news, these "Notes" are generally as intentionally unpoetic as possible. However, while readers will certainly rejoice at the positive diagnosis and conclusion, many may feel more like eavesdroppers on the whole process, as often is the case elsewhere in the book. There is a gifted and sensitive consciousness at work in these pages, but it too often achieves its effects by the exclusion of its audience.

B.W. Powe is best known for his stimulating if idiosyncratic essays on Canadian writers, artists, and intellectuals and the idea of Canadian nationhood, as well as for *Outage*, his controversial 1995 novel of technological disconnect. His prose has provoked a variety of reactions, perhaps the most extreme

being Barbara Amiel's preposterous likening of it to the Unabomber Theodore Kaczynski's manifesto. For all that, Powe's writing embodies a persistently romantic optimism that is most significantly expressed in this, his first collection of poetry. *The Unsaid Passing* is, at first blush, an eclectic compilation of—to quote from the back cover—"meditations, drafts, fragments, lyric samplings, glimpses, notes, reveries" from 1995 to 2004. But these fragments have a way of bleeding into each other to create a thematically unified work that expresses the poet's deepest longings for a return to an Eden that is just "one inch" away from us. Many of the poems are personal and immediately accessible, ranging from his contemplative life to his many relationships, especially those with his beloved children, Katie and Thomas. While the poems, as a result of their very accessibility, sometimes teeter toward the prosaic, they generally maintain a competent balance. Some of the best are found in the central section, where the narrator steps outside of his confessional self and adopts the voices of several significant romantic figures and of those most closely associated with them. We hear moving words on the death of Arthur Rimbaud from his sister Isabelle, on William Blake, from his wife Catherine, and on Clara Schumann, perhaps from her husband Robert, perhaps from Johannes Brahms. The most poignant of these is "Song for the Superman," in the voice of the abused coach horse wept over by Nietzsche in what may have been his final moment of sanity. While some of the poems in this collection miss their mark individually, a cover-to-cover reading reveals some subtly textured themes that affirm the importance of the romantic voice in these troubled times.

The Fertile Crescent is Karen Shenfeld's second book of poetry. Her first, *The Law of Return*, won the Canadian Jewish Book Award for Poetry in 2001, and there is no

reason why this present volume should not also win an award from someone somewhere. Shenfeld has remarkable poetic gifts and has clearly worked hard at perfecting her craft. She attends to the finer details of diction, patterns of sound and image, and subtle rhythms and phrasing that result in many polished poetic gems. To take only two examples, auditory and visual imagery combine to create palpable impressions of delight, as in these lines from “Girls at the Well, Laughing”: “Laughter announces their presence, / circles / like birds / the silver music of / bracelets and anklets, / as they walk, single file”—or of divine terror, as in these lines from “Take Thou Thy Son, Thy Only Son”: “All night, / hooves trod / the cracked earth / your herd’s fugue / darkening to a dirge.” The settings of these poems are exotic, from a Canadian perspective, ranging from Latin America to the Far East, from North to South Africa. They also range in time, from the biblical time of Abraham and Sarah to the present day. Although unfamiliar place names and exotic common nouns may occasionally challenge readers, they unfailingly reward the persistent. A delicately shifting “I” weaves in and out of these poems, much like the threads of the woven rugs that figure so often in them. The female and the feminine are celebrated in many ways, with brilliance, with dignity, and with some archness as in these lines of a portrait entitled “Woman at the River, Washing”: “You have no business / watching her, but do,” where the final verb oscillates artfully between the indicative and imperative mood. The collection ends with a homage to South African poet Tatamkhulu Afrika, whom Shenfeld met and interviewed several years earlier and whose influence on her has been significant. I recommend this book.



Fear of Doorknobs

Susan Andrews Grace

Flesh, A Naked Dress. Hagios \$16.95

Amanda Lamarche

The Clichéist. Nightwood \$15.95

Susan McCaslin

A Plot of Light. Oolichan \$17.95

Olive Senior

over the roofs of the world. Insomniac \$11.95

Reviewed by Anne F. Walker

In *over the roofs of the world*, the poem “The Dance of the Cranes” appears in the section entitled “A little bird told me,” a section that largely narrates birds’ stories. Other sections include “Islanded” and “Penny Wheel,” and employ a variety of poetic structures. “The Dance of the Cranes” depicts a shift in what it can mean to narrate where story, architecture, and the body’s movements are overlapped:

Ancient Priestesses schooled
in dance notation
copied down the mating
dance of cranes to use as blueprints
for constructing
labyrinths
so initiates might wind their way to ecstasy.

The idea of crane mating dance notation transferred into a maze is an evocative and unique vision of narration and its effect. The language of the last line weakens a potential effect of the piece, as does the logic that a mating dance for cranes would evoke ecstasy in a woman walking a structure built on that pattern. The poet’s reliance on shaky, or not thoroughly worked through, assumptions decreases the poem’s impact, as does the repeated reliance on abstract nouns such as “joy,” “ecstasy,” and “magic.” I want joy, ecstasy, and magic in a poem, but not in the empty envelope that abstract nouns alone create. I want them specific and clear enough that I understand the feeling without indistinctness. I want distinction in poetry. This poem illustrates the strengths

and weaknesses of the collection as a whole, where the poet's desire to narrate crucial impulses needs to be sculpted more carefully to integrate the impact of content with aesthetic expression.

I found more linguistic distinction in *The Clichéist*, for example, in the final poem, "The Meek Shall Inherit the Earth." More on that in a moment. *The Clichéist* also uses the technique of a themed first section. The theme is fear, and the fears are unique, odd, and given tangible details which evoke clear sensations of unexpected directions. "Fear of Doorknobs" reads:

Say what you will
or when, or how
loud. The doorknob,
the hand to the glass
handle, the bowed latch
catching will always
be the last thing said
in the cold room.

Each line leads to the next through unexpected and yet fit links that switch sensibilities. The simple idea that the click of a latch makes a doorknob a fright-fest is unexpected. The language and flow of the poem are somewhat mimetic to that which it describes: circular, clear, movable, and usable. The language in the final poem, "The Meek Shall Inherit the Earth," also demonstrates some of the strong style present through the collection. "The Meek Shall Inherit the Earth" starts out "she herself can never know so // she scouts // his yard." The poem rolls forward using assonance and alliteration to link line to line, image to image, in a satisfying, grounded manner. It is a strong note on which to end.

Each section of *Flesh, A Naked Dress* begins with quotations that set the stage for the poetic exploration of the human condition. These sections—"Erasmus in the Kootenays," "Joy of the Proper Tool," "A Sometime Gravity—Thomas More," "Flesh, A Naked Dress," "Luther in the Desert," and

"An Event in the World"—explore and narrate philosophic viewpoints, often engaging with the ideas of Erasmus of Rotterdam, Thomas More, and Martin Luther. While these philosophies are important to the creative impulse of the collection, the sections more sensory or tactile in their orientation are stronger in their music. Section "15" in "Joy of the Proper Tool" connects abstracts into a concrete framework of sustained metaphor:

Lay out that intricately woven life,
its warp necessity, its weft circumstance:
permeability
is like that: relentless in the way it argues
unto death, undoes a white silk ribbon
unfurling its narrow good.

These lines integrate abstract ideals of life, good, and permeability in a kind of intellectual Möbius strip that resonates with lines such as at the beginning of "A Sometime Gravity—Thomas More": "—What shifts under the rug is still under / the tightly woven wool of enclosures, poverty, excess / vanities swollen in the worst citizens." When tangibilities are touched on, and are connected to ideas of what it means to be a social being, this poetry sounds an acute intellectual chime.

A Plot of Light works with highly contained structures as it explores through the sections "A Brevity of Visions," "Transcultural Poetics," "Contemplation in a world of busyness," and "Main Street Elegies." The collection uses couplets extensively and has a small suite of sonnets. Often where there are not couplets, there is a repeating first word or phrase through the poem. The impact of these highly visible structural techniques is to set a forerunning tone of formal control. When I see repetitions I think of bpNichol's visions of repetition as a constant mutation. As Christmas gifts in 1991, Ellie Nichol sent out "Ad Sanctos," from *The Martyrology Book 9*:

No path but the true path
should be taken. No road but the
holy road, the way. All other roads are

mistaken. When the true path is taken, the way is clear, tho the true path be not the near path & the price be dear, no path but the true path should be taken. No road but the holy road, the way. All other roads are mistaken & when taken lead to loneliness, lovelessness, lead to emptiness, bitterness, lead to nothingness, lead away.

Repetitions in *A Plot of Light* are more consistently frontloaded. "A Cylinder of Light" makes "like" the first and last point of reiteration:

Like a swirling tube of blue light
like a milk bath in the head
like suddenly being lighter
like being inside a pipe organ
like light improvising
like a gentle cooing of doves
like a natural hot spring
like resting in energy
like something else doing the work
like pulsations with pinions

like
like

Some of these images work more than others. A "gentle cooing of doves" is a difficult line to read in serious poetry. The concluding "like / like" without punctuation might be the strongest part of the poem, but only because of the weight of that which has come before. The flow of images suddenly absent, the suspension of two "like"s alone in their own stanza, the lack of end punctuation all form a lyric conclusion which is a pleasant mutation of the repetition. They simply enact the sentiment of the bpNichol lines "lead to nothingness, / lead away." It is not that the poems are telling the same story; they are ending the stories with a letting go facilitated in the poetic structure by the repetitions previously used.

Theatrical Landscape

Brian Kennedy, ed.

The Baron Bold and the Beauteous Maid: A Compact History of Canadian Theatre.
Playwrights Canada \$26.00

Steve Pirot, ed.

Nextfest Anthology II: Plays from the Syncrude Next Generation Arts Festival. NeWest \$18.95

Reviewed by Neta Gordon

These two books look in opposite directions: *Baron Bold and the Beauteous Maid* provides a wide-ranging collection of necessarily truncated scenes culled from plays spanning a 400-year history of theatre in Canada, while the *Nextfest Anthology II* contains five plays, written and performed by young and emerging artists, that premiered at Edmonton's edgy Syncrude Arts Festival between 2001 and 2005. Though both collections offer a seemingly eclectic array, their editors, Brian Kennedy and Steve Pirot respectively, have curated selections according to perceptible and constructive principles, attempting to demonstrate how Canadian theatre, of old and of new, functions as historical, political, and/or social commentary. Further, both collections appear directed at, and will likely appeal to, the same groups: high school and college teachers of drama, especially those with cross-curricular designs, and their students, especially those on the lookout for contextually rich and theatrically diverse material.

Kennedy explicitly identifies his intended audience and his project in the prologue, asserting that *Baron Bold* "attempts to present the teacher of English or Drama with a simple introduction to Canadian theatre history," and, in doing so, demonstrates the logical development of Canadian theatre, its engagement with the social framework, and its national distinctiveness. To better establish his case, Kennedy provides background information, not only about the performance history of each play represented, but

also about the historical and, often, political context that inspired their original creation and production; Kennedy's research is thorough and valuable, and the bibliographical notes that follow each of the six chapters, as well as the resource bibliography, offer further research opportunities to the curious teacher or student. At the same time, however, Kennedy clearly intends readers to explore how these short scenes "live" as theatre, providing director's notes that turn attention to, for example, how in *Le Théâtre de Neptune*, the first theatrical production of North America, rhythmic shifts are used to indicate character difference; how, in order to catch the spirit of the nineteenth-century parody, *The Baron Bold and the Beauteous Maid*, actors should "exaggerate with the worst assaults to the realistic style that they can muster"; how to focus attention on the pitch and timing of voices in a scene from *Hill-Land*, a Canadian modernist attempt to "combine the effects of painting and poetry with the sister arts of music and theatre."

While the prologue makes mention of English and Drama teachers, Kennedy might also have made reference to History teachers as likely readers of his compilation, as with an eye to establishing a historical context and course, he organizes the 25 scenes included. Most scenes in the first two chapters, "The Velvet Gloves of the Garrison" and "The Baron Bold," will probably be unfamiliar, with the notable and odd exception of a scene from Sheridan's *The School for Scandal*. At first glance, the stress Kennedy places on the overt "Canadianness" of an eighteenth-century garrison prologue or the significance of Sarah Anne Curzon's nineteenth-century dramas about women and Canadian history suggest perhaps an attempt to force a trajectory of social engagement where none exists. However, his inclusion of scenes from more well-known, and clearly central, plays such as *Eight Men Speak*, *Les Belles Soeurs*, and *The Ecstasy of Rita Joe* suggest the logic of this emphasis.

The final scene included in *The Baron Bold and the Beauteous Maid* is from Tomson Highway's *Aria, A One-Woman Play in One Act*. In his director's notes, Kennedy draws attention to the different voices that must be developed by the lone actor to delineate the several characters in the play; this theatrical requirement, rooted, the notes suggest, in Highway's perception of the "contrasting worlds" that define the urban Aboriginal's existence are similarly taken up by the first play in the *Nextfest Anthology*, Sheldon Elter's *Métis Mutt*. Steve Pirot's introduction to the play notes that it was developed from a student exercise, and how its successful production crucially depends on the actor's abilities as an "artistic storyteller," who is able to move between the "Bad Comedy Sheldon," who cracks increasingly racist jokes, "Little Sheldon," a five-year-old boy, and various friends, family members and members of the establishment that "Sheldon" encounters. Though the piece is clearly autobiographical, playwright Elter has provided enough theatrical innovation to the telling of his various stories to allow another actor to experiment with these "contrasting worlds."

The four other plays collected are equally accessible to young actors looking for sharp material. Pirot's introduction asserts that "Nextfest is sexy . . . [it] celebrates youth, newness, and creativity;" indeed, these plays call for actors in their late teens or early twenties who are inclined to stretch themselves creatively. The play written in the most realistic idiom, Janis Craft's *Citrus*, is a dialogue-driven exploration of desire and intimacy, in which a newly married couple must confront their attraction to the husband's twin sister; the language is rich and the series of two-handed scenes full of emotional tension. The play *Grumplestock's*, written and originally performed by Kevin Jesuino, Trish Lorenz, and Jon Stewart, is, on the other hand, an experimental piece that depends on the innovative interplay of voice

and movement to portray the plight of four marionettes trapped by the tyrannical Grumplestock; the actors must inhabit not only these four characters but other members of the fantastical world of Bowble, a cross between a Dickensian world and sci-fi circus, in order to expose the horrors of class inequity.

Both *Code Word: Time*, by Leah Simone Bowen, and Rob Bartel's *Beneath the Deep Blue Sky* might be said to operate as the latest stage in the trajectory Kennedy outlines in their concern with the social impact of an increasingly technological, post-national world; they are plays about the potentially dehumanizing effect of the paradoxical anonymity and isolation resulting from surveillance technologies, digital worlds, and global identities. Both plays, in particular, require technically innovative staging in order to "live" as theatre, and in order to demonstrate the concerns of the young artists who must function in the world they represent.

Remembering Hana

Karen Levine

Hana's Suitcase. Second Story \$14.95

Karen Levine and Emil Sher

Hana's Suitcase on Stage. Second Story \$18.95

Reviewed by Annika Orich

Elie Wiesel has emphasized time and again that "we must always remember the children, frightened and forlorn, all part of a nocturnal procession walking towards the flames, rising to the highest heavens." How do we remember the one-and-a-half-million Jewish children who perished in the Holocaust? How do we teach children about this era? Karen Levine's *Hana's Suitcase* and Emil Sher's *Hana's Suitcase on Stage*, which is based on Levine's work, are both sensitive and powerful answers to these questions.

In their works, Levine and Sher remember Hana Brady, a young Jewish girl who

died in the gas chambers at Auschwitz. Levine's book and Sher's play give testimony to Hana's life by telling her story simultaneously with Fumiko Ishioka's. Ishioka, the director of the Tokyo Holocaust Education Resource Center, unearthed Hana's story by relentlessly following a single trace she left: a suitcase with her name on it which was sent to Tokyo from the Auschwitz Museum. Ishioka's search, inspired by questions about Hana from the children's group "Small Wings," led her to Theresienstadt. There, she discovered five drawings created by Hana while she was in the camp. She also learned about Hana's brother George, who is now living in Toronto. Levine and Sher link the past with the present and demonstrate how Ishioka's search has brought together Japanese children, Hana and George, and the history of the Holocaust. *Hana's Suitcase* and *Hana's Suitcase on Stage* depict convincingly how, as a result of their inspiring curiosity, Ishioka and the children reconstructed Hana's life and, by doing so, learned about the Holocaust. Both Levine and Sher transfer the fascination the children have for Hana's fate to the reader, making him/her part of this remarkable act of commemoration.

Both Levine's book and Sher's play tell the story of an ordinary girl. Hana's early childhood did not differ much from that of children today. Her story is also ordinary insofar as her fate, in regard to the Holocaust, is not unique. It is this ordinariness that makes her story so powerful and helps children relate to the victims. Hana grew up in a loving family in the town of Nove Mesto, now in the Czech Republic. On Sundays, the family enjoyed picnics and daytrips; Hana loved to crawl into her parents' bed or to ski with George. Their lives changed rapidly when the Nazis reached their hometown. Nazi laws forbade Hana and George to attend school, to go to movies, to visit friends, to skate on the local pond. Gradually, the Bradys became iso-

lated from the rest of the community. In 1941, the Gestapo deported Hana's mother to Ravensbrück. After the arrest of their father, Hana and George stayed with their Christian uncle. Both children were deported to Theresienstadt in 1942, where Hana attended secret art classes given by Friedl Dicker-Brandeis. In 1944, Hana and George were sent to Auschwitz on different transports.

Levine constructs her narration around the family photographs. They give visual testimony to Hana's life, and are the main advantage the book has over Sher's play. They contribute greatly to Levine's accomplishment of reconstructing Hana's life. Not only do we read about Hana's passion for skiing and skating, but we also see her performing these activities. The questions the children had regarding Hana's identity illustrate how important it was for them to link the name on the suitcase to Hana's face. The photographs allow them to make this connection, while the play only provides the features of an actress. Levine also included Hana's drawings, authentic documents such as her deportation order, Ishioka's original letter to George, and photographs from George's visit to Japan. All these materials help to reconstruct the last years of Hana's life and document the process of remembrance. For her parts, Sher included some of the original wording of the historical material in the script, and the stage directions ask for Hana's drawings to be screened during the play. On stage, nameless, ghost-like figures (which do not appear in Levine's book) represent other victims, emphasizing that Hana's fate resembles that of millions of others. Thus, both writers represent history and commemoration on more than one level; this descriptive depiction that makes the play and, in particular, the book valuable sources for learning about the Holocaust.

Both Levine and Sher interweave Ishioka's with Hana's story, though in dif-

ferent ways. Levine's narration alternates between chapters relating Hana's life and Ishioka's search. The two distinct narrative strands come together when we learn of Hana's fate: Hana and other prisoners "were ordered to enter a large building. The door closed behind them with a frightening bang." At the beginning of the next chapter, Ishioka gains knowledge of Hana's death. Although Sher concentrates more on Ishioka's investigation in Act I and on Hana's past in Act II, two members of "Small Wings" are always on stage, commenting on Hana's fate, their knowledge of the Holocaust, and their understanding of remembrance. Their active involvement in the reconstruction of Hana's story demonstrates the meaning of remembrance to the audience. As a result, the performance of *Hana's Suitcase on Stage* is a visual emphasis on the importance of active commemoration.

Although Levine owes the content of her book mostly to Ishioka and George, it is Levine's voice that captures the reader. Her writing is never didactic but it is nonetheless educational and informative. Sher does not always master this balance. It is a weakness of the play that some characters are, at times, patronizing or quarrelsome. The publisher, in this regard, was wise to include Levine's story in *Hana's Suitcase on Stage*.

Both Levine's book and Sher's play are insightful examples of how we can remember the victims of the Holocaust and at the same time teach the next generation about this event. The works complement each other. In the end, one can argue that the story of Hana's suitcase and its message may be best remembered by reading Levine's book and seeing Sher's play performed—or, in the case of children, by performing Hana's story in class.



Stories of Loss

Heather Ball

Remarkable Women Writers. Second Story \$10.95

Jon Paul Fiorentino

Asthmatica. Insomniac \$21.95

Robert Strandquist

A Small Dog Barking. Anvil \$18.00

Ann Walsh, ed.

Dark Times. Ronsdale \$9.95

Reviewed by Lynn (J.R.) Wytenbroek

The short story is, like poetry, the crucible in which an author's essential skill and wit are distilled. For some, it is the only narrative structure that works for them; for others, it is one of the genres which they navigate, skilfully or otherwise. But it seems to be the form that most clearly gives the reader glimpses of the stylistic essence, the touch of the writer, even as poetry reveals the soul. Three of these books contain short fiction, which reveals as much about the writers as about the stories themselves. The first book features short biographies on women writers.

Remarkable Women Writers is aimed at the young reader. It is full of interesting but carefully expurgated bits of information about writers such as George Eliot, Lucy Maud Montgomery, and Joy Kogawa. Three Canadian writers are featured in this odd biographical collection. Several questions immediately spring to mind. Given Heather Ball's Canadian roots, why did she not write exclusively on Canadian women writers, when three pieces in the book already are, in fact, devoted to three great Canadian women: Atwood, Montgomery, and Kogawa? Then again, why not concentrate on all adult authors or all children's authors rather than combine the two age-groups? Also, why start with Jane Austen and end with J.K. Rowling, rather than all living or all deceased authors? Given the condensed and expurgated versions of the lives of these women, and the somewhat simplistic manner of the writing, this book is obviously for children, so why not

choose all great women who wrote for children? These questions are left unanswered. The information presented about each author and her place and time is interesting enough, but there is neither flair nor colour in the prose. The writing is pedestrian and after a while, each biographical sketch sounds like the one before it. The idea behind this book is admirable; the execution is weak.

Asthmatica is poet Jon Fiorentino's first foray into the world of short fiction. The writing is that of a poet—sharp, pithy, but surprisingly, without much poetic style. In fact, the prose is grittily realistic. There are flashes of humour, especially in the story "Sicker Quicker" about a young man and his great aunt on one of their drinking sprees. On the whole, however, the comedic elements are weighed down with endless scenes of failed sexual exploits and self-conscious teenage angst. The biggest problem is that the writing is altogether too self-conscious and thus needs wit or clever insight to carry it off, neither of which is present in any redeeming quantity.

Strandquist's *A Small Dog Barking* is, in contrast, quite clever in places. This book has repeated flashes of brilliance, and while it is somewhat self-conscious at times, allows the narrative voice to take on its own story often enough for many of the pieces to work well. There is both a wit and a candour in some of the stories that engages the reader. The collection lacks the incessant neurosis of *Asthmatica*, and therefore each story has its own tone and mood, as well as a varying set of characters. Strandquist's parody of *Hamlet*, "Hamnet," is clever, while the three short chapters of "The Shift" give a fascinating if bleak outline of a waterless future in a drought-ridden Vancouver. The writing is varied and interesting, while the author weaves through the treacherous shallows of modern life and love.

Dark Times is a collection of short stories for young people, all centred on the theme of loss: loss of a parent to death or desertion,

loss of a sibling or a friend in some way. While the theme sounds bleak, it is handled extremely well by a very competent group of writers. Several of the authors, such as Sarah Ellis and Ann Walsh, who is both editor and contributor, are well-known in the Canadian children's literature scene. The stories explore loss through accidental death or injury, suicide, desertion or jailing. None is squeamish about its subject matter, and none pulls any punches about the effects and pain of loss on loved ones, especially children and young people. Yet the stories manage not to be bleak or forbidding, offering some comfort in sometimes subtle, sometimes obvious ways. All are strong with well-realized characters, clear themes, engaging although vastly different styles, and coherent plotlines. It is remarkable that there is not one weak story in the anthology, although all will obviously appeal more to some readers than others. Some, like Mac's "The Sign for Heaven" about the death of a child who cannot speak, or Walsh's "All Is Calm" about a teen dealing with a grandmother's descent into Alzheimer's, are quite wrenching, while others such as Keller's "Balance Restored" or Maracle's "Canoe" show the resilience of those who survive the loss of a loved one to carry on and recreate new lives, phoenix-like, from the ashes of their old lives. Walsh has done a superb job of selecting the stories for this anthology; it is a truly excellent collection that will speak to both adults and young people alike about the many facets of loss and recovery from loss.

Poetry for an Audience

Shane .L. Koyczan

Visiting Hours. Mother Press Media \$16.95

Reviewed by T.L. Cowan

Visiting Hours is the first full-length collection from internationally-admired performance poet, Shane .L. Koyczan. Since winning the Individual Championship at the National Poetry Slam in 2000, Koyczan's rep-

utation as a charismatic performer has allowed him to maintain a busy touring schedule. His performance credits include opening for Ani DiFranco, Spearhead, and Saul Williams. Like Williams, Tracie Morris, Maggie Estep, and others who have come up through the slam scene, Koyczan is a poetry rock star. Audiences around the world line up to buy personal copies of *Visiting Hours* (which includes a five-track CD); the book thus functions, in part, as a piece of memorabilia.

Formally, each poem in *Visiting Hours* is similar. Beginning with a capital letter, and rushing toward a period at the end, the majority of these poems are slam-length (taking about three minutes to read at lightning speed). They have a spoken cadence, which, despite unstandardized line lengths and apparently idiosyncratic line breaks, falls easily into a sing-song metre that trips off the tongue. Like many performance poets, Koyczan's attention to assonance and consonance is remarkable, and, when considered as a collection of sounds, these poems are impressive.

I find extensive thematic repetition, as well, in these pages. The "Skin" series (comprised of three poems) is characteristic of the many enthusiastic erotic/love poems that read as impressive chains of touching, and sometimes naughty, one-liners. Two of his non-sex poems, "Visiting Hours" and "Restaurant," are narrative pieces that, like a good pop song, have the power to make audience members cry. Given prolonged consideration on the page, however—again like most pop songs—I find them wordy and melodramatic. "Move Pen Move," the final poem of both the book and the accompanying CD, is a dirge which brings to mind W.H. Auden's "Stop All The Clocks." Certainly, Auden's brevity and formal discipline concentrate the impact of his lines, but the passionate recklessness of Koyczan's style reflects, I think, the desperate experience of dealing with the loss of a loved one. This is the strongest, and the most careful and conscientious piece in the

book. I look forward to seeing Koyczan give the same attention to poems on a broader range of topics.

Reviewing a book like *Visiting Hours*, one must avoid the stage/page turf war so invariably re-initiated whenever spoken word performance/poetry is discussed in relation to other poetry. Koyczan's poems are powerful because they are hyperbolic, unabashedly sentimental, and humanist; formally, they reproduce the heightened emotional state of an evangelical preacher and the quick wit of a stand-up comic. Like most popular poetry, this work aestheticizes everyday experience, giving audiences and readers a language with which to imagine their own thoughts and lives as extraordinary. It strikes me that this is the task Koyczan's poetry sets for itself and, therefore, this is the criterion by which it should be evaluated.

Comrade Shakespeare

Irena R. Makaryk and Joseph G. Price, eds.

Shakespeare in the Worlds of Communism and Socialism. U of Toronto P \$85.00

Reviewed by Vin Nardizzi

In the wake of the sudden collapse of the USSR in 1991, Joseph G. Price coordinated a scholarly effort to "assess the significance of Shakespeare to Marxism and to analyse the appropriation of his plays in the Soviet world." Funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities and elaborated in a series of conferences which hosted international academics and theatre practitioners, this effort was from its inception archival, collaborative, and exploratory in design. Its arenas of dialogue were "electrifying" and "evidently highly charged," phrases which attest to the excitement and interestedness of the interlocutors as well as to the timeliness of the conference programs. Rich in detail and amply illustrated, *Shakespeare in the Worlds of Communism and Socialism* compiles the surprising

returns of the archival opportunities that late-twentieth-century political upheavals in Eastern Europe and Russia continue to afford students of cross-cultural Shakespeare studies and of modernist and postmodernist drama. And I venture that the collection's final essay could occasion in readers of all stripes the sort of high voltage response that the conference programs, out of which the volume developed, elicited from audiences over a decade ago. Sharon O'Dair's provocative piece, about which I shall say more, urges scholars to reassess and to analyze the significance of Marxism in North American, especially in US institutions of elite higher education.

With eighteen essays by sixteen contributors, *Shakespeare in the Worlds of Communism and Socialism* is a hefty book. Individual essays trace the "fortunes of Shakespeare's reputation" in geopolitics as diverse as Maoist China, late-twentieth-century Cuba, post-1961 East and West Germany, and early-twentieth-century Latvia. The collection's editors judiciously arrange essays into four "[r]oughly" chronological subsections and frame each quarter unit with a review of the major political events and personalities of that swath of historical time. The collection thus integrates materials spanning three continents and nearly 85 years. Yet the editors concede that this "first sustained, global look at Communist and socialist Shakespeare" does not aim to be comprehensive: archival evidence, if it exists at all (and, if it did, how would one access it?), exempts North Korea, for instance, from consideration, and so the editors "quickly dismissed" the "completeness of coverage" as a "utopian ideal." Though I think it wise for the editors to have addressed the related matters of comprehensiveness and archival availability, I nonetheless would like to have had them define the term "global" more precisely, for it resonates richly in recent articulations of postcolonialism, transna-

tionalism, and the present state of capitalism. I mention this concern about vocabulary less as a critique than as a prompt for future discussion about the aptness of critical terminology for comparative literary reception studies in former and emergent Communist and socialist societies.

The temporal organization of the collection's essays, the editors insist, does not mean to ratify a "straightforward or evolutionary" or even a predictable "trajectory" of Shakespeare's reception in Communist and socialist worlds. One of Stalin's most admired authors, for instance, lauded Shakespeare as "the world's greatest playwright" in 1934 but, as Irena R. Makaryk remarks in her essay "Wartime *Hamlet*," Stalinist Russia did not always embrace the Bard so warmly: "*Hamlet* in particular attracted scorn in official discourse and was tacitly banned up until Stalin's death in 1953." "[O]rthodox theatre histories," as Makaryk dubs them, routinely note that Stalin "detested" a play whose infamously introspective protagonist "could hardly serve [his] self-image." The official chapter on Stalinist *Hamlet* would thus close. Makaryk, though, presents evidence of successful productions of *Hamlet* in Nazi-occupied Ukraine during the early 1940s, a period when Russia, Fortinbras-like, was poised to assume rule there as soon as Hitler's troops were ushered offstage. Makaryk regards these performances as a "declaration of war against art as propaganda" because they rejected the didactic protocols of socialist realism, the standard theatrical genre of Stalinist Russia. For the non-specialist of twentieth-century Russia, tracking this complex micro-history of theatre as dissent might prove difficult. Yet the stakes of the critical intervention Makaryk and her fellow contributors manage are unambiguous: new archival research affords the telling of lost histories of Shakespeare's cross-cultural career, of unpredictable narratives which complicate "straightforward"

Shakespearean and modernist theatre histories. This example of a Stalinist-era *Hamlet* stresses that the play was *tacitly* banned.

Perhaps with good reason, audiences might fault Shakespeare's *Hamlet* for thinking too much, for expending energies on introspection rather than on immediate action. Sharon O'Dair's "Marx Manqué," the final, compelling contribution to *Shakespeare in the Worlds of Communism and Socialism*, all but figures "contemporary Marxist criticism of Shakespeare in North America" as a paradigm long overdue for a healthy dose of the Danish prince's brand of self-apprehension. A brief of new historicist, materialist feminist, and cultural materialist trends typifying Marxist Shakespeare studies in the later decades of the twentieth century, O'Dair's essay will appeal to scholars from all literary periods whose research concerns political economy as well as the state of the academy. It should also stir controversy, for it argues that the pressures and privileges of careerism in institutions of elite higher education "participate today in the maintenance and reproduction of social distinction in this society," and subsequently that "traditional" Marxism comes to "function as a site of desire, as a symbol for something other than, or in addition to, intellectual work." For O'Dair, a reluctance or aversion to "turn class analysis on ourselves or our institutions" disables Marxist literary criticism precisely because the academy, at present, is a stratified, professionalized hub of democracy and liberalism. As a consequence, scholars displace and "marginalize" Marxism's transformative ideals to an "elsewhere." Radical in its message, *Shakespeare in the Worlds of Communism and Socialism's* closing salvo refuses to ring a death peal for Marxism as "intellectual work" performed inside the walls of the academy. Responses to O'Dair's Marxist self-critique of higher education and literary studies, though, just might prove all too predictable.

Gothic for Beginners

Edgar Allan Poe; Ryan Price, illus.

The Raven. Kids Can \$18.95

Poli Délano; Sean Higgins, trans.; Manuel Monroy, illus.

When I Was a Boy Neruda Called Me Policarpo.

Groundwood \$17.95

Reviewed by Hilary Turner

It stands to reason that children nearing the end of childhood should gravitate naturally toward the gothic: they are already in “liminal space”; they have an instinct for the uncanny, and an uninhibited curiosity about the more unsavoury aspects of human existence. And people’s most vivid childhood memories tend to involve events that stand out from the norm or violate the usual order of things—just as the gothic imagination thrives on the disquieting visitations of the unexpected in the midst of the mundane.

One of the most famous gothic interruptions of all time takes place in Edgar Allan Poe’s “The Raven.” In this handsome Kids Can Press edition of the poem, its macabre qualities have been greatly enhanced by the drawings of Ryan Price. The hapless speaker of the poem is initially pictured as gaunt, anxious, and introspective. As his uninvited visitor begins to occupy more and more psychic space, his appearance grows, by turns, alarmingly mournful and manic. The Raven, by contrast, is unwaveringly sinister—with a gentlemanly aspect reminiscent of the Prince of Darkness. Price’s use of sepia tones throughout reminds the reader of the poem’s nineteenth-century origin, as does the copperplate script used for the repeated “Nevermore,” yet his use of objects and images in the background (including family photographs and a television set) makes the speaker’s descent into madness seem eerily contemporary. In a chilling touch, the dropped leaves of a dying plant spell out the name “Lenore.”

Less overtly gothic, though quirky and

unsettling in its own way, is Poli Délano’s memoir of Pablo Neruda, *When I Was a Boy Neruda Called Me Policarpo*. The title is a historical fact: in Mexico, during the 1940s, Délano’s parents were friends and neighbours of the poet and his then wife, Delia del Carril, and the nickname was bestowed on the author *in utero*. The book consists of a series of episodes in Délano’s relationship with his Tío Pablo. As he later became a writer himself, the book is in part a tribute to this early influence: six poems by Neruda are included as a counterpoint to the narrative. Each vignette is rendered from the young boy’s point of view and—because of the mixture of clarity and confusion with which children interpret experience—each is also ambiguous and more than slightly ominous.

On the other hand, Neruda’s eccentricities account in large part for the oddities of the stories. In the opening chapter, for example, the eight-year-old Poli is savagely bitten by El Niño, the poet’s beloved pet badger. In “An Invisible Stroke of Fate,” Neruda gives the boy a bow and a quiver of arrows, one of which is later found mysteriously embedded in a large snake, while in “The War,” as the author cowers under a restaurant table, a spontaneous fist fight erupts between the Nerudas, the Délanos, and some German tourists. On another occasion, he enjoys snacks of grasshoppers and ants with his mentor. On still another, he is present at a fatal battle between a tarantula and a walking stick insect, while the adults make bets on the outcome.

Given Neruda’s devotion to the disadvantaged, it is not surprising that the sequence of stories should conclude with a lesson in social justice—but this too has an undercurrent of savagery. In order to make some extra pocket-money, young Poli has the bright idea of retailing boxes of gum to the atreagoers. As luck would have it, the project involves encroaching on the turf of some local urchins—who respond to the unwanted competition by administering a

knuckle sandwich and a kick in the pants. Poli understands in the end that whereas his business venture was all about personal gain, “those other children do it to buy food for their families.”

Of course both these books would also serve as a way of introducing children from about ten to fourteen to poetry. While the intricate rhythms and rhymes of “The Raven” provide a compelling lesson in poetic form, the six selections from Neruda’s works interspersed in *Policarpo* are more purely lyrical and evocative. With a short biography of Poe appended to *The Raven*, and an essay on Neruda included in *Policarpo*, each book enlarges on the poetry it contains with historical context and personal information. Most importantly, with their emphasis on the inexplicable and the uncanny, both do a splendid job of dispelling the notion that poetry is all about hearts, flowers, and the sunny side of life.

(Un)Settling Secrets

Julie Johnston

As If By Accident. Key Porter \$32.95

Mary Lawson

The Other Side of the Bridge. Knopf Canada \$34.95

Reviewed by Andrea Wasylow

How well do we know our loved ones? And how many lives have we unknowingly touched and profoundly affected, even if only by happenstance? These questions receive creative and satisfying treatments in Julie Johnston’s first novel for adults, *As If By Accident*, and Mary Lawson’s second novel, *The Other Side of the Bridge*. The secrets encapsulated within these novels burn not achingly, but unapologetically. The message that belies these skilfully woven narratives is that even though some secrets should stay secrets, they will out eventually, unbidden.

The physical manifestation of a singular obstacle leads Johnston’s character Val to discover that for which she had not even known to look. Beyond the guilt she feels for

her husband’s death, beyond the ensuing mysteries of unknown properties, family relations and events, new life exists in the form of a manuscript to edit, which is more her hopeful project and prerogative than she knows. She and Johnston’s co-protagonist Gus become inextricably linked in innumerable ways. Johnston deftly shows how these linkages make sense; they are so easy, so matter-of-fact, and so common, that it makes us marvel at the permutations of human interconnectedness.

Given this notion, both of these novels pose the question: what if we could prevent an accident from happening? How can’t we see it coming? Johnston offers: “It’s when we come face to face with our frailties and our own mismanagement that we have this need to be the scapegoat.” Even though Val and Gus both watch as dear ones literally run toward the flames instead of away, *As If By Accident* sees tragedy and loss provoke inspiration, creativity, and the possibility for greatness. The obstructions in this book try to show us that we each take too much responsibility for the outcomes of others, and that complex assessments of degrees of guilt and culpability cannot help but result in negation.

Arthur must reconcile himself to this same conclusion, as he shoulders an enormous and unfair burden in *The Other Side of the Bridge*. Driven and devoted to protecting his younger brother Jake from the most dangerous force, which is Jake himself, Arthur loses time, opportunity, and love, but he will gain anew. A deadly mix of charming and devious, Jake’s most cruel act is making Arthur constantly guess at the real behind his seeming intent. Lawson’s is a vivid portrayal of how intangible debts, even imaginary ones, will exact a price that is unquestionably too high to pay. This realization gives weight to the preponderant influences that certain characters have over others: “Once it has left your lips, you cannot take it back.”

The drama of Lawson’s novel rests in one

character's abandoning another at the brink of a totality. Ian irretrievably loses his mother; Arthur's hollowness cannot be filled by Laura; and Jake becomes a "free agent" not only because of Arthur, but more so because of his own grievously wrong judgement. Jealousy amongst brothers, amongst lovers, results in death, results in choice. This novel studies characters trying in various ways to make amends with each other, and with themselves: each attempt is riddled with strife, error, and remorse. Lawson's novel veers from promoting forgiveness as goal, and toward forbearance.

The forms of these two novels are very deliberate and competent. They read as stream-of-consciousness, but by blending the third-person narrative in interweaving chapters and sections, with non-linear sequencing, the characters converge and collide with each other, as form extends to meaning.

There are sufficient details and explorations of universal themes in Johnston's and Lawson's novels that we can easily glimpse how our own lives could become impressive, unbelievable, troubled stories. Like Ian and his friend Pete, we can sit back and watch dragonflies, not quite understanding how infinitesimal we are. Like Val, we can feel deep down that our suspicion exists for a good reason. The secrets revealed in these novels are nothing short of staggering, and the characters deserve our investment.

First and Last

Anita Lahey

Out to Dry in Cape Breton. Véhicule \$16.00

Anne Szumigalski; Mark Abley, ed.

When Earth Leaps Up. Brick \$18.00

Reviewed by Alison Calder

Out to Dry in Cape Breton, Anita Lahey's first poetry collection, is divided into three sections, thematically arranged. The first two sections, "Woman at Clothes Line" and "Post-war Procession," take their central images from paintings by Alex Colville. The

last section, "Cape Breton Relative," is more personally inflected, organized around the conceit of a visit to a regional family home.

Lahey's verse is carefully composed; one has the sense of a certain weight to her lines. The attention paid to pacing is clear from the opening poem, "Woman at Clothes Line":

Strapped sandals lift the lady
above the lawn. Hung linens adopt her
hippy contours. This is no steamy
Tide commercial.

The way in which Lahey works her line breaks gives her lines resonance, and her mundane subject a dignity not often afforded it. The measured treatment of her verse is also seen in more formal pieces, such as "Post-war Procession," where the repetitive structure effectively dramatizes the plodding, senseless repetition of the violence the artist records:

Envy the barrel's ability to contain nothing.
You stink of blood, a blown-open field, severed
limbs. The march in was less pungent.
Puddles, open wounds along the ditch. Your
rifle cools your neck.

You stink of blood, a blown-open field.
Severed, still following orders, boots, the men
in front, wounds along the ditch. Your rifle,
your neck, yellow leak of sky. Bodies reek in
your head.

It's a critical cliché for a reviewer to claim "Lahey's writing seeks to elevate the details of everyday life," but it's an appropriate description of Lahey's project. Mostly, this re-centring of the aesthetic gaze works, as in "Wash Day in a Toronto Slum," where the speaker is a tenement dweller responding to the judgemental gaze of the photographer sent to document the squalor in which she lives. But she does hit a couple of wrong notes, particularly in "Seven Foot Balsam Fir from the Parkdale Market," in which the fate of the murdered Christmas tree is compared to "those six million Jews."

Lahey is a competent writer, shown by her skill with line breaks, by her publications, and by the awards she has won. But the col-

lection has a depressing sameness to it, a sameness attributable not only to Lahey, but symptomatic of a larger body of writing by young Canadian poets. Here are the ekphrastic verses that seek to animate paintings; here are the several-poems-written-on-a-particular-theme sections. Because the voice she uses is so invariable, whether she's animating a figure hanging laundry, a World War II battlefield, or an aging aunt in Cape Breton, the specific details she works with seem to disappear into vagueness. All these characters seem, improbably, to be wrestling with the same problems.

Anne Szumigalski published 15 books of poetry from 1974 to 1997, winning the Governor General's Award in 1995. The poems in *When Earth Leaps Up* are drawn partly from a manuscript she was assembling at the time of her death in 1999, and partly from uncollected or unpublished work found among her papers, and assembled by her literary executor Mark Abley. Despite these disparate origins, the collection holds together.

Szumigalski's work is delightful to read because it is so surprising. Her imagery is unexpected, and her topics sweeping. Cats talk, and so does God. Both seem appropriate.

Many of these poems could be read as personal reflections on aging, but Szumigalski's style, her use of generalized rather than particular identities, "the old woman" or "the girl" rather than the personal pronoun, gives her verses an archetypal or folkloric quality. She often uses a pastoral landscape, peopled by cowherds and maidens, but always disrupted or complicated by intimations of mortality and decay. Such complication closes the poem "Assortment," where the innocence of a child asking for an assortment of sugared almonds dissolves into something darker:

her teeth white as kernels
her tongue pink as a bud

her greed dark as licorice
her avarice grey as fields
before they quicken into spring

Other poems recall epigrams or nursery rhymes, as in the opening couplet of "Rowan in May": "an eggshell is a house to be broken out of / a house is a shell to be broken into." Like William Blake, a strong influence on her throughout her writing life, Szumigalski's simplicity is deceiving. Her mysticism can be broad and dramatic, as with the angels who "write with the fire of their fingers," words that the poet can only copy ("Statement for A Matter of Spirit"). Other times it can be subversively domestic, as in God's description of the "nightgown for everything" that encloses the universe in "A Conversation."

Szumigalski writes in "Statement on Peace" that "my drawings, my poems I think of as bubbles of quiet, each one perfect as it comes from the clay pipe but falling quickly in my estimation until there seems nothing for it but to blow another." This combination of the airy bubble and the earthy clay, the sacred and the profane, can stand in as an image for Szumigalski's writing itself.

Szumigalski's literary executor Mark Abley writes that a book of her miscellaneous writings (poetry, prose, drama, liturgy, and the score for a dance piece) is forthcoming within a few years. We will be lucky to receive it.

Seeing Reproductions

Don Kerr

My Own Places: Poems on John Constable. U of Calgary P \$24.95

Daniel Scott Tysdal

Predicting the Next Big Advertising Breakthrough Using a Potentially Dangerous Method. Coteau \$15.95

Reviewed by Tim Conley

Says the dealer to the prospective buyer:

It's a wonderful thing, art is,
you puts nature in a box like
and takes it indoors
and you looks at it over a nice cup of tea.

Yes indeed, squire. And another thing:
poetry, rather wonderful in its way (if, like

the “paintins” of John Constable, it is “done the proper way”). A book of poetry about paintings, you say? Don Kerr puts Constable in a book; flattens him like. Start scalding the kettle.

My Own Places evokes the life and times of the painter more than it does the paintings themselves. Kerr’s book acts as a catalogue for an imaginary show: this form accounts for the inclusion of full colour reproductions, which might otherwise seem somewhat redundantly decorative. For Kerr, “the art of seeing nature” the way that Constable painted it, and perhaps too the art of looking at Constable seem to be the same phenomenon. “You can observe how a tree is built”: there’s intelligent design for you.

Research is flourished in the quotations from eight volumes of correspondence as well as from George Field and John Ruskin, the curator’s insistence on dates everywhere, and the oft-sounded pedagogical tone. Kerr is sometimes deft at converting the raw material of these researches into verse. “And as for yellow,” the poem “Chromatics” splendidly begins:

the contrasting colours of yellow
are a purple inclining to blue
when the yellow inclines to orange
and a purple inclining to red
when the yellow inclines to green,

and so on, all of which makes a nice lack of sense because it is so technically precise and measured. Likewise the trajectories of some of the painter’s trips possess an enchanting rhythm and specificity, and Kerr cheerily pilfers John Kirby’s 1735 guide *The Suffolk Traveller* to give directions from Ipswich to Stratford: “From the Market Cross passing through St. Matthew’s Street / over Hanford Bridge, at 6¹/₂ furlongs, / avoid the right turning at Hadleigh.” With such processes Kerr comes closer to capturing (in relief) the consciousness of his fellow regionalist than he does with description.

The romanticization of Constable, though, can become pretty bland and even

silly, particularly when the methods are second-hand. Kerr’s summoning of Johnny Cash to tell of Constable’s walks (“I’ve been everywhere man / and walked but a mile or two”) seems calculated to make the reader wince in just the way students do when a professor inappropriately stoops to make a too-popular reference. When the book ends, after ringing down a contrast between what astounding prices Constable’s work now fetches with how little the painter himself got for them, with a thudding Wordsworth allusion—“Constable, thou shouldst be living at this hour”—the reader is left to wonder what good the painter’s resurrection would do anybody.

If poetry about paintings of nature seems like mediation double-jeopardy, *Predicting the Next Big Advertising Breakthrough Using a Potentially Dangerous Method* seems predicated on the notion that nature is a commercial fiction. Kerr’s Constable “could taste the weather / taste the clouds”; Daniel Scott Tysdal presents clouds as “so many hands amid hands / that have no idea how to assemble / or associate with fingers.” A cloud is never just a cloud, the chain of signification never ends, and why oh why “do we always ostracize with meaning?”

Ostracism was, strange to say, originally a democratic process—the word’s etymology speaks of a method by which citizens could banish a dissident or troublemaker—but Tysdal has little truck with originals. Walter Benjamin observed that in the age of mechanical reproduction (how quaint “mechanical” must sound to twenty-first-century ears), the “aura” of the original is always receding. That this insight provokes Tysdal to accelerate in the reverse direction puts me in mind of the Monty Python skit in which a character who has never before heard the cliché “no time to lose” takes considerable time trying to understand its usage. The order of the day, the title’s promised “potentially dangerous method,” is appropriation, effacement, reconfiguration,

repeat—and any denigration of a so-called “original” is just collateral damage.

Ersatzification is inevitable, so here’s to it! A “trailerization” of Ezra Pound’s “In a Station of the Metro” shouts from the rooftops that the poem relies on the implications of juxtaposition, just as movie trailers do. Canadian culture is just a knock-off of American products, as an ode to Leonard Cohen that parrots the anaphoric stand-up manner and structure of Ginsberg’s “America” suggests. But the events of 9/11 cannot be understood at face value, either:

- 1.11 Analogy is to this succession of pictures what ruins are to the lives within which the footage is rapt and extinguished.
- 1.1 (along with singular repeated sounds.
- 1 (along with repeated sounds resounding)).
- o.o What I mean is:
- o “it’s like a movie”

That’s Jean Baudrillard heard playing bongos in the back there (uncredited).

Tysdal’s book has the pleasing shape of a catalogue but structurally smacks of one of those dead-end marketplace “squatter” sites encountered at a wrong turn on the web, offering catch-all links in categories (games, dating, cell phones, horoscopes, real estate, movies). Among the commodities in *Predicting* are the Creature from the Black Lagoon, Paris Hilton, and Archie Andrews, carefully balanced by assuredly highbrow brands such as Benjamin, Rilke, and Joyce. Also porn: “Faces of Bukkake 6” reports how

her face is without
a grammar

since jargon in such cases
is inevitable (requiring a certain
skill and
timing).

There’s that potentially dangerous method again: poetry isn’t just masturbation, but impersonal degradation of the original face, and pornography is just parody and translation “gone wild.”

More irritating, even, than the television remote control in the hand of some other

impulsive person is the mouse in the hand of some other impulsive person. Simply, it is hard to enjoy someone else’s websurfing, and rather than giving its reader credit, *Predicting* only shows interest in the reader’s cultural credit rating. Have I been ostracized with meaning? Or just voted off the island?

La maison vide du poème

Michel Leclerc

Le livre de l'échoppe. Noroît 17,95 \$

Hugues Corriveau

Paroles pour un voyageur. Noroît 17,95 \$

François Dumont

Brisures. Noroît 14,95 \$

Compte rendu par Antoine Boisclair

« Me voici en moi comme un homme dans une maison », écrivait Gaston Miron en ouverture à *L'homme rapaillé*, associant ainsi la quête identitaire qui traverse son recueil au thème de l’habitation. Cette maison qui devient dans un autre poème de Miron un « corps de grange vide » apparaît chez Michel Leclerc sous la forme d’une « échoppe », c’est-à-dire d’une « baraque » ou d’une « petite boutique ordinairement en appentis et adossée contre un mur » (*Petit Robert*). Dans la lignée de plusieurs poètes canadiens-français et québécois, Leclerc développe ainsi dans *Le livre de l'échoppe* une quête identitaire qui touche au thème de l’habitation. C’est plus précisément à la précarité et à la pauvreté de cette habitation que renvoient plusieurs poèmes : « tu possèdes si peu de choses / qu’on t’a conduit jusqu’ici / avant que ton ombre / s’égène ». « Je tremble en ma demeure », écrit ailleurs Leclerc, ou encore : « je mesure à ras de terre / ma pauvreté ». Bien entendu—et nous retrouvons ici un autre thème important de la poésie québécoise—, cette difficulté d’habiter finit par atteindre la parole, qui tend à se confondre avec l’identité du sujet poétique : « Nous pesons moins que quelques mots / dans le creux du souffle ».

Dans la partie éponyme du recueil, qui porte plus explicitement sur la parole poétique, Leclerc opte pour la forme du fragment et dit écrire « avec la voix dilacérée de l'ombre / pour démonter l'obscur [et épeler] à toute force le nom du poème ». « Tout livre est une échoppe désenchantée », dit un fragment qui résume peut-être l'essentiel du recueil : la traversée du poème—celle qui incite Orphée à descendre au royaume d'Hadès, comme le suggère ailleurs l'auteur—est indissociable de l'expérience de la pauvreté et de l'incertitude identitaire, mais aussi de la mort, de la disparition. « J'écris comme celui qui serait mort / dans l'étrangeté de lui-même », constate notamment le poète.

Le thème de l'habitation traverse également le recueil de Hugues Corriveau, mais l'espace que le poète tente ici de s'approprié ou de parcourir se rapporte moins à l'image de la maison qu'à celle de la ville. *Parole pour un voyageur* élargit également la quête identitaire à l'altérité culturelle. Dans « Rome » et « Retour à Rome », parties constituées de poèmes en prose, Corriveau évoque tout d'abord les thèmes de l'errance et de l'étrangeté. La (ré)appropriation de l'identité, suggèrent certains poèmes, passe par la langue de l'autre (« une vie se traduit, là, dans une langue étrangère ») et par un travail de déchiffrement qui rappelle à certains égards le métier de l'archéologue. Dans une ville qui « de place en place inscrit des chiffres sur le sol », le tracé des rues s'apparente en effet aux lignes d'un livre : « Nous croyons que les villes étrangères ne sont rien d'autre que des romans, des fictions égarées en plein centre de l'œil ». « Nous désirons les mots », écrit ailleurs Corriveau dans le même ordre d'idées, « les villes lointaines, cœurs et corps, pour nommer ». Écrits en vers, les poèmes de la section intitulée « Ailleurs » évoquent quant à eux différentes villes du monde ayant en commun d'avoir été confrontées à la guerre ou d'avoir joué un rôle dans l'Histoire : Hiroshima, Kaboul,

Bagdad et New York, pour en nommer quelques-unes. Plus lyrique, cette suite de poèmes parle d'un « globe incendié », d'un « monde [qui] tombe en morceaux » ou encore des « avions [qui] fracassent des temples fragiles ».

À l'aide de poèmes minuscules—deux vers seulement—qui rappellent à certains égards la forme et le ton du limerick, François Dumont évoque dans *Brisures* un état de désenchantement qui semble sans appel. « Voici venu le temps / de l'exaspération », nous prévient l'auteur dès le premier poème. Mais s'agit-il vraiment de poèmes? Tandis que Corriveau et Leclerc optent pour un lyrisme somme toute assez convenu dans le paysage actuel de la poésie québécoise, Dumont substitue au chant du poème une parole « brisée » qui tend à dépouiller la parole de ses prétentions élégiaques : « Tu es divisé / par toute parole entière ». En dépit des différences de forme et de ton, ce recueil rejoint néanmoins les poétiques de Corriveau et de Leclerc lorsque Dumont met en scène un sujet troué ne pouvant « habiter qu'en dehors » et pour qui « même la plus petite ouverture / est béance ». Il en résulte une sorte de pessimisme au deuxième degré—ce serait là une autre manière d'« habiter en poète »—où « inventorier l'absence / ne peut avoir de fin », où « la négativité [devient] un attachement ».

Printing Their Proud Hoofs

J. Edward Chamberlin

Horse: How the Horse Has Shaped Civilization.

Knopf Canada \$32.95

Reviewed by Neil Querengesser

Let me begin by saying that I am not a horseman. My experience with horses has been limited mainly to the occasional trail ride and to watching horses in parades or on TV westerns. When I was young, in the early 1960s, my friends and I would feed boulevard grass to a horse that still drew one of

the few Northern Alberta Dairy Pool milk carts in Edmonton as it stopped on our street. I mention these details because I suspect that most city-dwelling readers of Chamberlin's book may have had similarly limited equine encounters, and reading this book may also impel them to recall just when and where they last saw one of these beautiful animals in the flesh. For among its many other accomplishments, *Horse* makes us keenly aware of the profound influence that the horse has had on the shaping of human culture and civilization, an influence whose traces can still be found even in modern industrial societies, although its absence is much to be lamented.

Horse has six chapters, separate but inter-related essays that examine the deeply rooted relationships between horses and humans from a variety of perspectives. It begins and ends with the story of Big Bird, a mare who survived the frigid northern Rocky Mountain winter of 1933, and her foal Little Bird, as well as their former and new "owners," Bobby Attachie and Joe Healy. Real horses, Big Bird and Little Bird also function as archetypes of horses past, present, and future. In between are enough stories and facts to satisfy even the most devoted hippophile and to instruct and delight the rest of us in the history, anatomy, psychology, art, and culture of these remarkable creatures.

In the opening chapter, we learn the evolutionary story of the horse, from *Eohippus*, or Dawn Horse, to the modern *Equus caballus*, and its early migration from North America across the Bering Bridge to Asia and eventually back to the Americas via Spanish and possibly Viking ships. We also learn the Blackfoot story of how the horse was created from a mallard. And we learn chiefly about the complex culture between Native Americans and the horse from its early development to its tragic demise. Succeeding chapters deal with horses worldwide in nomadic and agrarian cultures,

horses in war and peace, horses in ancient and modern times, horses as flesh and blood, and horses as spiritual beings.

Chamberlin's style is relaxed, often anecdotal, and almost always interesting, although the reader does risk becoming occasionally bogged down in the details. His facts include the historically precise: "Riders in India were using toe-stirrups—a looped rope that held the big toe—as early as 500 BCE, almost a thousand years before Attila the Hun, who is often credited with introducing stirrups to the rest of the world"; the near legendary: Alexander, in his pursuit of Darius, "rode about two hundred miles in five days through desert country on unshod horses, without water or enough food"; and the linguistic: "the pirouette, for instance, was a fancy name for something that every herder on a horse would do every time an animal needed to be cut off or cut out."

While on one level *Horse* feels encyclopedic in its coverage, it also subtly deconstructs its subject, playing as it does with the signification of "horse" and equine terms in their various linguistic and cultural manifestations. Through allusions to Levi-Strauss' structuralist work, *The Raw and the Cooked*, and to a variety of other theoretical and practical works, Chamberlin convincingly demonstrates that our conception of horses and their relationship to human beings is socially constructed. While many of his arguments embody an essentialist apology for the horse, at the same time we are normally only able to frame our view of this animal through the lens of our particular culture, and the several lenses of other cultures that he provides for our view help to drive that truth home. We are also constantly reminded that the apparent dichotomy between the natural and the cultural is itself a linguistic construction. Whether barns are the most natural of shelters to the domesticated horse or highly unnatural structures requiring a great deal of attention to their form and function to

render them tolerable to their equine inhabitants is but one example of the many ways Chamberlin makes his subject strange only to make it familiar again—or for the first time.

Horse is a labour of love that I would recommend for the general reader and the specialist alike.

Decoding the Code

Northrop Frye; Alvin A. Lee, ed.

The Great Code: The Bible and Literature: Collected Works of Northrop Frye, Volume 19. U of Toronto P \$100.00

Reviewed by Graham N. Forst

Max Nordau said of the Bible that “to compare it seriously with the productions of Homer, Sophocles, Dante, Shakespeare or Goethe would require a fanaticized mind that had entirely lost its power of judgement.” Northrop Frye was not a fanatic nor did he lack judgement, yet in his monumental paean to the Bible, *The Great Code*, he undertook to demonstrate exactly what Nordau denied, and more: to show not only that the Bible stands with the greatest literature, but that it is no less than “the great code” of all art.

Twenty-five years have passed since Frye’s attempt to re-enshrine the Bible on the tottering secular altar of the twentieth century, and here is its latest reincarnation, as the nineteenth volume of the University of Toronto Press’s proposed thirty-one volume *Collected Works of Northrop Frye*. In spite of the fact that the type size is reduced from the first edition, this re-publication is more than 150 pages longer than the original, because of voluminous notes and reverent Introduction by Alvin A. Lee, the General Editor of the *Collected Works*.

The world has changed sharply in the last quarter-century, and the passage of time has ground a new and ruddy lens through which to appraise *The Great Code*. The temptation

is strong in reviewing the book now to sympathize with its early critics, especially George Woodcock who complained of the book’s “ahistoricity.” For especially since 1982, the Bible has become increasingly problematic to look at ahistorically because of Christianity’s bloody rivalry with Islam for global religious hegemony. This competition, as we painfully know, has placed the modern world in a precarious, possibly irredeemably disastrous imbalance, making it seem at the very least an abrogation of intellectual responsibility to address the “book of books” purely aesthetically, as if it were a well-wrought urn.

However to take this position would be to overlook completely Frye’s whole intention with *The Great Code*, and that was precisely to disarm those who would endanger us all, intellectually and socially, by insisting on seeing the Bible as dogma or history or as, God help us, “Creation-Science.” In fact, as Frye says here over and over, dogma, history, and science have no direct relevance to the Bible, where “myth and metaphor [are] the true literal bases . . . directed not to a terminus of belief but to the open community of vision.” That intent alone provides sufficient justification to (re-)read and indeed to celebrate the republication of *The Great Code*.

There is, however, still the larger critical question, as valid now as it was in 1982: what substance is there to the notion of there being a “great code” of anything (let alone of [all?] art)? Can we any longer really believe that there might be One Meta-Meaning hiding behind some archetypes and image patterns which just had to be ordered and foregrounded to reveal that meaning?

Moreover, in 2007, Frye’s *Great Code* mantra that the (Christian) Bible is the central informing source of western literature is surely eroded past all questioning, unless one regards “Grand Theft Auto” as an “anti-type” of the eighth commandment. And in any case why should the Bible be considered the “great code of [western narrative] art”

rather than the rich tradition of English folk stories, or a short shelf of books from the library at Constantinople, or Jung's *Collective Unconscious*?

With justification, we also feel more critical in our postmodern world about the exclusively *Christian* turn of *The Great Code* with its tacit rejection of the integrity of Judaism, a blindness Frye shared with his beloved Hegel, and with the anti-Semites Jung, T.S. Eliot, and Joseph Campbell. Frygians would object that the Torah hasn't "informed" western literature as much as has the Christian Bible, but this view is circular, only made credible by demarginalizing Blake and resuscitating Spenser and Milton. One can perfectly well read (as one must of course read all the great poets and playwrights of the Classical world) Shakespeare, Pope, Dryden, Byron, Shelley, Austen, the Brontës, George Eliot, Woolf, Faulkner, Fitzgerald, Hemingway, Atwood, Richler and the whole extraordinary tradition of Jewish-American authors with no sense of the Christian Bible hovering anywhere near. As well, it will hardly do nowadays to suggest that Christianity supersedes (Frye's transparent phrase is "distinguishes itself from") Judaism and Islam because its founder went beyond enlightenment and subsequently "[went] through a martyrdom and a descent into death," thereby, by extrapolation, making heightened spiritual demands upon its followers. Jews, Muslims, and Buddhists are hardly passive in their spiritual journeys, which require life-altering sacrifices as radical as those demanded of Christians.

In short, from the strictly critical point of view, *The Great Code* seems now like a last gasp of critical Euro- and logo-centrism, to be enjoyed if at all for the characteristic learning and wit we expect from Frye. But Alvin Lee's adulatory Introduction will have none of that: for Lee, reading *The Great Code* can do no less than "enable genuine [as opposed to fraudulent?] individuals to . . .

effect individual imaginative and spiritual resurrection and apocalypse." As such, the Bible, says Lee, must be accepted, still today, as the one work which "[holds] together as the imaginative framework of Western culture."

Lee has written brilliantly and voluminously about Frye in the past, and his notes in the present volume are thorough and accurate (although he does misspell Virgil's cognomen as "Marro"). But he seems too close to Frye to see that the Christian Bible is no longer a great code of anything (if it ever was) except the junkfood fundamentalism of such hacks as Tim LaHaye and Hal Lindsey, and of the odium of American right-wing evangelism.

Received wisdom has it that devils can quote scripture to their own purposes. Frye's *Great Code* proves that the same holds true for angels.

Survival of the Courageous

Gail Robinson

God of the Plains. Coteau \$19.95

Kevin Patterson

Consumption. Random House \$32.95

Reviewed by Jennifer Fraser

God of the Plains by Gail Robinson and *Consumption* by Kevin Patterson have in common the need to recount the story of incredible strength and endurance that dominates Canada's past and present. In an era that loves superheroes, these authors narrate tales of heroic achievement from people without any special powers: they suffer a deadly climate and harvest what it yields; they demand work from bodies that can barely move or that have been injured; they survive tragedy; they save neighbours; they save themselves. Each novel leads the reader into an exploration of what quality allows us to triumph and what dangers lie in being "weak-kneed" as one of Robinson's prairie characters puts it. Or in the final line of

Patterson's book: "Contained within this beauty, and perhaps its necessary consequence, are the people here—who huddle similarly close and watch for one another's peril."

Robinson's *God of the Plains* revolves around a haunting windmill, which dominates a community in the prairies like a Tower of Babel. From the poem as prologue where "the man / tightened into the shouldering wind / like a salmon into fast water," to a child jumping from the windmill, rocking "until the tidal wave of lava-blood to damaged nerve-tissue ebbed," one is aware that the legacy of *God of the Plains* is not just the telling of Canadian landscape and its history, but it is also the heritage of our language. The family that builds the windmill immigrates from Scotland in a series of Anglo-Saxon epithets: their trip is "soot-covering," "sick-making," "weary-filled," and "bone-numbing." The characters belong to a time almost lost to us now as evidenced in the description of the fourteen-year-old Nester boy: "Will, who could look any man in the eye and lie as though quoting from the Bible, said, 'If I'm old enough to drive a car and fight Germans, I reckon I'm old enough to pay for a stick of dynamite.'" The book culminates in a scene of magic realism worthy of Gabriel Garcia Marquez, where a girl "riding her mill like a frigate on a prairie ocean" and letting "her spirit soar, taking with it the ordinariness of bone, blood, muscle . . . breathed in a whole world, and jumped." Since, as this child thinks, "maybe, simply, there really are truths beyond what we allow ourselves to know."

Patterson's *Consumption* revolves around a lung infected with tuberculosis, which functions as a metaphor for the Inuit body diseased by the Europeans who settle Canada. The virus that ravages one girl's lung serves to represent the way in which diseases decimate whole communities and then finally reveals the damaging potential of affluence on our bodies; thus the infected lung ultimately raises larger medical and

cultural issues about epidemiology. This novel opens with a dedication taken from a French alms box to which one often returns in contemplation: "For the sick, the poor, and the ashamed." Throughout the novel, Patterson investigates the complex relation between these three qualities or situations.

Both *God of the Plains* and *Consumption* tell the story of three generations. Thus the point of view shifts back and forth from old to young. In *God of the Plains*, the older generation cannot fathom the war; Fred and George in their sixties discuss it in the hayloft. Fred cannot believe that God would endow his son Brian with such a brilliant brain only to have him die young: "A boy like that shouldn't be anywhere near a war." And George replies "without taking a moment to think about it": "No boy, no matter who or what, should be anywhere near a war." "Fred nodded, eyes suddenly full of tears, said, 'Amen to that. Well. . . . Have another beer?' 'Don't mind if I do.'" In contrast, the young men of the community see the war as an opportunity to escape the exhausting, thankless work of farming. They cannot resist the chance to see Europe even if it is being bombed. Once close-knit, the community, already diverse with immigrants, acts out its fears and cruelties during World War II within itself.

In *Consumption*, the time-honoured way of life in the North is represented by the Inuit hunter Emo, who calls a storm strong enough to tear a house off the ice "*Ublumi anarahkto*" (a little windy). When his daughter, Victoria, is diagnosed with tuberculosis at ten years of age and sent far away to a sanatorium, an irreparable break occurs in the family line. Her body is cured of the disease, but her heart and soul are infected.

Three symbolic figures strive to bridge the gap in the community between the insular Inuit and the faraway multicultural world: a doctor, a priest, and a teacher. The teacher: "ached for something she couldn't have described with any precision, but it had something to do with a place like this—cold,

hard, unyielding—and the sort of heat a place like this requires one to generate.” The Arctic of *Consumption* lures hunters into its vast realm for survival; it lures miners deep into its diamond-filled core for greed; it lures the teacher out as she runs with her dogs across the snow and it consumes her.

The most compelling line in *Consumption* is “at the essence of the experience of being sick lies fear.” One realizes that Fear has been the antagonist all along in the book. It is the villain that creeps in and ravages the Inuit community; it is the psycho who lashes out at the city dwellers dismantling their better selves and leaving them broken. In *God of the Plains*, even through the racism that threatens the trust and dependence on neighbours, one sees the prairie people like the crocuses surfacing in snowbound March: “They aren’t the prettiest flowers in the world, but you have to admire their gump-tion.” One learns the beauty of inner strength from Gail Robinson’s *God of the Plains* and one learns to expect and to do battle with fear from Kevin Patterson’s *Consumption*.

Exploring Loss and Healing

Maxine Trottier; Paul Morin, illus.

Mr. Hiroshi’s Garden. Fitzhenry & Whiteside \$9.95

**Andrea Spalding and Alfred Scow;
Darlene Gait, illus.**

Secret of the Dance. Orca \$19.95

**Veronika Martenova Charles; Annouchka
Gravel Galouchko and Stéphan Daigle,
illus.**

The Birdman. Tundra \$22.99

Reviewed by Judith Saltman

Three recent Canadian picturebooks address historical and contemporary social justice issues. Two of the titles are set in Canada; one is concerned with the Japanese-Canadian internment camps and the other with the outlawing of the West Coast Potlatch. One is set in India. All of

them implicitly consider cultural continuity through the passage of values from a generation of elders to children of their own culture or to outsiders who respect and value that culture.

Maxine Trottier’s *Mr. Hiroshi’s Garden*, a historical, West Coast picturebook, was originally published as *Flags* in 1999. Reissued in paperback under a different title and with a new cover, it is identical in text and illustrations to the earlier publication. Maxine Trottier has written many picturebooks with Canadian historical narratives, ranging from Laura Secord to Louis Riel. Here, she observes the internment of Canadian citizens of Japanese heritage during World War II as a childhood memory, told in the first person, from an outsider’s perspective. Mary, the prairie-born narrator, recalls the summer during the war that she spent at her grandmother’s home overlooking the Pacific. She meets a neighbour, Mr. Hiroshi, and discovers his traditional sand-and-moss Japanese garden, the blue irises or flags, and the pond with koi fish. Her friendship with Mr. Hiroshi is disrupted when he is taken away to an internment camp. Although Mary cares for his abandoned garden, Mr. Hiroshi’s house is sold and his garden destroyed. Mary and her grandmother rescue the koi and transplant the flag bulbs in Mary’s prairie backyard. Mr. Hiroshi’s tranquil and beautiful garden is a symbol of peace, and its continuity through Mary’s attention and care into another location offers a glimmer of tolerance and understanding. The story’s tone is bittersweet, not sentimental or exploitative, but hopeful. Paul Morin’s expressionistic oil paintings on canvas are stunning in their realism, light, and texture. Figures and portraits are subtly emotional and the shimmering, fragmented light of the garden on the water lilies, pond, and golden carp, evokes the magic of western-styled Monet garden paintings rather than traditional Japanese art.

British Columbia's Orca Books has released a picturebook collaboration by Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal creators. In *Secret of the Dance*, Andrea Spalding co-authors the text with Judge Alfred Scow, elder of the Kwakwa'wakw Nation. The narrative is described as "fiction but . . . based on an incident in the life of the child Watl'kina." Scow's fictionalized memoir is set in 1935, when, at age nine, he witnessed an illegal Potlatch, secretly held by his family at British Columbia's Kingcome Inlet as a memorial for his grandfather. The Potlatch is held when the children are sleeping, but the boy Alfred, Watl'kina, is awakened and drawn to the singing and drumming. Hidden in the shadows of the Big House, he observes masked dancers, drums, the family's ceremonial regalia, and recognizes his father dancing. His personal sense of culture and identity is deeply affected by his bearing witness to this act, culturally powerful and bravely defiant. The voice of the adult recalling a profound and transformative childhood moment is more immediate and credible than that which Trottier constructs in *Mr. Hiroshi's Garden*. Unlike *Mr. Hiroshi's Garden*, an afterword offers historical context and personal details of Scow's experiences, including the imprisonment of his family members for refusal to give up the regalia to the government.

The illustrations by Darlene Gait, of Coast Salish heritage, strikingly reflect Aboriginal imagery drawn from button blankets, masks, and carvings, both in their realistic presence in their family's life and ritualistically in the potlatch, and surrealistically, transformed in the sky and waters of the West Coast. Her use of black and white drawings juxtaposed with full-colour acrylic paintings contrasts images of the secular ordinary world with those of the ceremony's sacred dimensions. By contrast, Gait shows a tentative, poignant naiveté and even awkwardness in the handling of human figures.

The passage of loss through grief to healing is a theme in these picturebooks.

Author-illustrator Veronika Martenova Charles' *The Birdman* is, like *Secret of the Dance* and *Mr. Hiroshi's Garden*, a picturebook narrative of generational change, loss, and healing. Like *Secret of the Dance*, it is based on a true story told from an adult perspective. Charles' protagonist is Nobi, an adult tailor from Calcutta, who loses his life to despair after his children are killed in an accident. His grieving and healing begin with the act of buying caged birds from the market, nursing them to health, and releasing them to freedom. The allegory of suffering and redemption is beautifully backgrounded by the *gouache* paintings based on Indian folk art by Québécois illustrators Annouchka Gravel Galouchko and Stéphan Daigle. The heavily patterned and decorative imagery incorporates Hindu cultural artefacts and imagery of birds in flight.

All three of these works touch on the pain of human life and examine acts of grace, compassion, and courage in response to suffering and injustice. They are representative of a newer type of picturebook designed for the older school-aged child and adult reader, rather than the young pre-school child.

Oprah Will Love It

Robert J. Wiersema

Before I Wake. Random House \$32.95

Reviewed by Barbara Pell

I expect there will be a big audience for this novel, but doubt that it will include anyone who takes Canadian literary fiction seriously. The advertising copy identifies it as "part domestic novel, part [supernatural] thriller," compares it to *The Lovely Bones*, and alludes to a "larger battle" that "has been raging for close to two thousand years." With echoes of popular apocalyptic Christian literature, *The Da Vinci Code*, and *Touched by an Angel*, this book has the ingredients of a blockbuster page-turner and melodramatic romance.

An elaborate, unbelievable plot drives the

novel and peoples it with stereotypical, unbelievable characters. In April, 1996, three-year-old Sherry Barrett is left comatose after being hit by a truck. In this tragedy, Sherry's saintly mother, Karen, is abandoned by her selfish lawyer husband, Simon, for his lover and junior lawyer, Mary. However, miraculously, when taken off life support, Sherry does not die or atrophy, but just sleeps in the family living room for months. During that time, she becomes a source of miraculous healing to hundreds of people who visit her or send her letters. Karen and Simon, faced with the dilemma of Sherry's healing powers (and without any spiritual beliefs themselves), generously open their home to all pilgrims. By Christmas time, Simon has repented his adultery (and recovered his lost idealism by singing folksongs again), Karen has forgiven him (and recovered her lost potential by writing children's stories again), and Mary has repudiated Simon, befriended Karen, and renounced corporate law for Legal Aid. At the end of the novel, Sherry cures her parents of their bitternesses (and their conception problems), and her ghost happily watches them as, pregnant with her new sister, they visit her grave.

Meanwhile, the truck driver, Henry Denton, has thrown himself off a cliff. But his ghost is trapped in limbo, haunting the public library with others who cannot fully die until they atone for their sins. He is mentored by Tim (whose name is a Monty Python joke), really Ahasuerus, the Wandering Jew, locked in an ages-long apocalyptic battle with the Stranger, really Judas Iscariot. The Stranger, masquerading as a Catholic priest sent to assess Sherry's miracles, mobilizes a group of fundamentalist fanatics to protest the falsity of her miracles and the corruption of her parents. He also, in a vague allusion to his knowledge of everyone's sin, blackmails a host of powerful people into firing Simon from his law firm, Sherry's doctor from his hospital, and Karen's best friend from her newspaper; he

also corrupts the entire police force of Victoria into refusing to protect the Barretts. Finally, the Stranger tricks a young retarded man, Leo, into trying to burn down Sherry's house. In Henry's brutal confrontation with Leo on Christmas night, he saves the home and defeats the Stranger's evil, but is badly burned (are ghosts flammable?). At the end, Henry approaches Sherry, who wakes from her coma to forgive him (his body then disappears, presumably to heaven), and immediately dies in the arms of her parents.

Wiersema attempts to normalize his spiritual fantasy with ordinary domestic details about shopping, cooking, and dish-washing. His style is clean and functional; the constantly shifting multiple narrative voices are announced with the characters' names before their sections. It is impossible not to feel compassion for a mother who climbs into bed with a three-year-old whose life-support has just been turned off: "*And if I die before I wake . . . I tightened my arms around her, pulling her to me, trying to pull her back inside me, where I could protect her, where I could keep her warm and safe.*" However, the strings that tug the heart are too obvious. This novel supposedly "reveals the power of forgiveness, and the true nature, and cost, of miracles." But Karen's forgiveness is cheap, and Sherry's miracles are simply asserted. Some attempts to introduce profound questions about faith and morality into this romantic soap opera are present, but the theologically skeptical parents remain skeptical throughout and live happily ever after. Although they clearly believe in Sherry's miracles, they do not interrogate any intellectual or spiritual depths. Their moral dilemma concerning whether or not to turn away the pilgrims is introduced ("What are we going to do?") and quickly resolved ("Do you want to be the one who has terminally ill kids dragged off by the police?"). This is good popular fiction, but literary popcorn.

Shocking and Senseless

Walter W. Igersheimer; Ian Darragh, ed.

Blatant Injustice: The Story of a Jewish Refugee from Nazi Germany Imprisoned in Britain and Canada during World War II. McGill-Queen's UP \$39.95

David Matas

Aftershock: Anti-Zionism and Antisemitism. Dundurn \$24.99

Reviewed by Adrienne Kertzer

In his preface to *Blatant Injustice*, Walter W. Igersheimer characterizes the events that followed 25 June 1940 as “shocking and senseless.” Igersheimer, a German-Jewish refugee and medical student whose treatment of soldiers wounded at Dunkirk was disrupted when the British Home Office arrested him, wrote most of his memoir in Cuba in 1942, shortly after his year-long imprisonment in two different Canadian internment camps. Ian Darragh helped him to complete the memoir based on notes and interviews done in 2001. For years he had known of Igersheimer’s anger regarding his experiences, and it is clear, despite the positive lessons with which Igersheimer concludes his memoir, that he is still furious about his mistreatment. The three years he spent in internment and exile (he was admitted to the US 7 April 1943) may have transformed him from an apolitical medical student to a strong advocate of human rights, but what is noticeable about this memoir extends beyond the lessons he derives. Drafted so soon after his imprisonment, the tone of *Blatant Injustice* is far angrier than what is found in memoirs written years after internment. It is also highly sensitive to issues of class and antisemitism, not only among the internees but also within the Canadian military class.

In a bureaucratic and colonial muddle that mixed German prisoners of war with Jewish civilian refugees, Canada, insisting that it had only agreed to take prisoners of war, treated the refugees as identical to—if

not worse than—prisoners of war. In a foreword that provides historical background and thereby attempts to make sense of the “senseless,” Darragh explains that the British originally placed German and Austrian nationals into three categories based on perceived risk: Category A were highest risk; Category B were considered less risky, and Category C covered those who posed no risk to national security. This last category included over 50,000 “Refugees from Nazi Oppression.” Canada was asked to take 7,000 prisoners consisting of “captured German military personnel, and Category A civilians, including 350 Nazi leaders.” However, when the British couldn’t fill their quota, they added “2,290 Category B and C Jewish refugees and about 1,100 Italian internees.” Even after the British recognized the absurdity of treating as Nazis people they had categorized as “Refugees from Nazi Oppression,” the Canadian government remained oblivious to this distinction. The British refused to admit that they had made a mistake, and the Canadian government insisted that, whatever Britain had done, Canada was powerless to release any of the internees. Many of the refugees found themselves trapped in a catch-22 situation in which the US refused to consider visa requests from those held in military custody and the British authorities refused to release them until they had been granted visas.

Having boarded the ship bound for Canada as a stowaway because he thought that this would give him a better chance to fight the Nazis, Igersheimer was first imprisoned at a camp outside the Quebec Citadel. He assumed that his treatment was based on “the erroneous [and oft-repeated] belief that we were German prisoners of war and fifth columnists,” but he changed his mind after the sergeant major at the second camp greeted the refugees with a series of antisemitic slurs. When representatives of the Montreal Jewish community failed to persuade the government to free him so that he could take up a scholarship to Tufts Medical

School, he wondered whether Canadian Jews “[were] too afraid for their own skins to help us in a really big way.”

Such timidity is not initially apparent in David Matas’ *Aftershock. Blatant Injustice* is part of the Footprint Series, which publishes the stories of individuals to “help nuance larger historical narratives.” In contrast, *Aftershock* combines legal analysis with Matas’ firm conviction that there are lessons to the Holocaust and that to think otherwise is “a counsel of despair.” The book’s title reflects Matas’ view that the Holocaust “was an earthquake of the human soul” and that anti-Zionism “is an aftershock of that earthquake.” Central to his analysis is that the distinction made between antisemitism and anti-Zionism is false, and that those who persist in making this distinction ignore what anti-Zionists actually say—in this way repeating the mistake of those who once refused to believe that Hitler really meant what he said.

Linking the existence of Israel to the Holocaust, Matas argues that to question Israel’s existence is inevitably to trivialize and/or deny the Holocaust. He differentiates legitimate criticism of specific Israeli practices and policies from anti-Zionism that is not interested in addressing specific practices since its real aim is the destruction of the state of Israel. Acknowledging the necessity of remembering the Holocaust, Matas cautions that focusing upon Holocaust memory at the cost of ignoring contemporary forms of antisemitism is dangerous. What is needed is “imaginative hindsight,” anticipating what might happen in order to prevent it.

In contrast to Darragh, who argues that *Blatant Injustice* teaches us “to be ever vigilant so that prejudices and stereotypes do not lead to human rights abuses,” Matas is ultimately far less hopeful. Although he sees the struggle for human rights as inseparable from the struggle against antisemitism and anti-Zionism, his conclusion is bleak. Despite including a chapter on combatting antisemitism that provides eight lessons the

Jewish community can learn from the human rights community and eight lessons the human rights community can learn from the Jewish community, as well as another chapter on strategies for combatting anti-Zionism, he believes that “antisemitism will always be with us,” and “anti-Zionism . . . will continue to exist as long as Israel exists.” The best Matas can hope for is that his book helps to persuade human rights advocates of the need to “contain” antisemitism and anti-Zionism, a perspective that makes a lot of sense given the evidence he amasses, but remains deeply disturbing nevertheless.

Iron Keys

Darren Wershler-Henry

The Iron Whim: A Fragmented History of Typewriting. McClelland & Stewart \$29.99

Reviewed by Karl E. Jirgens

Darren Wershler-Henry offers astute perspectives on the history of the typewriter and its role in shaping communications and literature. He covers the invention of the typewriter and its influence on diverse authors including Henry James, Charles Olson, and Paul Auster. For example, Wershler-Henry’s examination of Tristan Tzara, Brion Gysin, and William Burroughs’ application of the cut-up method, along with Cronenberg’s film adaptation of *Naked Lunch*, readily reveals the profound cultural influence of the typewriter. Wershler-Henry’s interest is in typewriting, discourse, and our perceptions of ourselves. *The Iron Whim* is a *bricolage* on the nostalgia that inhabits typewriting, creativity, and social constructions of truth.

Marshall McLuhan’s maxim that “the medium is the message” informs perceptions presented here. Wershler-Henry comments on the title to this book by acknowledging McLuhan’s chapter “Into the Age of the Iron Whim” in *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*. Aware of McLuhan’s delight in puns, Wershler-Henry discovered that “whim” refers to a capricious notion, a

play on words, and any machine with a drum and connecting radiating arms, including the typewriter. *The Iron Whim* includes insightful references to prominent theorists including Foucault, and feminist thinkers Gilbert and Gubar. Providing a history of the mechanical development of typewriters, the book moves to human interaction including questions of secretarial functions and dictation in business environments. Relationships of authors such as Henry James with their amanuenses, arguably gave rise to literary styles suddenly freed from restrictions of longhand. The book illuminates political economies involving female typists, but primarily discusses male authors. In balance, perhaps more could have been offered on women writers who have also worked with typewriters.

I found one of the most rewarding chapters to be "The Poet's Stave and Bar," in which Objectism and the poetics of Charles Olson are discussed with reference to McLuhan's notion of technology not only as a prosthetic extension of the human body, but as a vehicle for returning us to a "post-literate acoustic space." This key point resonates throughout the study in discussions of numerous typewriting authors. Included are discussions of automatic writing, stylistics, temporal efficiencies and emerging social truths with reference to Northrop Frye, Mark Twain, and Jack Kerouac with his 120-foot typewritten scroll featuring a single-spaced paragraph from *On the Road*. Wershler-Henry analyzes legal, military, and counter-cultural applications such as *Samizdat* publishing during the Cold War. *The Iron Whim* concludes with observations on the mechanics of typewriters and the interface of the QWERTY keyboard with computer software, while returning to questions of perceived social truths in reference to contemporary electronic communications, including blogging. This book gestures to but does not enter into typewritten concrete and visual poetry, but in his acknowledgements Wershler-Henry promises to pursue

such remarkable forms in his next book. *The Iron Whim* offers incisive perceptions on the cultural impact of the typewriter and is elegantly informed by the author's own significant literary accomplishments.

The Other Slope of Sorrow

Madeleine Gagnon; Phyllis Aronoff and Howard Scott, trans.

My Name is Bosnia. Talonbooks \$19.95

Reviewed by Roseanna Dufault

This translation from the French by Phyllis Aronoff and Howard Scott effectively renders Gagnon's clear, evocative language in her uncompromising treatment of suffering, loss, love, and healing. The narrative, which begins in war-torn Bosnia-Herzegovina, follows the protagonist's trajectory to Quebec, by way of France. The kind-hearted people who support Sabaheta, who changes her name to Bosnia as a reminder of the place she must leave, reaffirm the positive in human nature, in stark contrast to those who "love to kill." Besides describing horrifying scenes of violence and the immense hardships of survivors in bombed-out Sarajevo, Gagnon also portrays the war-induced insanity of Bosnia's mother, and her brother's transformation from a friend and ally into a frightening fanatic. Gagnon addresses sensitive topics such as the status and roles of women in Muslim societies, and the potentially explosive connections between ethnic identity, religion, and violence. In this engaging novel, Gagnon deplores bigotry and denounces violence against women. Sabaheta-Bosnia in particular struggles with the injustice of being raped by an uncle, then blamed for dishonouring her family: "It was in her own body, still that of a child, that she had first learned of war."

A dominant theme of *My Name is Bosnia* is the loss of religious belief and its replacement by a kind of secular faith based on hope. Upon finding his family viciously murdered, Bosnia's lover Adem abandoned

his faith “with the scream of his soul in the dark world of catastrophe.” A friend, Marina, “lost her faith in the Eternal” on her brutal wedding night. She claims that “if God/Allah really existed, then goodness would govern the world.” Another friend, Hannah, a Holocaust survivor, speaks of her “deconversion” and her “atheist enlightenment.” On the other hand, all of these sympathetic characters believe profoundly in education, literature, and music as humanizing, civilizing forces. They also believe in love and the healing power of majestic landscapes and pristine nature.

Eventually, Bosnia and Adem put down roots in Quebec, where they divide their time between Montreal and the immensity of land and water near Rimouski, where the abundance of wildlife inspires hope and serenity. As Gagnon states, Bosnia “finally reached the other slope of sorrow, where you can remember happiness and, through memory, make it exist.”

My Name is Bosnia conveys through narrative the suffering and courage of women interviewed for Gagnon’s non-fictional *Women in a World at War: Seven Dispatches from the Front*. Further, Bosnia’s decision to become a writer calls to mind protagonists in Gagnon’s earlier works, such as *Les Cathédrales sauvages*, *Le Deuil du soleil*, and *Le Vent majeur*, who also choose writing as a means of overcoming trauma and affirming life.

Inuit on Display in Europe

Hartmut Lutz, ed.

The Diary of Abraham Ulrikab: Text and Context.
U of Ottawa P \$29.95

Reviewed by Madelaine Jacobs

Customarily the artefacts in museums are inanimate, and the attractions in zoos are not given monetary recompense for their part in attracting lucrative tourist dollars. In *The Diary of Abraham Ulrikab*, editor Hartmut Lutz explores an uncanny occurrence that would be at odds with currently accepted

conventions of presentation.

Working on behalf of Hagenbeck’s Zoo in Hamburg, Germany, Adrian Jacobsen capitalized on European predictions that North American First Peoples were dying away when he hired two Inuit families from Labrador to leave their homes in order to be put on display in Europe. One family, led by their father, Abraham Ulrikab, were devout Christians and had been living within a Moravian mission. Ulrikab’s family became fascinating specimens presented in contrast to a more exotic “pagan” Inuit family. The Moravians objected to Jacobsen’s intention to create a travelling show where their “christened people are exhibited outside and looked at like wild animals for money.” Ulrikab longed to see Europe and could not understand why the missionaries disapproved of his desire to earn money to pay his debts while contributing to the scientific endeavours of that time. To the Moravians, however, their converts were “free people” and they could not compel them to stay. Therefore, in the fall of 1880, the group embarked on a sea voyage for Europe.

In the midst of this intriguing journey, Ulrikab filled a remarkable diary with his thoughts on Europeans, Inuit peoples, and the relations between them. For Ulrikab, the wonders of Europe were tempered by the objectification that they experienced as targets of study and tools of commerce. Although he exercised his autonomy in making the journey in the first place, Ulrikab began to feel that he had been “lured” by Jacobsen and threatened to inform an authority in England when “our master” severely beat one of the Inuit party with a dog whip. Jacobsen quickly improved his demeanour. As Ulrikab grew increasingly dissatisfied with his life as an object of “science,” he despaired that he would never return to his home, his extended family, the foods that he enjoyed, and the form of Christian worship that he was accustomed to. Ulrikab’s prophecy became reality when, without the vaccinations that Jacobsen promised, each of

the Inuit members of the exhibition contracted smallpox and died in 1881.

Jacobsen then returned the property of his ill-fated party to Labrador. Missionary Brother Kretschmer took up the task of translating Ulrikab's diary from Inuktitut to German and, because the original is lost, it was later translated from his German into English. Ulrikab's diary is now considered the earliest autobiographical text written by an Inuit author. In crafting *The Diary*, Lutz privileges the seldom seen written historical voice of an Inuit man who lived and wrote at the end of the nineteenth century and presents it prominently on the page without direct comment or alteration. Instead, Lutz juxtaposes Ulrikab's words with documents authored by his European-born contemporaries and images produced in relation to the Inuit exhibit. Only the necessary academic interpretation envelops this package. *The Diary* combines Ulrikab's observations with Lutz's own passion for Ulrikab's diary. In this way, Lutz enables readers to draw their own insights from the thoughts of men who seemed worlds apart yet were increasingly stepping on each other's soil.

The Diary of Abraham Ulrikab may be difficult for some readers to follow because it does not conform to a standard style; however, Ulrikab's commentary compellingly ties the collection together. Even though Ulrikab became an object of study, he chose to go to Europe with the intention of learning about that place. As he travelled, Ulrikab documented his experience of Europe. Ironically, this process of observing "others" allowed Ulrikab to capture even richer understandings of himself. Similarly, the European obsession with viewing, describing, and measuring people like Ulrikab betrayed more about the cultures that performed that brand of "science" than it did about those who became the subjects of its interest. Lutz has astutely compiled a thought-provoking platform from which his readers can develop deeper understandings of the worlds traversed by Ulrikab.

Memory and Resistance

Lorena Gale

Je me souviens: Memories of an Expatriate Anglophone Montréalaise Québécoise Exiled in Canada. Talonbooks \$15.95

Reviewed by Adele Holoch

In the opening scene of Lorena Gale's autobiographical performance essay, Gale is seated in a café in Vancouver, reminiscing in English with an old friend from Montreal. As she laments the ways in which her native city has changed, Gale is interrupted by a Francophone Québécois who has been listening to her conversation. "You don't say nutting. Tu n'as pas le droit!" he tells her. Gale replies, "Je suis née à Montréal. Et j'ai le droit à parler"; as a black Anglophone, she has been defending her right to her Québécoise identity all her life. *Je me souviens* is, in part, an illustration of Gale's struggles, in her double "otherness," to claim that identity; it is also an effort to preserve a place that was, for Gale, sometimes comfortable, sometimes painful, and always home. Evocative and profoundly personal, the play is a compelling account of what it is to be both "other" and Québécois.

In her introduction to *Je me souviens*, Gale writes that the work began as "the articulation of personal memory as political resistance"—specifically, resistance against Jacques Parizeau, who famously blamed the defeat of the 1995 referendum for Quebec's sovereignty on "money and the ethnic vote." But Gale, a writer, director, and actress, soon found the text evolving. What began as "an essay, a rebuttal, a scathing criticism of Mr. Parizeau" became foremost an homage to Gale's memories and her home. Her memories, she writes in her introduction, "are mine. They make me who I am. They can not be negated or denied. It doesn't matter what Parizeau or anybody thinks. Montreal was and always will be my home. I have a living history to prove it."

A 75-minute monologue first produced by

the Firehall Arts Centre in Vancouver in January 2000, *Je me souviens* strives to situate its audience within Gale's experience of that history not only through spoken language, but also through projected images and recorded sounds. As Gale speaks, photographs of Martin Luther King, Jr.'s assassination and of the "angry, intense and despairing faces of black people" loom on a large white projection screen. Strains of song—"This Land is your Land, This Land is my Land," "Mon Pays"—and other recordings, such as "soundscape[s] of voices," play in the background. For audience members, the effect can be both evocative and jarring, as the original production's director, John Cooper, notes in his foreword to the text: as Lorena was alienated as a black Anglophone child, the "jump-cut style from scene to scene and form to form, supported by extreme shifts in sound, image, colour and intensity, creates a similar alienating effect in the viewer, heightening our visceral understanding of each relationship." For readers of the text, the experience of Gale's memories is more partial; *Je me souviens'* multisensory elements do not transfer easily to the page.

But even in its limited textual form, *Je me souviens* is a significant achievement: through its articulation of Gale's experiences, it stands as an effective illustration of the ways in which individuals are affected by the larger questions of Quebec's collective identity. The performance traces Gale's childhood through her family's move from Montreal to Outremont, where, though they identify as more authentically Québécois than their immigrant neighbors, they are told they don't belong. Gale's stage directions note: "*We hear the sound of 'Go back where you came from' being spoken in different languages.*" It also chronicles Gale's efforts to assimilate to that hostile culture, dancing Scottish, Jewish, Greek, and Chinese jigs and declaring, "'Look Ma! I fit!'" It details Gale's love affair with a

Francophone Québécois, the frustration of her Anglophone friends, who feel deserted and betrayed, and Gale's own conflicted relationship with her native English tongue—"Massa's tongue."

Interspersed among Gale's memories is a dream sequence written in French. In the sequence, Gale is alone and lost in a cold, snowy landscape awash in blinding white glare. Fearing she will die there, she begins to walk. As she walks, she sees a figure on the horizon; as she approaches, she realizes it is a woman. "Qui est cette femme qui défie les éléments et ose revendiquer cet endroit pour elle-même?" Gale asks, then realizes the woman is Gale herself. The sequence is a powerful illustration of Gale's process of establishing her claim to her culture, of discovering that her history and identity as a Québécois are fundamental aspects of who she is that can never be "legislated out of being." This realization is itself a profound political statement—a powerful rebuke to those who have questioned Gale's right to identify herself as Québécois.

Je me souviens is a valuable text for anyone interested in contemporary Quebec history or the ongoing struggle to establish and define Québécois identity, and would be an excellent resource for teaching Québécois culture in the classroom.

Brave New Prairie

Annette Lapointe

Stolen. Anvil \$20.00

Reviewed by Kristen Warder

Annette Lapointe's stunning first novel *Stolen* chronicles a Saskatchewan man's troubled journey from childhood to adulthood. Although it is a murder-mystery that begins with the 26-year-old Rowan Friesen burying a corpse in the bush, *Stolen* is ultimately less centred on solving this probable crime than it is on revealing the series of events that has led Rowan to develop into the unusual and

largely unlikable person he has become. A unique blend of the rural and the urban, half-cowboy and half-punk, Rowan is a small-time drug-dealer, amateur robot-builder, and accomplished thief who supports himself by selling stolen goods on the Internet. Despite having already spent much of his young life in jail for various crimes, he continues to burglarize homes, schools, and businesses for everything from computer parts to prescription drugs. At first glance, it might seem that Rowan's thievery has inspired the novel's title. While innumerable things are "stolen" in Lapointe's narrative, however, what has most obviously disappeared in this contemporary portrait of Saskatchewan is whatever innocence the province might have once possessed. Readers quickly recognize that the romanticization of the rural prairies as an idyllic place of childhood bliss so common in popular representations of the region will not be found here.

Rather, as the novel unfolds, readers are given glimpses into the unstable and confusing world in which Rowan is raised. Chief among his formative childhood experiences is the initial psychotic breakdown of his schizophrenic father who viciously blinds his own horses before being arrested by the RCMP. This disturbing event seemingly motivates Rowan's mother to shed her Mennonite clothes, pull on some jeans, cut her hair, and leave Saskatchewan for the Pacific Northwest, where she drags her young son around for six years, repeatedly uprooting him and unknowingly exposing him to sexual predators. Between the ages of seven and thirteen, Rowan watches his decidedly lost mother engage in a series of short-lived relationships with various drug-addicts, hippies, and lesbians before returning to Saskatchewan to live with her brother. With his father now medicated and his grandfather living next door, readers may wonder if Rowan will finally obtain some stability. He finds none. Instead, he voluntarily moves out after learning the scandalous family secret

that precipitated his father's breakdown. A generally unpopular boy at school, Rowan becomes best friends, and later lovers, with Macon, another misfit in his town. Their tender relationship is the only anchor in Rowan's young life; yet, it, too, changes dramatically before long. Readers familiar with the frequently negative depictions of heterosexual relationships in the iconic novels of prairie realism will not be surprised that those relationships in *Stolen* are also portrayed as coercive, oppressive, and unfulfilling. What is surprising is the degree to which the novel portrays the majority of its relationships as fundamentally misguided and dangerous.

One of the many achievements of *Stolen* is that it offers readers of Canadian literature an updated depiction of a Saskatchewan in transition from a predominantly rural agrarian society to an urban one dominated by global capitalism. Elements of traditional and modern life co-exist here in what are often startling ways: granaries still dot the rural landscape, but they now hold stolen goods; farm kids brand cattle one hour and play Game Boys the next; and billboards for McDonald's and buffalo auctions appear side-by-side. Although vestiges of the past remain, this contemporary Saskatchewan has forever been altered by technological advancements and global capitalism: individuals move effortlessly between the increasingly collapsed rural and urban worlds; residents belong to global communities made possible by the Internet; and transnational corporations, such as Walmart, McDonald's, Starbucks, and 7-Eleven, now dominate the landscape. In what is still considered the breadbasket of Canada, Lapointe's characters unflinchingly choose "body killing vats of fast-food," sugar, caffeine, and assorted combinations of street and prescription drugs over wholesome foods. Chemicals rule here, and their negative effects are evident everywhere. Yet, all is not lost. This Saskatchewan might be fallen,

but its residents persevere. Moreover, *Stolen* proposes that the province was never as pristine as it might have appeared. Lapointe's novel, in its innovative, contemporary depiction of the province, heralds a brave new age of prairie writing.

Alone with the Memory of Everyday

Serge Lamothe

The Baldwins. Talonbooks \$15.95

Sylvia Adams

Sleeping on the Moon. Hagios \$16.95

Terence Young

Moving Day. Signature \$14.95

Reviewed by Erin Wunker

After reading *The Baldwins*, it came as no surprise to learn that Serge Lamothe has adapted Kafka's writing for the stage. Lamothe's experimental novel is set far in the future; it has been 50 years since the last elections, and the "turboliberals" have all but disappeared. A convention of diligent scholars has convened to study the stories of the Baldwins—a group of people who appear to exist only within the carefully documented pages of the cultural researchers who study them. In the prologue to the conference proceedings, the reader is informed that the "*Baldwin phenomenon has been extraordinarily useful in our efforts to minimize our historical inadequacies. For, though the existence of the Baldwins has never been scientifically demonstrated, more than a few scientists are prepared to . . . postulate that the Baldwins did indeed exist.*" In a post-historical world, the Baldwins have come to represent all that remains of formative cultural phenomena.

The novel is composed of short vignettes, each of which is written as documentation of the particular Baldwin whose name appears in the vignette's title. The reader encounters Oliver, whose function is to "tally the wild geese of Goose Lake, high in the tundra," "which meant drawing a line in his notebook

every time a new goose touched down noisily on the lake." Many of the Baldwins' jobs are simply to wait "for whom or what they hardly knew. But they waited fervently, jammed one another in the malodorous grotto that they named . . . *The Temple*." The scholars who have dutifully recorded the existence of the Baldwins sometimes are forced to cut their reports short, as, more often than not there is "no answer. Maybe no survival. It's the same story every time."

Lamothe's text is a searing and ironic commentary on the state of Western society. It is a parody—existentialism taken to its most extreme point. The scholars conclude that "*the Baldwins resemble us: they knew nothing of their origins, nor of their destination. They can hardly be faulted for that.*" Lamothe's novel is a wry and urgent reminder that if we are careless with each other we too may simply leave a non-history which, like the Baldwins, "*simply represents an extended form of unknowing.*"

Like Lamothe, Sylvia Adams constructs a record of an unknown persona. Adams' collection of lyrical poems weaves the fantastic biography of two nineteenth-century explorers. At the age of seventeen, Florence had been "swept along with Hungarian flotsam / from the Hapsburg Empire massacres" where she "fled across the Danube into the arms of slavers." It is in the Turkish marketplace where the widowed Samuel Baker, "his bearing more regal than a prince," bought Florence's freedom. "It was here that my life began: / Florenz Barbara Maria von Sass— / Florence—soul's companion / to Samuel Baker."

Baker's life calling is to locate the source of the great Nile river, and Florence accompanies him on his epic journey. Adams' poetic skill captures the geography of land as well as it captures that of the heart. Lines bleed into one another organically; memory "smells of damp wool and tallow. A hot brick wrapped in flannel," while love scorches, "like thin cotton under a hot slow iron." While at points Adams threatens to fall prey to the

overuse of simile (“*Fleas as big as bantam cocks, bugs as large as turbot* . . .”) more often than not she captures poignant observation in succinct phrases. Remembering her narrow escape and her family’s murders, Florence recollects, “I grew up trapped by the dead. / Handed about, cousin to cousin / friend to neighbor. / Cocooned in languages, books / never forgetting that throats could be cut, / all the words escaping.”

Most of the journey’s adventures are related from Florence’s perspective, and Adams never lets the reader forget Florence’s liminal and unique perspective as a non-English speaking woman in a male-dominated expedition. “Another day passed in hand-me-down words. . . . My mouth makes V’s of his W’s, F’s of his V’s . . . I am a moth translating flame at its peril,” Florence observes. Regardless of, or perhaps because of, the difficulties of language, the relationship between Florence and Samuel is rendered mythical through Adams’ manipulation. It is strange, then, that after pages of near flawless lyric and prose poetry, Adams chooses the villanelle form to close her text. The rhythmic sequence, when juxtaposed with the rest of the poems, smacks of a children’s song: “So long ago we course each streaming mile! / Now Sam’s gone too and only memory calms. / Every river conjures up the Nile— / until we two are sleeping all the while.” Despite this questionable stylistic shift, Adams’ collection of poems is worthy of the rich lives it attempts to resurrect.

Terence Young’s second collection of poetry, *Moving Day*, bears earmarks of both Lamothe and Adams. While Young’s collection is rooted firmly in the recognizable present of Vancouver Island, it warns, like Lamothe’s, of the danger of forgetting one’s history. Similarly, almost all of Young’s poems are relayed through the dusty lens of re-memory that is reminiscent of Adams.

Young’s subject matter is the usual fodder of poems—youth, aging, marriage, love, regret—and in the hands of a lesser poet, the

collection would be banal. Young has a talent for weaving the epic into the everyday; in the opening poem, “Saturday Wine Tour on the E & N,” a bourgeois afternoon becomes a self-effacing reflection on entitlement: “The city conforms, divides itself into triangles along the right- / of-way, which was here first . . . At each vineyard on the circuit, I raise a toast to the past and listen to the pretty speeches of the oenologists . . . I am a / student out on a school field trip waiting for my free sample.” While, in the text’s title poem, the narrator claims that “there was so much to say / that we said nothing, / convinced / as we had been that the Age of Miracles / was over for us,” Young’s latest collection is nothing short of an everyday miracle: a deft rendering of the bittersweet process that is life.

Chaotic Fancies

Alberto Manguel

The Library at Night. Knopf Canada \$35.00

Reviewed by Joseph Jones

Anthologist Alberto Manguel has turned from writing about reading to writing about aggregations of readable objects. Where a collection policy sets no boundaries, any such aggregation can be taken for a library. A leitmotif of nighttime fosters a mood that follows whims with “a lightheartedness verging on insouciance.”

This book offers fifteen ways of looking at a library as some analogue, aspect, or attribute. The second and longest section is “The Library as Order.” Before anything else, order means the arrangement of books on shelves, a matter encountered by Manguel in dealing with his own book collection. To a librarian, his ruminations seem confused. Imprecise terminology wanders without charm among issues of classification, notation, subject headings, and bibliographic description. Pride of place is given to an oxymoronic concept of “alphabetical classi-

fiction.” (The strength of arrangement by alphabet is its arbitrary and predictable sequence, a sequence that lacks any of the semantic content implied by classification.) Not intended as a manual of library science, *The Library at Night* should have stayed farther from that sphere. What is it then? An assemblage of anecdotes and images, a constellation of associations, a field for browsing. What strikes any particular reader will be as idiosyncratic as the book itself. Two of the items that stuck in my memory were a mention of oasis city book collections along the road to Mecca and an account of Michelangelo’s Laurentian Library.

Over a tenth of the volume is devoted to providing attribution for the bits of content, as well as access to those bits: 367 endnotes, three pages of image credits, and an index. This apparatus bestows an aura of scholarship. Where an endnote attaches to a passage, the reader can return to a source. Such proves not to be the case for the doubly dubious claim that Varro wrote “an unreliable handbook of library science, quoted approvingly by Pliny.” Another frustration attends an image captioned “ground plan of the Pergamon library.” The credits lead only to “author’s collection,” yet the same plan appears as a better graphic in Lionel Casson’s *Libraries in the Ancient World* (2001). More than two dozen other illustrations also trace back to that murky authorial collection.

Apart from particular libraries (not least that of Manguel himself, which gets eleven lines in the index), topics are unpredictable. The author revels in this unpredictability as he handles his books, picking up this and that, reading here and there. Sensibility and atmosphere aim to provide continuity and to carry the load of a larger structure. Even at the level of detail, treatment can seem limited. That Rabelais may have been the first to invent an imaginary library typically remains an incidental comment. Why Rabelais might occupy that position in the early days of printing remains unconsidered. Given the

conceit of the freedom conferred by the night, it is surprising not to find a mention of Aulus Gellius, an ancient who called his gleanings *Attic Nights*. In a sense, this and anything else not found in the book may secretly reside in the section “The Library as Shadow,” a realm of absence where a “forbidden or forgotten double” can be sought.

A curious and contradictory kind of credo frames the volume. The foreword opens with the exposition of a practical nihilism: “Outside theology and fantastic literature, few can doubt that the main features of our universe are its dearth of meaning and lack of discernible purpose.” The final section, “The Library as Home,” leads into a postscript that invokes “the suspicion that we and the world are made in the image of something wonderfully and chaotically coherent far beyond our grasp.” This evocative conclusion unfurls echoes of *Genesis* as it sails past paradox into meaninglessness. In the heterodoxy of the darkened library, chaos amounts to god.

This compendium of library lore gathers and arranges materials, sketches out topics, and trips along to the next diversion. What any individual reader perceives in the resulting panorama will depend on that reader’s own acquaintance with the contents of books and libraries. In other words, this book about The Library will act as a mirror.

Abiding Space

Alice Major

The Occupied World. U of Alberta P \$24.95

Reviewed by Neil Querengesser

Alice Major, Edmonton’s first poet laureate, is one of Canada’s finest writers. Since 1988 she has published a children’s novel and seven books of poetry, most of which have been nominated for or have won awards. Her creations have their genesis in a brilliant, encyclopedic, and inventive mind and are brought to fruition through meticulous

craftsmanship. History, hagiography, geography, geology, physics, politics, mathematics, mythology, archaeology, the arts—certainly human relationships: there is little that sooner or later is not transformed by her verse. An overarching intelligence characterizes each of her collections, imparting to them a sense of design and purpose.

The Occupied World, her first collection since *No Monster* (2002), is no exception to this principle. The poems, most of which celebrate her adopted city in one way or another, are organized into six sections. The first, “Contemplating the City,” is a poetic sequence that in its original version won the *Malahat Review’s* long poem contest. Following the pattern of ancient Roman rituals for founding a colony, these poems offer a distinctive view of Edmonton and its omnipresent river, the North Saskatchewan, that “curls, bows to each whorl / of the compass, but always makes for the east, / ushers us to the feet of the sun.” The second section, “A Book of Days,” reinvents the year even as it harks back to the nineteenth-century Chambers’ original. With titles like “Gule of August” and “Good Thief Sunday,” the poems do end runs around our ordinary perceptions of the days and the seasons, compelling engagement with the world we occupy, particularly in the cunning uppercut of the environmentalist “Borrowing Days.” The third section, “Kore,” is a poignant reworking of the Demeter-Persephone myths from the perspective of a modern childless woman. The “Kinderszenen” section features poems about children that recall the title of Robert Schumann’s piano works of the same name. The reader may profit by listening to these pieces, particularly the final melody, “*Der Dichter spricht*,” while she reads the poems. The “Messages from Planet E” section is an ingenious mingling of the scientific and the literary. A brilliant illustration of the difficultly defined phenomena of solitons can be found in “Alice, Downtown.” The exact mathematics of “In the City of the Poor” where “irrationals / drop from the number

line” is capable of making razor cuts across the reader’s conscience. And an unlikely juxtaposition of the Irvine-Michigan-Brookhaven particle detector and the *Sacrorum Rituum* infuses the “The Sifters of Miracle” with inspiring delight. The final section, “Root Zones,” sinks its poetic shafts deep into ancient Albertan soils, and into ancient poetic forms as well, as it includes a rare and finely executed virelay in “Empress Formation.”

There is a diamond clarity to these poems, and a conviction that, just as matter predominates over antimatter by a tiny margin, so what is right and good will edge out their opposites in this world our dwelling place:

In all the ephemeral collisions
between humanity and space, there’s hope
we might achieve a balance on the side of grace,
a slight preponderance of beauty.

These are poems to make you catch your breath.

Une poétique de l’Autre

Carole Connolly

Le partenaire occulté : manifestations du narrataire dans le roman québécois. Éditions David 18,00 \$

Compte rendu par Marilyn Randall

S’inspirant de l’importance rhétorique fondamentale de l’allocutaire depuis l’Antiquité, cette étude du narrataire trace les manifestations de cette figure clé—celle de l’Autre—dans un ensemble représentatif de romans québécois publiés entre 1870 et 1970. Constatant que le peu d’études consacrées au narrataire dans le roman québécois laissent la « porte grande ouverte » pour une étude approfondie, Carole Connolly défend l’hypothèse de la construction du narrataire (extradiégétique) comme fonction d’une pragmatique de la lecture où l’Autre sollicité entretient un rapport—ressemblant ou divergeant mais toujours opératoire—avec le lecteur-cible, jouant ainsi un rôle crucial dans la réception et l’interprétation du roman.

La brève introduction au concept du narrataire remonte à Aristote pour ensuite retracer les principaux moments modernes proposés par Barthes, Genette et Prince qui, eux, se sont inspirés des contributions de Jakobson, Benveniste, Bakhtin et Sartre. Très utile sur le plan pédagogique, ce chapitre liminaire remplit bien sa fonction « d'introduction » et trouverait bien sa place dans un cours de théorie littéraire, en même temps qu'il fournit un précieux aide-mémoire à ceux qui sont déjà familiers du concept. Les cinq chapitres qui suivent présentent les romans dans l'ordre chronologique, proposant ainsi une histoire de « l'évolution esthétique au Québec dans l'art d'écrire des romans », où sont tracés les avatars du couple narrateur-narrataire, les stratégies textuelles déployées et leurs effets rhétoriques.

Les études du corpus—*Jean Rivard* (Gérin-Lajoie), *l'Appel de la Race* (Groulx), *Maria Chapdelaine* (Hémon), *Mon royaume pour un cheval* (Poulin) et *Parlons de moi* (Archambault)—découvrent la transformation du rapport narrateur-narrataire depuis une relation de *déférence* typique du roman à thèse et de la tradition réaliste, vers une relation plus nuancée, voire hostile, qui renvoie le lecteur à ses propres moyens pour juger de la fiabilité du narrateur. La tendance réaliste dans *l'Appel de la race* explique la disparition des apostrophes explicites au narrataire qui caractérisaient *Jean Rivard*, et pourtant l'intérêt pédagogique commun aux deux ouvrages y institue un même rapport de soumission entre le narrataire et le narrateur, le premier ressemblant en tous points au lecteur-cible désiré, le deuxième se maintenant autoritaire et infaillible. Dans le roman moderne, par contre, un narrateur à la première personne s'adresse encore une fois explicitement à un narrataire, tel que dans *Mon royaume pour un cheval* et *Parlons de moi*—mais que le narrataire soit sympathique ou bien hostile au narrateur, son trait essentiel

est de ne plus être à l'image du lecteur-cible qui, lui, se trouve coupé des assises qui guidaient autrefois sa lecture. À travers les divers rapports possibles entre narrateur et narrataire, c'est la caractérisation du deuxième qui est la clé qui « permet de déterminer la crédibilité du narrateur et, dès lors, le poids relatif de son acquiescement ou de son désaccord face aux propos du narrateur ».

Les analyses de texte sont généreusement nourries de rappels théoriques et critiques provenant d'autres chercheurs de sorte que la pratique se voie continuellement appuyée par la réflexion théorique. Connolly fournit des lectures honnêtes, sensibles et surtout d'une clarté et d'une précision admirables. Sans révolutionner le concept de narrataire, elle déploie finement ses nombreux axes et pose, ce faisant, de nouvelles questions à ces romans : le rôle du narrateur explique-t-il le succès à la fois international et québécois de *Maria Chapdelaine*? Le narrataire de *l'Appel de la race*, est-il québécois ou franco-ontarien? Les deux parties de *Jean Rivard* mettent-elles en scène un seul narrataire ou deux personnages interlocuteurs distincts?

La force de l'étude du narrataire réside dans sa capacité de faire relire des romans familiers du point de vue de cette figure tantôt intrusive, tantôt évanescente, mais toujours cruciale quant à la construction de sens par le lecteur. Si c'est le narrateur qui semble jouer au prime abord le rôle de guide et d'interprète du monde fictif, c'est son partenaire occulté, le narrataire, qui médiatise ce rôle, s'interposant entre l'autorité du narrateur et la crédulité du lecteur.



Varied Voices

Catherine Owen

Shall: Ghazals. Wolsak & Wynn \$17.00

Shannon Bramer

The Refrigerator Memory. Coach House \$15.95

Jennica Harper

The Octopus and Other Poems. Signature \$14.95

Reviewed by Darlene Shatford

Shall: Ghazals, by Vancouver-based poet Catherine Owen, showcases a collection of 54 compact poems written in a variation on an ancient, Persian verse, a sequence of couplets that adhere to a “tender yet fierce form.” Owen’s preface-styled “Portal,” dated October 2005, provides a context to the subsequent ghazals as it describes the speaker’s return to the poetic expression of experience. Beset with a mysterious illness that left her lying in bed exhausted and “broken,” the speaker recounts how she was able to do only nothing, for even language had become “painful, impenetrable.” However, the ghazal, the promise of the ghazal, then only a “flicker,” haunted her mind and “flooded” her body. Once she was able to hold a pen again, she became obsessed with the form, so much so that her life not only had been drawn into the poems but also had been “pared away to a relentless language.” She admits that the traditional ghazals are not her own, with their “contained couplets, mantras, and rhyme schemes, with the oral force of community behind their chanted refrains,” but, evident in the collection of poems, Owen does know the emptiness, the loss, the smallness, and the beauty the ghazal wants and demands.

The poems, short and spare, allow only half-glimpses, slices of images, of the speaker’s awareness and experience, but somehow these are enough. The smallness of birds, a spider’s eggs, lips, leaves, crickets, and children signify the ongoing-ness and potential richness of life; they are also used to point

to its brevity, for the speakers are preoccupied with shadows and emptiness. It is as if upon reflection on new life, hope, and renewal, the speakers are reminded of death, loss, and grief. For example, in the twenty-eighth poem entitled “Absence,” Owen writes, “I used to hear birds close to morning. / Now asphalt whimpers.”

Throughout the collection, readers are reminded of the struggle for poetic expression, for the speakers repeatedly refer to the written word, language, or poetry itself, and, at times, question the power and/or usefulness of the art form: “There is only so much a poem can save. / Is there anything saved by a poem?” and “Some poems are like morning / —their light berates my seeing.” Readers are given some insight into the poet’s longing for the precision language can offer but, along with the poet, know how elusive language can be: “Again, the seasons collide. / Where is there place for a word?” Owen’s collection of ponderings on the poet’s uneasy relationship with language deserves more than a single reading; the poems are complex and compelling, worthy of study.

Although Shannon Bramer’s poems in her third poetry collection, *The Refrigerator Memory*, also resonate with a certain sadness, they are comprised of a diversity of characters and subjects. Far from stark, Bramer’s poems have a fairy-tale quality to them and are peopled with magical figures such as a clown, a fire-eater, a scientist of kindness, and a boy who can’t stop crying, among others.

Many of Bramer’s speakers confess to entertaining and committing outrageous acts. For instance, as a way to get back at her husband for flirting with her sister, the speaker in “Our Prosthesis” admits to hiding her husband’s arm in the basement after a night of drinking and, before bed, reads *The Idiot* long into the night: “My sister doesn’t / even know who Dostoyevsky is.” In the poem “Riding Hood Reads the Suicide

Note,” Nana, although afraid of what Riding Hood might think, admits to loving the wolf and confesses her desire for “a muzzle / of blood and fur.” Surprisingly, she says, “You must learn / to love those who trespass; they are the most interesting / people you will come across.” In “The Hot-Air Balloon Operator and Her Brother,” the brother, frustrated by his sister’s renouncement of her medical studies and her surprising new vocation, thinks he might “strangle her” and imagines her “body dropping down / through the sky, landing broken near the front steps, back / home where he might help her start again.”

Typically serious subjects such as molestation, terminal illness, and murder become quirky under Bramer’s treatment, comical even. The speaker of “First Husband” frankly states, “Like the young girl in that book / I murdered him in the afternoon. . . . I had longed to drag him, let / his head bump and knock on the antiques.” In “Elegy for Atlas,” Bramer surprises the reader with a poem addressed to the dog of a family in the midst and aftermath of a breakup: “I watched you. / The summer you chewed off your tail / to forestall the divorce.” Bramer’s voices, many of them startling in their grief, manage to rise above the moribund, refuse to be weighted down by complex musings. Their charming, sometimes absurd tones quietly fascinate.

Fascination with and examination of the “science of everyday life” are the subjects of *The Octopus and Other Poems* by BC poet, Jennica Harper. Harper’s speakers are innocent, questioning explorers, desirous not only of the uncharted terrain but also of the experiences on the journey itself.

Filled with investigations of love, travel, and other human behaviour, the collection speaks to the need to relate, identify, learn, and belong through a process of expression and reflection. In “Breasts: Case Study,” the speaker recalls her reaction toward her breasts at the age of ten, “the blobs on my /

chest just extra weight, / jacket pockets filled / and turned inside out” and compares them to her mother’s that “continue to face forward. / They know the way.” In “Screw Roses,” the speaker waits her turn at the tattoo parlour, admitting she wants to be a “bad girl, hanging out / with the mean guys, loyal but unpredictable, / adored, adorned, / a leader of the pack / (*vroom, vroom*).”

Harper writes of lost men, sea life, maps, and music, and although some of the narrative poems tend to sprawl, the metaphors and imagery, largely exploratory and scientific in nature, provide tension and feeling. Harper’s work is engaging and promising.

Erratic Relations

Leslie Greentree

A Minor Planet for You and Other Stories. U of Alberta P \$24.95

Reviewed by Tim Haner

A Minor Planet for You and Other Stories is Leslie Greentree’s debut collection of short fiction. The themes she explores are various, but a number of the stories are told from the perspectives of youngish women, many of them suffering the manipulative behaviour of the significant men in their lives. The reader may wish that these women would just come to their senses and dump the losers. Greentree, however, deftly catches these mostly immature and inexperienced female characters in their first intimations that maturity and freedom must sometimes be won from loved ones who would otherwise hold them back.

Greentree is a published poet who handles imagery effectively. A number of the stories feature objects that sit in their midst like Zen koans, inviting interpretation yet resisting it. One such object is highlighted in “Black Shoes Slightly Askew.” Here, Sophie, diffident and confused, finds herself trapped in a suffocating relationship with the selfish Derek, who pressures her to

move in with him and his young son. Her discovery of a mysterious pair of black shoes abandoned on a curb provides her with an objective correlative that seems to bring her to the brink of an epiphany. As with many of the stories in this collection, though, the epiphany, if it occurs, does so beyond the conclusion of the tale. A similar gnomic entity appears in "The Erratic." In this story, one of the strongest in the collection, a barn-size rock deposit from a retreating glacier squats in a farmer's field, "a strange and foreign visitor," looming allusively and seeming through its sheer mass to accelerate the disintegration of the relationship of the sightseeing couple that gazes upon it.

In the title story, the protagonist looks back on her relationship with Brian, a lout who spends his evenings at a friend's house drinking beer and desultorily searching the galaxies through a telescope for an asteroid to name after his girlfriend. She eventually leaves him but is still confused and disheartened by her need to cater to his whims and his drinking buddies: "I wonder what the hell I was playing at, sitting around smiling at those losers like some fifties housewife, who thinks it's her job to admire men." The protagonist in "How You Know" doesn't possess Maggie's capacity for such introspection, but she knows when she is being used and, unlike the other women in this collection, she instinctively knows how to deal with it. In this story, Paula is being stalked by a besotted and cowardly male acquaintance; she contrives to drive him away by giving her voyeuristic nemesis a peep-show display through her bedroom window of her real affections for her boyfriend. She is the realized possibility that many of the other characters in these stories stumble toward, a confident young woman who contemptuously defies the attempts of men to intimidate and control her.

Greentree's writing has much to recommend it, including a vividly terse prose style

and a keen ear for the idiomatic speech of twenty-somethings. Some of her narrative choices, however, are inept. The most significant of these is telling where showing would be more effective. Similarly, she tends to tell where she has already shown. For instance, we do not have to be told by the narrator that Sophie, from the story "Black Shoes, Slightly Askew," "sees herself constantly striving to live up to yet another person's idea, and always as usual, falling short," because we have already gleaned this from her actions. Greentree's virtues as a writer, though, overshadow any vices, and if she is not yet a sure-hand at the short story form, she is certainly a writer to watch for in the future.

Of Note

Bill Gaston

Sointula. Raincoast \$21.95

Eighteen months after its publication, I have now incorporated Bill Gaston's novel in two courses—so, this note is less book review than report from the classroom. The majority of my senior undergraduate students like to dislike this novel. Peter, the aspiring Spokane-based writer who tries to go native, is easy to despise. And Evelyn, Oakville society matron on the lam, is too intuitive to identify with. One student, to general nods of assent, lamented that the form was too "block-y," a reference I think to long sections devoted to different points of view, without "fluid" transitions.

But many come around to admiration, or respect, when we begin to push the relevance of the novel to the course focus on "Habitat Studies." Peter, however annoying, is a retired biology teacher and the vehicle for including much specific ecological detail that is also resonantly metaphorical. And we recognize the care with which Gaston shapes the third-person narration to repre-

sent the mind-style, vocabulary, and syntax of the characters: Peter's catholic if superficial enthusiasms; Evelyn's post-antidepressant dream-state. And when we ask why every chapter is headed not with pointers to theme and character, but place names, we begin to consider the possibility that the character with which to empathize here is place (the connected places of the Salish Sea), the sound and pace of a different breathing.

To be sure, Gaston keeps us unbalanced—never quite sure in his honouring so many staples of West Coast mythology (spirit quest, Emily Carr, utopian experiments, and orcas) when the burlesque and the irony leave off and the passion for environmental rhapsody takes over. But we find we can make a good argument for both the Coupland-style cynicism *and* the possibility of an ecocentric narrative where Don McKay's inverted urging—what am I to the beach?—is realized in restless dialogue and fronding description. — LAURIE RICOU

Don McKay

Strike/Slip. McClelland & Stewart \$17.99

Don McKay's writings have examined from consistently original angles the complex relations between word and world. His latest work *Strike/Slip* shifts the focus from spatial to temporal encounters with "wilderness" and the implications for thinking about one's relation to place. The poems enact in part the concept of "geopoetry" that McKay explores in his 2005 book *Deactivated West 100*. A "geopoet" (McKay borrows the term from early theories of plate tectonics) is alive to the inadequacy of language in the face of geological time. A number of poems in this collection focus on "deep time" as a way into questions of responsibility. "Quartz Crystal," for example, presents the difficult conflict between rock and stone embodied in the impulse to commandeer pieces of the earth as paper-

weights. The poem expresses McKay's characteristic dark humour: "Who do I think I am, with my little dish of stones, my ball-point pen, my shelf of books full of notions, that I should own this specimen of earth's own artifice, this form before mind or math?" These questions augment those posed in other poems such as "Après Chainsaw" or "Utter," where time is explored in the context of the industrialized landscape: "To reach / into the rock and drag forth / Inco."

A strike-slip fault occurs where two plates slide past one another (for example, as they do in the San Andreas fault). The poems in this collection succeed in enacting this rupture by sliding different contexts against each other in unexpected ways: a horse pull and the specifics of gravity, an abandoned railway and the neolithic, birdsong and basalt, humour and heartbreak. This is an important book. With skill and thoughtfulness McKay's poems provoke us to reckon with what it means to think our place in time at the beginning of the twenty-first century.

— ADAM DICKINSON

Lisa Robertson

Occasional Work and Seven Walks from the Office for Soft Architecture. Coach House \$19.95

In a short addition to the new edition of *Occasional Work and Seven Walks from the Office for Soft Architecture*, Lisa Robertson thanks Coach House Books for taking in her "wandering book." And a wandering book it certainly is: most of the collection's poem-essays were first commissioned between 1998 and 2000 as stand-alone pieces; eventually assembled by Clear Cut Press (Astoria, Oregon) in 2003, the collection another three years later has wandered its way to a Canadian publisher. Even with Toronto-based Coach House, the collection remains to some extent adrift from the site and contexts identified by Robertson as key

to her Soft Architecture writing—the city of Vancouver and its recent (and ongoing) period of economic growth and respatialization, “bracketed by the sale of the Expo ’86 site . . . and the 2003 acquisition . . . of the 2010 Winter Olympics.”

Robertson interrogates her “dissolving” city with densely textured ambles through the “history of surfaces” and into the threshold possibilities of daily living and civic futures. But in a new addition to the Introduction, she writes: “Now I can say that I have left that city. . . . I think now that I am not an architect. Perhaps I am a clothier emitting moths. . . . But then, with utmost religiosity, I was a citizen.”

How are we to read the texts of a “soft architect” who has abandoned her “profession”? How might we read Vancouver—that so-called “dream city” slumbering toward 2010—in the writings of a now-former citizen? Perhaps with the sense of superfluous pleasure and potentiality that Robertson herself discovers in the disjunction of anachronism, however slight. As she writes in “The Value Village Lyric,” “each garment describes differently the collapse of the ideal. . . . Their vulnerability lends us a rhetoric.”

One other change to the new edition is worth noting. Replacing the original cover art (a palimpsest of map-signs that never quite fit Robertson’s project) is a detail from an archival photograph included in the essay “Doubt and the History of Scaffolding.” The close-up image of bodies working in the “listing” space of a scaffold hints at the attentively indexical quality of Robertson’s writing: “Scaffolding . . . explains what a wall is without being a wall. Perhaps it describes by desiring the wall. . . . But also the scaffold wants to fall away from support. Its vertigo is so lively.”

— MAIA JOSEPH

J. Edward Chamberlin

Living Language and Dead Reckoning: Navigating Oral and Written Traditions. Ronsdale \$9.95

“Feeling is coming back into fashion in literary criticism,” Ted Chamberlin announces at the end of the first movement of this song-lecture—as if the information is both inarguably obvious and completely astonishing. This turn comes after three pages of recording and responding and questioning the view from his home in Halfmoon Bay: a purse seiner on the way to work, seals at play, dolphins dolphining. The transitional zone between sea and land, the dream of its endless stories, sets up an intricate contemplation of betweenness. Being lost and yet knowing. Listening as a form of reading as a form of listening. Music or language. In learning to read, “we learn that the word or sign is the thing . . . which is to say, we learn that it is *not* the thing.” Chamberlin navigating between conviction and astonishment, between thought and feeling.

This publication of Chamberlin’s Sedgewick Lecture (University of British Columbia 2005) is a supplement, an elaboration, perhaps also a testing and re-evaluation of his compelling *If This Is Your Land, Where Are Your Stories?* (2003). The music of his prose invites—demands—close listening. — LAURIE RICOU

Frederick Philip Grove; Klaus Martens, ed.

A Dirge for My Daughter: Poems. Königshausen & Neumann EUR 12.80

Klaus Martens has selected and attentively edited 35 of the poems Frederick Philip Grove wrote in response to death of his daughter May, of a ruptured appendix, 17 July 1927 (a few days before her twelfth birthday). Martens writes a restrained introduction in the face of Grove’s unrestraint, and concludes: “Suffice it to say, he felt the poetry had gone out of his life.” This nicely ambiguous formula describes both

the unpoetic poems, and the earnestly agonized accompanying prose notes in which Grove keeps trying to explain (to himself?) why and where a particular poem was written.

“Blow” is a noticeably frequent noun; accumulating interrogatives plead for explanations, while “chaotic,” “convulsive,” “hideous” bludgeon the reader with evidence of Grove’s agony—the more agonizing for the inadequacy of the vocabulary. A surprising number of black and white photographs illustrate the text; some are barely distinguishable but maybe the more ghostly appropriate for that—a complement to Grove’s frequent images of “mist.” Grove mentions no names, and only rarely a particular identifying detail: in their austere unnamings, these poems add resonantly to the endlessly compelling Grove/Greve saga.

— LAURIE RICOU

Lisa Moore

Degrees of Nakedness. Anansi \$18.95

Lisa Moore’s story “Surge” ends with this sentence: “When the lightning flickers, I am the one who flinches.” Those ten words might serve to describe the effect of these dozen shimmering short fictions. The charge and power of some cosmic force, often erotic, is suppressed to a flicker by conversational banality, syntactical restraint, and abrupt turns of scene. The genius of these stories is that the reader feels *immersed*, despite the distancing implicit in the casual narration: ultimately not the teller but the “told-to” flinches, first with empathy, and then with self-awareness. Our gratitude to Anansi for bringing Moore’s first collection back into print.

— LAURIE RICOU

Brian Brett

Uproar’s Your Only Music. Exile \$22.95

Brian Brett’s memoir has the chaotic zest one might expect to be inspired by a tumble of ancestors devoted to bootlegging and buccaneering. The characters, like the form, scramble just on the edge of the illegitimate and illegal. In a raucous tale of Kallman’s Syndrome, technicolour drugs, and addiction to books, Brett follows his wanderings as a poet in the “roughest districts of Vancouver,” looking toward some resolution or acceptance or celebration of “the festival that nature is.” Within this frame, many of the poems that make up the second part of this uproar of mixed genres feel familiar: there’s the same junk-collector’s eclecticism, and shift of attention; some of the stories are retold in a more contemplative mode (yet still the volcanic burns just under the surface). This whole bubble and gurgle of wandering syntax ends in the teaching of right directions for the lost, as in the memoir proper: “Name the animals, name the plants, name yourself, / and keep on going until you can call it paradise.”

— LAURIE RICOU



Dynamic Equivalence in Translation

Zhao Fa

I am seized with violent desire
 Alone by myself I become lustful.
 I am seized with violent desire
 Alone by myself I become lustful.
 Inuit song¹

If the Inuit song quoted by Dorothy Speak is to be read as preparing the Canadian readers for an Arctic love story of the original, uninhibited yet unrequited passion, then, for a translator, how to render the song into Chinese that will produce an equivalent effect on the Chinese readership proves a daunting task.

To conjure up an atmosphere of desire intensified by the helplessness and extreme loneliness in which the protagonist “I” struggles, Speak quotes this traditional folk song of the Inuit, resorting to its repetition and its sing-song lamentation. But in an English-Chinese translation of this story, are there any poetic forms and rhetorical properties in Chinese that can be used to achieve the same effect and create the same horizon of expectation for an audience of a different cultural heritage?

The poetic form employed by the Chinese classic *The Book of Poetry* (*Shi Jing*) seems an ideal choice. As one of the earliest collections of folk songs about the weal and woe of common people in ancient China, songs in that collection express emotions in the most concise, unmodified, and unrestrained

manner. Moreover, those songs were originally intended for lamentation or freely expressing strong emotions, without the now anticipated tone of “Chinese reserve.” Thus an imitation of those songs as a sort of intertext in translation is expected to reproduce the sentiment in those songs, and can be relevant literarily to that in Speak’s story. Here is an example of a possible translation of the English original into Chinese:

English Original	Chinese Translation	Literal Meaning of the Translation
I am seized with violent desire.	欲火中燒，	My desire burns inside me like fire.
Alone by myself I become lustful.	吾情驕驕。	It grows vast as fields.
I am seized with violent desire.	獨守孤影，	Alone I watch my lonely shadows.
Alone by myself I become lustful.	吾情淫淫。	My passion runs profuse as flowing water

In the Chinese translation, the four-character line pattern is typical of the folk songs in *The Book of Poetry*. The rhyme scheme “aabb,” the internal rhymes “驕驕 (jiao jiao)” and “淫淫 (yin yin)” and the parallel structure of the second and fourth lines produce

the same sing-song effect prevalent in many pieces in the Chinese classic. Furthermore, to induce in the mind of the Chinese readers a memory of *The Book of Poetry* and another Chinese classic *Poetry of the South* (*Chu Ci*) (also collected songs of the unrequited dreams and aspirations), allusive diction is used, as in “驕驕”, alluding to the song “The Vast Field”² in *The Song of Qi of The Book of Poetry*:

無田甫田，Don't care for that vast field;
 維莠驕驕。Wild grass has grown afield.
 無思遠人，Don't miss your man, I say,
 勞心忉忉。Or you will have dismay.

And in “淫淫”, alluding to the fourth stanza of the song “Mourning the Lost Capital”³ in *Poetry of the South*:

望長楸而太息兮，A deep sigh escaped me gazing at the forests;
 涕淫淫其若霰。My tears in profusion coursed down like sleet.
 過夏首而西浮兮，Passing the Xia's head, we then drifted westwards,
 顧龍門而不見。I searched for the Dragon Gate but all in vain.

Both songs, like the numerous others in either classic, have helped in accumulating a sensitivity to sorrows, helplessness, uninhibited yet unfulfilled desires and aspirations, which has become part of the Chinese readers' literary preconception. By resorting to those frames of reference, Chinese readers may graft their own aesthetic conventions on the present reading process, and thus transcend their immediate reception of Speak's quotation. The sentiment that the translated Inuit song wakens may be the pre-existent subconscious one, which prepares the Chinese readers with a frame of

mind ready for the protagonist's urgency for love, and her grief and agonies over that unconsummated love.

Of course, it may seem far-fetched to prepare the Chinese readers for a Canadian story by resorting to existing Chinese forms and cultural memories. But if we take for granted that every reading is a new process of creation, then isn't contributing to the work of art a new scope of association and imagination a worthwhile act of transcreation? After all, the overriding purpose or, to be more exact, the desirable result of literary translation is “to produce the same effect (or one as close as possible) on the readership of the translation as was obtained on the readership of the original” (Newmark 48). This practice seeks to realize what E.A. Nida calls the “dynamic equivalence principle.”⁴

NOTES

- 1 Quoted by Dorothy Speak at the beginning of her short story “Eagle's Bride” in her collection *Object of Your Love*.
- 2 Anonymously written, the song is about a young lady who tries to persuade herself not to miss her husband too much and not to bury herself in sorrow.
- 3 The poem is written by the famous Chinese lyric poet Qu Yuan (340-278 B.C.) as a mourning for the capital of his homeland the State of Chu fallen to General Bai Qi of Qin State.
- 4 The principle lays its emphasis on the readability of the translation. Applied to a literary translation where the readability is more important than preserving the original form of wording, dynamic equivalence subordinates adherence to the original text in favour of a more natural translation. That explains why in the Chinese translation of the Inuit song, the repetition in the original verses is recaptured by the two parallel lines starting with “吾情”, and by repeated sounds of “驕驕” and “淫淫”. The sense of loneliness and isolation expressed in the original is reproduced by the use of “alone” and “lonely.” After all, according to Nida, “if a close, formal translation is so

semantically and syntactically difficult . . . certain changes are warranted” (Nida 93). And that warrant may be regarded as the translator’s licence.

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Lullabies for Literature: An Interview with Heather O’Neill

Kristin McHale

On 18 April 2007, novelist and poet Heather O’Neill spoke with Kristin McHale at O’Neill’s St. Urbain street home in Montreal. O’Neill’s novel, Lullabies for Little Criminals, winner of CBC’s 2007 “Canada Reads” contest, tells the story of Baby, a twelve-year-old girl growing up in Montreal’s red-light district in the 1980s. These excerpts complement Danielle Fuller’s article in this issue. The full interview is available at www.canlit.ca.

KRISTIN MCHALE (KM): Tell me a bit about the experience of having the book on “Canada Reads.” Were you surprised that your book was chosen?

HEATHER O’NEILL (HO): Yeah, I was surprised. I think I was more surprised when it was selected than when I won, actually, because being selected for these things is always the hardest thing. Then

it’s “Okay, I’m one in five.”

KM Which is a lot better than being one in millions. . . .

HO Exactly. And then at least you know that what you’ve done is being considered properly. For so many things it’s just hard to get the attention of anyone who’s doing the selecting.

KM And what was it like to listen to the debates about your book?

HO I didn’t really listen to them from beginning to end, because it was too existentially strange, and odd. You know, it’s done for entertainment, so it can be very trashy. So it’s hard to listen to as a writer because you just start getting offended. Like “hey, what did I do to you? I’m not saying that my book needs to be on there like this!”

KM What do you think about the idea of books being pitted against each other?

HO I think it’s fun. It’s all done in entertainment, and all the books got a lot of attention. I think it’s fun: any sort of competition, people enjoy.

KM If you were going to go on the show, do you know which book you’d choose to defend?

HO No, I’d have to really think about it.

KM I noticed that of the books that were chosen this year for “Canada Reads,” four of them were written since 2000, so they’re all kind of newer. Do you think that’s indicative of the literary scene in Canada changing?

HO I think so. I mean, it may just be my own perspective, but there’s a lot more excitement about the new writers coming out. It was sort of like the canon was fixed for a while. The Atwood-Ondaatje-Munro thing was sort of impenetrable. But I think now, it’s up for grabs. It might just be because I’m publishing, so I’m like “Hey, why not?” But I think there is just a level of excitement—there needs to be a new vanguard.

KM Some writers have been saying that the

Canadian canon is impenetrable, saying that nothing that's been written since 1970 is being seriously considered. What do you think about that?

HO Well, maybe I'm an optimist, but I don't think it's true. For a while there just wasn't the level of excitement about the books that were coming out. But with the new younger writers—like with David Bezmozgis, it's so exciting. There's just a lot of hype for new books that are coming out.

KM Let's talk about your book. What were you hoping that readers of *Lullabies for Little Criminals* would come away with?

HO I put a lot of stuff in the book that I found intrinsically interesting, or things that I had seen and things that I thought were just really beautiful. I thought well, there's got to be some readers out there who are affected in the same way. And these things haven't necessarily been described yet.

KM What kinds of things are you thinking about?

HO Just the way that young neglected kids, like Baby and her friends, and how they try and charm one another, and how they have these larger than life personalities. They engage more with one another because their parents aren't around much, so they become these sort of extended families. If you have a tight family, you are always going to have love. But these kids are missing love at home, so in order to get attention, they have to behave in ludicrous ways, and it comes from things they've seen, like how rock stars are acting, or things in movies, or the older juvenile delinquents who have a lot of friends. So you have these 12-year-olds acting out things that they've seen, just to get attention.

KM I thought it was interesting in the book how Baby would find people to love her, like when she was sent to live with a foster family, for example, but then her situation would change and she'd have to

leave them and start all over again. Or she'd find a good friend like Xavier, the boy in her class at school that she befriends, and then it wouldn't work out. So she kept having to reconstruct a loving network of people around her.

HO Yeah, because there is no permanence for children: they have no way of keeping in touch with one another. They don't have the same rights that adults have. They can just be picked up and put elsewhere.

KM Speaking of parents and children, one of the things that I found interesting in the book is the relationship between Baby and her father, Jules, who is a single parent and a heroin addict. On the one hand, he's pretty irresponsible and gets her into these dangerous situations. On the other hand, he does protect her somewhat, and he's looking out for her more than anybody else is. What were you thinking as you were creating that relationship?

HO Well, Baby was the first character that I created, but as I was creating her, Jules was always there too. And Jules was one of my favourite characters to create, because I wanted to do someone who was such a screw-up, who did everything wrong, but at the same time was just so lovable, and attractive. And in a way, it's he who makes Baby who she is, because the two of them have this sense that they're the most fascinating people on the street—or that there's always something happening, or that they see themselves as the centre of the universe. Which is I think what parents are supposed to do for children—make them feel like they are the most important thing in the world. And I think that Jules does that with Baby. But his values are also ridiculous. But he's so young also—so in a way it's forgivable, because it's like they're growing up together.

KM What do you mean about the values being mixed up?

HO Well, for Jules it's all about show, or hav-

ing a good time, or having the friends over. He's like 27 or 28, so he's in a state of arrested development. I think that a lot of single parents who have kids young kind of miss out on their own childhood, so they're always trying to live out their childhood. So that's what happens with Jules, and he's in this state of acting like a child, and trying to get attention like a 17-year-old would get attention. And I think the thing with Baby is, I get the sense that she's going to get beyond that; so in a sense she'll outgrow Jules.

KM What do you see happening to her after the book ends?

HO I don't know; it's hard to say. It's just when the book ends, you leave them.

KM It ends on kind of an optimistic note, but still uncertain. Baby goes to stay with a friend in the country, so she gets away from some of the trouble she's gotten into in Montreal, but no one knows what's going to happen.

HO Yeah. Some people have said that the ending is overly optimistic, which I find kind of odd, because I'm like "How is it overly optimistic?" Jules is homeless, and Baby, you don't really know what's going to happen to her. It's like aside from having her murdered and thrown on the side of the road, it's too optimistic. But I didn't want that to be in the book because it's about survival. And most kids do survive, you know?

KM Yeah. I don't think that it was too optimistic. There was this possibility of things getting better, but nothing was certain—no one knew what was going to happen. It's not like she ended up in a castle with a loving family all of a sudden. Another thing that I find interesting is that you said that you wanted to capture the "ludicrously bad choices" that 12-year-olds can make. And there were a couple times, like when Baby decides to go back to [her violent boyfriend's] apartment, where I was thinking, "Why!? Why are you doing that?" So how did

you come up with that?

HO I don't know—it's just like growing up in the '80s. There was a style of parenting, and you'd just be left alone forever. And kids get these ideas in their heads, and their sense of consequences—they don't really grasp cause and effect. I remember once my sister got in her head that she should jump off this balcony. And we were all like "That would be great, that would be wonderful to see you just jump!" And she jumped, and of course she broke her arm and it was terrible, but at the time it seemed like a really good thing to do. When I was a kid I always made the worst decisions. That's why people get so paranoid about kids. It's impossible, really—no matter how many times you tell them, they just do really stupid things and they want to do stunts, and no matter how many times you tell them not to talk to strangers, they still talk to strangers, you know?

KM Another thing I really liked about the book was the dialogue. Do you have a special strategy for writing dialogue? What's your approach?

HO Well, I never write a character unless I totally believe in them, and sometimes I'll do just pages and pages of notes about them until they kind of just live in my head and I just know what they would say. And for me, one of the ways that I know I have a character down is when I can do their dialogue—because if I have no idea what they would say, then I don't really have them fully. But when I do, and it's time for the character to talk, it's just like reporting the dialogue: "I hear ya, I hear ya." [laughs]

KM Did you find yourself thinking about the characters after you'd finished?

HO Yeah, it is hard, because every time I'd sit down to write in the past few years, it'd be in Baby's voice—so when I'd sit down I'd start to write in Baby's voice, and it's like "OK, that book is done! Stop it!" It was a really enjoyable voice to write in.

Idea and Parody

Laurie Ricou

According to the book's biographical note, Patria Rivera was born and raised in the Philippines and now lives in Toronto. Her collection of poems *Puti/White* (Frontenac House \$15.95) ends with a glossary of words and phrases in Spanish, Polish, German, Greek, and (mainly) Filipino. In the loping and stretch of her lines, Rivera teaches the reader the inadequacy of the terms available in any one language system, and hints at the subtle gradations of difference between nada and nothing, between Puti and White. But even when the glossary is not needed, the Rivera poem typically negotiates the dynamics of translation—between geographies of persimmon and frangipani and “the movements / of bear, deer, lynx, squirrel, and porcupine;” between dreams of “bazookas and bayonets” and an elusive “world bathed in the soft light of snowdrifts.” Rivera is constantly translating the pain of having “once been vulnerable,” remembering and reliving. She is speaking in one language and thinking in another: “Somehow the words do not seem to match / the nettles that lacerate and I roil inside / because I cannot put words to my anger.”

Jordan Scott's *Silt* (New Star Books \$16.00) at once reminds of blackberry, brown river, and the work world of the Lower Fraser in Tim Bowling and Daphne Marlatt. Scott, although not explicitly, apparently learns precise observation and

attentive listening (to his own language) from these poets. But he writes his estuarial geography in two directions interestingly different from theirs. In quoting from his grandfather's (invented?) journal, he translates—compare with Patria Rivera—the trauma of fleeing Poland in the wake of World War II to “taking splendour in / the river's shale floor.” Such translation often founders in silent frustration. Scott embraces his own speech impediment and makes of it a poetics of stuttering, manifest in repeating consonants isolated from one another on the page, and in the “blockage repetition replacement” as tongue tries to talk river. This is a book of poetry—and I mean this in the most complimentary way—that merits careful study.

“The poem wants / to beat the crap out of you then / make love,” Jeanette Lynes announces in “What the Poem Wants.” This mix of bluntness, crudeness, and desire might serve to describe the variations of her voice. But somewhere even in these lives lingers a bemused perspective and more bemused self-awareness. A delightful series of poems on song and pop culture honour, however caustically, Shania, Paul Anka, Glen Gould, and the Guess Who—not to mention her re-reading of *The Horse Whisperer*, Charlotte Brontë, Klein's “Portrait of the Poet as Landscape,” and “In Flanders Fields.” Lynes' *Left Fields* (Wolsak and Wynn \$15.00) could also be titled “Of Irony, especially in Poetry.” She is proudly provincial: “That's why I talk funny,” she explains. It's great fun listening to her talk.

Ken Belford's manifesto poem, titled "The journeyman," has a more subdued, self-deprecating irony. "I'm Canadian and the author of these poems," he announces, half sad and half amazed. "I'm not invited to read in the universities," he continues. And "I'm an unregulated voice from the Nass. Alfred Purdy noticed me." *Ecologue* (Harbour \$16.95), the poet's fourth book, should prompt many more to notice. The proud journeyman believes the ones "doing the real work" deserve a poet's attention. For the journeyman, he knows "form is bewildering," "the poem forms in the muck," and unafraid, like his remembered mentor to allow and include when he has been stupid in a poem.

Although his work is considerably more overtly cerebral and allusive than Belford's, George Payerle's celebration of the "Gumboot Nation,"—the ghost of Hubert Evans its artistic founder—is closely allied with the still remarkably expanding body of work poetry in Canada. Payerle's *alterations* (Signature Editions \$14.95) is, in one sense, a geo-poem for Roberts Creek, BC. But the attentive local detail, and its "work-boot / contemplation," gathers into a composition that is closer to "ecodreamtime" than to documentary. Payerle's poetry performs and cites music (from Willie Nelson to "Johan Sebastian's B-Minor Gloria"); generous endnotes acknowledging literary allusions amplify. Alterations of tone and rhythm keep us reading—and listening, for example, to how the vocabulary of "lubricious" and "emollients" sorts with the sharp observation ("cedar withes") and casual resignation ("as good as it gets") all in one poem.

Shyamal Bagchee favours the short line (often as few as two or three monosyllables). His *Gabardine and Other Poems* (TSAR \$16.95) flirts constantly, if often ironically, with "the madness of exotic lust," but neither anecdote, nor the thematics of "the glorious urge" engender the poetic interest that Bagchee does when he concentrates more intently on a single word or phrase and

teases the variations on and inside of it. An apparently computer-generated poem on "heart" and "hurt" is the work that draws me back for another and then another reading: "unhanded / less heart / more hurt / heart loss."

"Idea and parody / divide the world between them" concludes the narrator of "King Vitale" in one of the extended monologues in Norm Sibus's *Intimations of a Realm in Jeopardy* (Porcupine's Quill \$14.95). But, we might ask "is this observation idea or parody?" These are monologues that incorporate the conversation of an interlocutor (or several), but without the tension of drama. Indeed, the performance often seeks the "mights" and the "sometimes" and the "non-sequiturs" that drain the dramatic tension, leaving the listener baffled and parodied into discomfort.

Dorothy Field inclines to the prose poem, both in blocks of text justified left and right, or in long lines extending across the page, stepping down, wrapping over what wants to be a pentameter. Hence, in *Leaving the Narrow Place* (Oolichan \$17.95), a loose and accumulating syntax accommodates anecdote, journaling, details of setting, lists, self-reflection, and annotations. Several of the most memorable poems use this mix to explore the writer's search for her own Jewishness. "Not That It's So Much Easier," draws on this prose mix to ponder the "long time" it took "to learn to be Jewish;" gradually the prose paragraphs extending over five pages, break toward shorter and shorter lines, unpunctuated blending of flavours—"Tang of apples walnuts sweet wine"—and scraps of prayers: "Come and eat . . ." For all of its anecdotal stretch and lingering, this is packed poetry, challenging in its detail, disorienting in its teaching.

"Absence defines us," Eve Joseph begins in the thirteenth poem of her sequence *The Startled Heart* (Oolichan \$15.95). Using the spare movements of the ghazal, Joseph writes of death in glimpses, caesurae, two-word sentences, and terse interrogatives. The

absence of context, elaboration, and referent pushes the reader to invent a narrative, a setting, and a personality. Hence the poems perform not so much the agony of loss, but the creative memory, defining life as it goes.

In the tradition of Marlatt, Wayman, Bowling, and Belford, Joe Denham's first book, *Flux* (Nightwood \$15.95), opens with graphic, empathetic work poetry. Almost every line reverberates with layered alliteration, assonance, consonance . . . extended in frequent imagery of music: lullaby, hums, allegro are all heard "Between Strings." Technical vocabulary laps against deck-hand's talk and the onomatopoeia in "slow slish of slackwater." To my ear, these are the strongest poems in the book, but the section of suitably urban realism is gritty, and the run-on returning of *Two Waters*, a short long poem remembering his native Sechelt Peninsula urges alerting ourselves to the slow things that define the lure of the local.

As its title suggests, Susan McCaslin's *A Plot of Light* (Oolichan \$17.95) stories "lamp," "star fire," and "luminescence," with Thomas Merton and William Blake as presiding spirits. McCaslin's favourite form is a sequence of unrhymed couplets of varying lengths—a shadow of rational balance that pushes on the reader the contemplation of general images ("rocks," "jewels," a "tree's finger"), and the contemplative in capitalized abstractions ("Presence," "Spirit"), which elsewhere might blur into blandness. Against such generalization, the isolated specific ("browning hydrangeas," "the albino gorilla in the / Barcelona zoo") sing like whole "alphabets" "fall[ing]." Moments of mystical vision may also be "written in light" and read in Carole Chambers' *Echolocation* (Thistledown \$12.95), but they are not celebrated so much as grounded as cause for the political elegy and the anecdote of working stewardship. "The Black Hole" tells of being arrested during the Clayquot Sound protests, yet at its centre is the revealing stanza:

We thought we lived
in a botanical eternity
that the simple wisdom of
the plants was background to
our complicated stories.
We thought we had forever
against the green.

In echoing those last two lines to conclude the poem, Chambers locates her poetic: the sound she sends out as awed admiration for the design of the non-human world comes back to her as protest against the human haste to act without listening.

Other valuable perspectives on the "simple wisdom of plants" may be found in three recent more technical works. Elaine Dewar's *The Second Tree: Of Clones, Chimeras and Quests for Immortality* (Vintage Canada \$22.00) is not literary text, although it moves with literary sensibility. It concerns the very considerable challenge of reading "the language of revelatory biology," and translating it to a wider public. At several points, Dewar reflects on this challenge, and, at one point remarks on the self-promotion inherent in giving nicknames to mutated genes. At another point, she remarks on science's sometime failure to explain meaning by quoting Sydney Brenner to the effect that sequencing a genome is purely technical: "It is the play *Hamlet* without Hamlet." Dewar is compelling reading: for those students grappling with writing across the science/literature boundary, it will still puzzle, but it will help.

Meticulously scholarly by comparison is Linda Schiebinger's *Plants and Empire: Colonial Bioprospecting in the Atlantic World* (Harvard UP \$39.95 US). Schiebinger is Professor of History and Science at Stanford. Her book focuses on the peacock flower (*Poinciana pulcherrina*) and its use, or not, "by slave women who used it to abort offspring who would otherwise be born into bondage." This unbearably fascinating story is extended into areas that might especially intrigue readers of this journal—for example, into the field of "agnotology," the study

of “culturally induced ignorance,” and into detailed comments on nomenclature.

Ten articles collected in *Keeping It Living: Traditions of Plant Use and Cultivation on the Northwest Coast of North America* (U Washington/UBC Press \$65.00/\$29.95), edited by Douglas Deur and Nancy J. Turner counter the “anthropological orthodoxy” that First Nations peoples were not agriculturalists. Students of literature, particularly ecocritics, will be interested in the details of naming of the natural world, as well as the broader narrative of keeping it living, which includes cultivating, tending, emphasis on native species, and “culturally significant” plants. E. Richard Atleo’s storytelling Preface, with its commentary on the non-Darwinian discourses of creation, is the most sustained “literary” commentary in the book.

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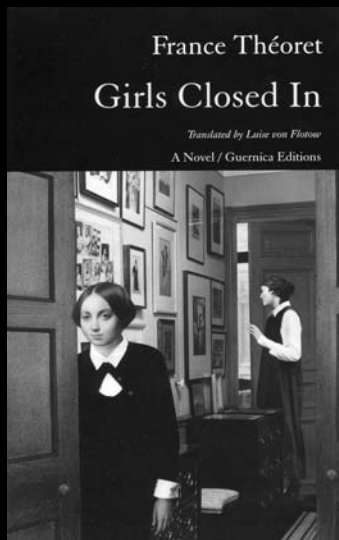
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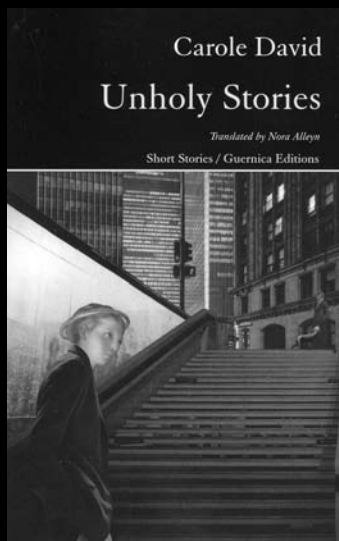
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Articles

Zhao **Fa**, professor of English in Ningbo University, Zhejiang, China, and translator of numerous works of Canadian fiction and drama by, for example, Guy Vanderhaeghe, Rudy Wiebe, David Adams Richards, Ann-Marie MacDonald, Wayne Johnston, and Dorothy Speak.

Danielle **Fuller** is the Director of the Regional Centre for Canadian Studies at the University of Birmingham, UK. Her publications include articles on Canadian literary cultural production, Atlantic Canadian literature, and the CBC's "Canada Reads." Her book, *Writing the Everyday: Women's Textual Communities in Atlantic Canada* (McGill-Queen's UP, 2004), won the 2004 Gabrielle Roy Prize (English-language). She is currently collaborating with DeNel Rehberg Sedo on an interdisciplinary project, "Beyond the Book: Mass Reading Events and Contemporary Cultures of Reading in the UK, USA and Canada" (www.beyondthebookproject.org).

Robin **Jarvis** is Professor of English Literature at the University of the West of England, Bristol. He is the author of *Wordsworth, Milton and the Theory of Poetic Relations* (1991), *Romantic Writing and Pedestrian Travel* (1997), and *The Romantic Period: The Intellectual and Cultural Context of English Literature, 1789-1830* (2004). He has been closely involved with the British Association for Romantic Studies since its establishment in 1989.

Maia **Joseph** is a PhD student in the Department of English at the University of British Columbia. Her research interests include Canadian urban literature and the interdisciplinary theorization of space and community. Her dissertation will examine literary responses to the recent (and ongoing) redevelopment of Vancouver's downtown core.

Kristin **McHale** completed a BA in English at the University of British Columbia and an MA in Linguistics at the Université Stendhal in Grenoble, France. She is currently studying law at McGill University.

Heather **O'Neill** is a Canadian writer. Her bestselling debut novel *Lullabies for Little Criminals* won CBC Radio's "Canada Reads" competition and was recently nominated for the Books in Canada first novel. She has contributed to the radio programs *This American Life* and *Wiretap*, as well as to the *New York Times Magazine*. She lives in Montreal.

Andrea **Stone** is currently completing her PhD in English at the University of Toronto. Her dissertation is on the body in nineteenth-century New World African literature. She holds a Doctoral Fellowship in Health Care, Technology and Place, and her research interests include nineteenth-century medical and legal theory.

Poems

Michael **Bullock** lives in London. Susan Andrews **Grace** lives in Nelson, BC. Bill **Howell** and A.F. **Moritz** live in Toronto. Michael **Lista** lives in Montreal. Theresa **Muñoz** lives in Glasgow, Scotland.

Reviews

Jes **Battis** teaches at Simon Fraser University. George **Belliveau**, Roberta **Birks**, Maia **Joseph**, Vin **Nardizzi**, Judith **Saltman**, and Christine **Stewart** teach at the University of British Columbia. Antoine **Boisclair** teaches at McGill University. Alison **Calder** teaches at the University of Manitoba. Marie **Carrière** teaches at the University of New Brunswick. Kathryn **Carter** teaches at Wilfrid Laurier University. Lily **Cho**, Marilyn **Randall**, and Kristen **Warder** teach at the University of Western Ontario. Tim **Conley**, Adam **Dickinson**, and Neta **Gordon** teach at Brock University. Nicole **Côté** teaches at the University of Regina. T.L. **Cowan** and Alan **Galey** teach at the University of Alberta. Paul **Denham** and Andrea **Wasylow** teach at the University of Saskatchewan. Roseanna **Dufault** teaches at Ohio Northern University. Graham N. **Forst** teaches at Capilano College. Jennifer **Fraser** teaches at St. Michael's University School in Victoria. Ronald **Granofsky** teaches at McMaster University. Tim **Haner**, Chris **Leach**, and Hilary **Turner** teach at the University College of the Fraser Valley. Beverley **Haun** lives in Peterborough, ON. Adele **Holoch** lives in Iowa City. Shelley **Hulan** teaches at the University of Waterloo. Madelaine **Jacobs** teaches at Queen's University. Karl E. **Jirgens** teaches at the University of Windsor. Joseph **Jones**, Travis V. **Mason**, and Meredith **Quartermain** live in Vancouver. Adrienne **Kertzer**, Annika **Orich**, and Erin **Wunker** teach at the University of Calgary. Catherine **Khordoc** teaches at Carleton University. Janet **Melo-Thaiss** teaches at York University. Paul **Milton** teaches at the University of British Columbia—Okanagan. Barbara **Pell** teaches at Trinity Western University. Helen **Potrebenko** lives in Burnaby, BC. Neil **Querengesser** teaches at Concordia University College of Alberta. Darlene **Shatford** teaches at the College of New Caledonia in Prince George, BC. Maité **Snaawaert** teaches at the Université du Québec à Montréal. Joanne **Tompkins** teaches at the University of Queensland. Anne F. **Walker** teaches at the University of California. Lynn (J.R.) **Wytenbroek** teaches at Malaspina University College.

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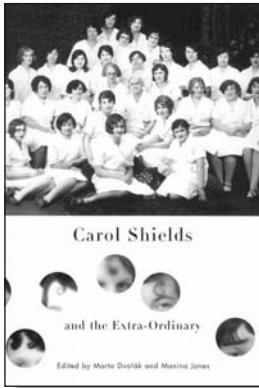
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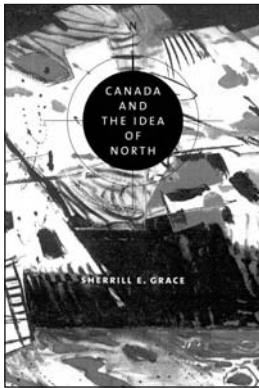
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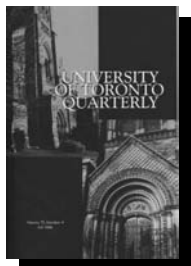
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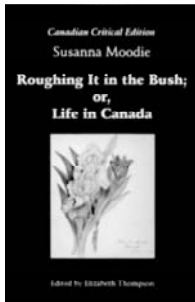
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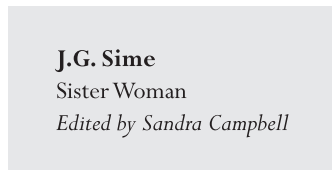
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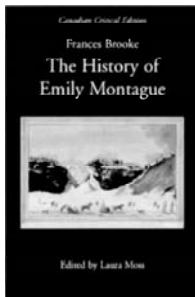
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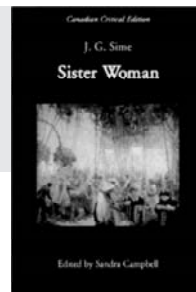
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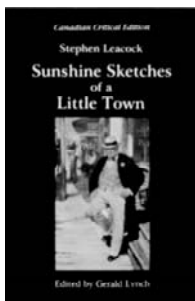
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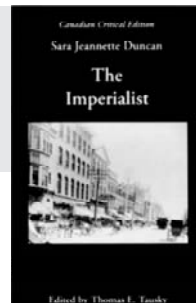
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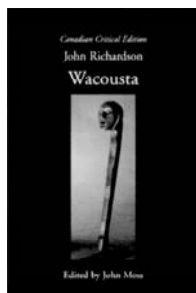
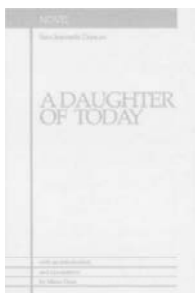
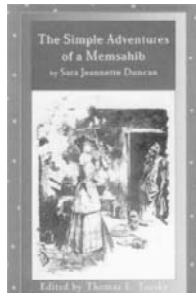
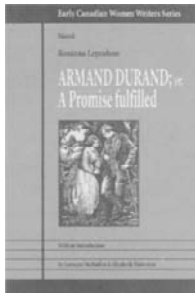
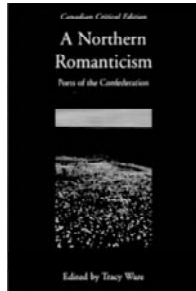


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