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In 2007, we overhauled the design and functionality of the web site to improve accessibility and provide more resources on Canadian literature. The navigation menu has been completely reworked, our search engine is faster and more useful, pages are accessible to the visually impaired via screen readers, and French translations are available for all static pages. Additionally, new book reviews appear randomly on each page, our list of Canadian literary journals/magazines has been updated, and we have added an ever-growing list of Canadian publishers.

We hope you will enjoy the new site and welcome any feedback you might have.

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Editorial

Context(e)s

Margery Fee

I have been reading a special issue on Canadian Studies of *Canada Watch*, the online newsletter for the Robarts Centre for Canadian Studies at York University (Fall, 2007, http://www.yorku.ca/robarts/projects/canada-watch/). One of my other hats is that of Director of Canadian Studies at UBC. I'm relieved to discover that Canadian Studies programs in other places are having trouble recruiting majors, while their International Relations majors numbers are booming. Relieved only that it's not just us—but worried about what this disparity means. Should our students be learning about other places without learning about where they are? This difference in numbers suggests that Canadian students may be leaving home to change the world without understanding their own biases, a recipe for cultural misunderstanding, if not cultural imperialism.

The connection between shifts in Canadian Studies and *Canadian Literature* is, I think, our shared context. When the journal was founded, to put the two words in its title together was a radical act, a manifesto even. Perhaps because of this, *Canadian Literature* has always conceptualized Canadian literature in the broadest terms. However, with the proliferation of terms such as *internationalization*, *globalization* and *interdisciplinarity*, both "Canada" and "literature" might now seem … well, narrow—limited and limiting. In 1959, the institutionalization of Canadian literature had scarcely begun; that it now might be construed as old-fashioned would be funny if it weren't so blinkered. The worry here is that rather than examining the forces that have changed the context, we might lapse into colonial cringing on the one hand and social science envy on the other. Scholars who have been able to work in their nicely delimited fields without self-questioning—a luxury that Canadianists have enjoyed for several decades—understandably may become crabby and defensive when their work starts to fall out of fashion, rather than trying to figure out why fashion has moved elsewhere. One

reason might be that an examination of Canada that is critical rather than patriotic can be threatening to students and state projects alike, as can an examination of literature that insists on its importance as equal to any other humanities or social science discipline in the understanding of Canada's national and international interests. In *Canada Watch*, Peter Hodgins, at the Centre for Canadian Studies at Carleton University, helpfully speaks of Canada not as a place, but as a project: "Canada is a discursive and material construction that is always contested, contradictory, and complex, and must be studied using tools of analysis that are critical and radically contextual." In this issue, the authors are working on this project of contextualization.

Three of the papers in this issue derive from a project to re-read the canon of Quebec literature, to recontextualize the classics, and the fourth, on Kerouac, fits nicely with this project, as Réjean Beaudoin explains below. The two papers in English do not focus on particular important works, but rather on the implications of important categories or periods of literature: modernism and realism. Both look at traditions of reading in order to destabilize them. Reading anti-colonially—as Colin Hill does—shows how Canadian modernism was not simply belated. Reading ecocritically—as Cheryl Lousley does—reveals how realism in the works of Matt Cohen implies that the world can be known, that there are overarching ideas that can explain even the more disastrous and intransigent mistakes of modernity. David Adams Richard's works, however, reveal a world where those disasters have gone beyond the abilities of human beings, scientists—"we knowers"—to understand or control them. Those who have poisoned the earth, air and water are also those we must rely on to save us from the wreck. His work rejects enlightenment ideals of knowledge and reason in favour of an ethics that insists on the idea, once commonplace, now-radical, that human knowledge is always limited. Ultimately, there are limits even to contextualization.

Réjean Beaudoin

Les oeuvres littéraires naissent dans des contextes qui, en plus de la genèse textuelle, incluent le milieu de la première lecture, laquelle, faut-il le rappeler, n'est pas toujours contemporaine de l'écriture. Quand il s'agit d'oeuvres devenues classiques, la distinction entre les circonstances de la création et l'histoire de la réception n'en devient que plus intéressante,

même si elle est parfois moins limpide à établir. Il arrive en effet que la tradition de lecture d'un texte finisse par se substituer si complètement à toute expérience de lecture concrète qu'elle tend à abstraire l'idée quintessenciée de la littérature. Et n'est-ce pas en cela justement que consiste la fonction des classiques?

Au sens le plus courant du mot, les oeuvres qu'on qualifie de classiques sont celles qui sont « découvertes en classe, depuis l'école secondaire jusqu'à l'université », comme le précisent Michel Biron, François Dumont et Élisabeth Nardout-Lafarge, auteurs de la récente *Histoire de la littérature québécoise* (Montréal : Boréal, 2007), la première à paraître depuis celle de Pierre de Grandpré en 1967. S'il y a lieu d'interroger constamment les livres élevés à ce statut symbolique, c'est bien sûr parce que le soupçon devient de plus en plus difficile à écarter devant l'opération qui a pour effet de transformer un produit littéraire original en valeur consacrée, confirmant du coup le rêve de pérennité inhérent à toute ambition artistique.

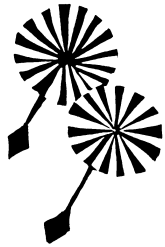
Les théories de la lecture n'épuisent pas entièrement la question, sans vouloir minimiser leur pertinence reconnue dans la mise à jour des horizons d'attente qui gouvernent la fortune littéraire des textes. Aussi convient-il de ne pas négliger l'incidence matérielle du paysage où l'auteur a vécu et ce qu'il a choisi d'en retenir pour l'inscrire sous forme de décor ou d'images moins immédiatement repérables dans son texte. La considération de l'environnement topographique dont s'est nourrie la pensée de l'écrivain pourrait déterminer le degré zéro de toute contextualisation, ce qui fournit l'occasion de retrouver une vérité souvent oubliée : le métier des hommes consiste d'abord à vivre dans un lieu donné qu'ils ne choisissent pas plus que leur date de naissance. Quand on sait jusqu'à quel point certains lieux absorbent dans leur espace propre des confluences d'ordre socio-linguistique dont l'empreinte peut aussi bien façonner le style d'un romancier que conserver la marque de ses origines sociales et familiales, on comprend aisément l'attention accordée aux facteurs biographiques liés au milieu natal. Tel est le cas de l'imagination romanesque de Jack Kerouac, comme l'explique l'analyse de Sébastien Ménard qui montre combien l'auteur de *On the Road* s'est attaché à transposer dans sa prose américaine le français parlé par des générations d'ouvriers canadiens-français émigrés en Nouvelle-Angleterre, comme les parents de l'écrivain franco-américain.

Deux grands récits du 19e siècle québécois sont étudiés à la lumière des théories de Bakhtine par Lisa M. Gasbarrone. *Les Anciens Canadiens* de Philippe Aubert de Gaspé père et *Angéline de Montbrun* de Laure Conan

sont deux romans fondateurs, l'un d'une conception réconciliatrice de la nation canadienne issue de l'histoire des hostilités franco-britanniques, et l'autre faisant entendre pour la première fois la voix singulière d'un sujet féminin dans une société patriarcale. David Décarie revisite le cycle du Survenant de Germaine Guèvremont pour y restaurer l'emplacement significatif d'un thème presqu'ignoré par la critique : la figure occultée de la fille-mère. Le tabou transgressé par la romancière et plus ou moins gommé par les agents institutionnels a privé son oeuvre d'un élément important de sa cohérence que cette relecture vise à rétablir.

Le premier roman publié de Réjean Ducharme, *L'avalée des avalés*, est reçu en 1965 dans la confusion du tumulte engendré par l'absence de l'auteur. Ducharme refuse de jouer le jeu de la publicité, ce qui n'empêche pas le livre de soulever beaucoup d'enthousiasme. Acclamé presqu'unanimement, *L'avalée des avalés* est paradoxalement célébré pour son étrangeté. C'est cette hétérogénéité que retient surtout la relecture proposée par Martine-Emmanuelle Lapointe qui conclut à l'ambiguïté profonde de la réception au terme de laquelle le texte ducharmien aurait lui-même identifié ses lecteurs autant que ceux-ci l'auront d'abord tenu à distance dans l'adulation de son génie.

Il nous semble que les quelques auteurs spécifiquement abordés ici sont loin de représenter les seuls qui puissent répondre à la problématique d'une reconfiguration contextualisée. L'enquête gagnerait à embrasser tout le champ des médiations institutionnelles, du commentaire promotionnel à la censure en passant par la sanction de la recherche et l'interprétation critique. Signalons enfin que trois des contributions de la présente livraison, les articles de David Décarie, de Lisa M. Gasbarrone et de Martine-Emmanuelle Lapointe, proviennent originellement d'un colloque tenu autour du défi de relire les classiques de la littérature québécoise, axe de réflexion largement dû à l'initiative de Micheline Cambron, alors co-directrice du CRILCQ, le Centre de recherche interuniversitaire sur la littérature et la culture québécoises.



Bill Howell

Late Light

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.

Cheryl Lousley

Knowledge, Power and Place

Environmental Politics in the Fiction of Matt Cohen and David Adams Richards

David Adams Richards and the late Matt Cohen have produced some of the most environmentally engaged fiction in contemporary Canadian literature. Richards' novels place the poverty of the Miramichi River region of New Brunswick within a socio-ecological context of pulp mills, polluted salmon streams and decimated forest landscapes. *Lives of Short Duration* (1981) presents a bleak portrait of a ravaged and poisoned social and physical environment. *Mercy Among the Children* (2000) pivots on water contamination from forestry pesticide and herbicide use. Ecological change also figures prominently in Cohen's celebrated Salem novels, each set near a fictional place called Salem located north of Kingston, Ontario. In *The Disinherited* (1974), Cohen focuses on marginal landscapes and rural people faced with the decline of family farming in the 1970s. His final novel, *Elizabeth and After* (1999), presents the same place some 20 years later when creeping urban sprawl and rural gentrification have made agriculture a postmodern simulacrum.

I develop an ecocritical analysis of these novels by focusing not on their representations of nature, but on their politics of knowledge. Cohen and Richards attribute responsibility for environmental degradation to particular social actors by showing how knowledge is socially and geographically situated. Both Cohen and Richards construct gaps and discrepancies between different subject positions in order to map power relations of class and region. However, as critics such as Frank Davey, Janice Kulyk Keefer and Philip Milner have noted, Richards' novels often amplify and extend these gaps to include a large discrepancy between the knowledge of the

characters and the reader. Richards' novels are productively read in an ecocritical context that recognizes that epistemological claims are key to the power relations, ecological crises and ethical dilemmas of postmodernity. In depicting the Miramichi as an environmental "sacrifice zone," a region that bears the brunt of the ecological costs of late industrial society, Richards' novels mark the limits of both experiential and empirical knowledge when confronted with the increasingly complex and less visible forms of environmental risk and contamination.

Power, Place, and the Production of Knowledge

Discussion of place, rurality, and region in Canadian literature is haunted by the spectre of "environmental determinism," the idea that giving prominence to the physical environment in a creative text or critical perspective denies human agency and erases socio-political relations.[1] Environmentalism and ecocriticism have similarly been accused of ignoring or subsuming social inequalities and differences in the name of environmental crisis. But environmental sociologists, geographers, and political theorists argue that environmental degradation and risk are inseparable from capitalism and other structural inequalities. For example, geographer Sharon Zukin argues that the landscape of North America in late capitalism is being reshaped into a divide between "landscapes of consumption and devastation" (5). Regional divides, especially, become more pronounced as industrial production shifts to other global locales: some areas, such as West Gull in Cohen's *Elizabeth and After*, are remade into tourist zones; others, such as Richards' Miramichi, become ecological wastelands.

Sociologist Ulrich Beck argues that the global production of ecological problems also levels and reconfigures inequalities. Modern ecological hazards, such as nuclear radiation, synthetic chemicals, and climate change, threaten not only the poor but also the most affluent nations and members of society. In *The Risk Society*, Beck proposes that the distribution of risk has become as important as the distribution of wealth in the industrialized societies of the post-World War II period. The significance of the "risk society" as a concept is that it calls attention to how political antagonism increasingly centres less on access to wealth and modes of industrial production and more on access to information and modes of knowledge production. The spatial, temporal, and perceptual distance between ecological hazards and everyday experience means every individual faces uncertainty about health and security, and every individual is cut off from

knowledge about his or her world and body—indeed, the more one knows, the greater the sense of insecurity and risk.

In part, the importance of risk grows because of the global scale on which contemporary environmental hazards operate. Like the global movements of capital, resources and people that globalization theorists track, the associated ecological hazards exceed the conventional checks and balances of the modern nation-state. But their causes and effects are much harder to map than the flows of capital. They emerge as side effects of the production not only of wealth, but of techno-scientific knowledge, which, in turn, is required to define and identify the hazards that have been produced. Compared to nineteenth-century pollution, where hazards "assaulted the nose or the eyes and were thus perceptible to the senses . . . the risks of civilization today typically *escape perception* and are localized in the sphere of *physical and chemical formulas* (e.g. toxins in foodstuffs or the nuclear threat)" (Beck 21, italics in original). To identify the presence of contaminants requires what Beck describes as "the 'sensory organs' of science—*theories, experiments, measuring instruments*" (27, italics in original). And yet, the certainties once offered by scientific knowledge are no longer trusted precisely because modern science is a primary source of these hazards. Moreover, causal links between intentions, actions and effects are notoriously difficult to establish with respect to environmental contamination.

Beck shows how environmental conditions raise a new set of questions about knowledge production that we can bring to an analysis of how literary texts engage with power and representation. Ecocritical analysis should attend not only to representations of nature or environment, but, more fundamentally, to how characters, narrators, and readers are positioned as knowing or not knowing the environments they inhabit and produce. The relationship of literary form to the production of knowledge about material conditions has, of course, been central to Marxist literary criticism. Although Marxist critics have often neglected the ecological dimension of materialism, the Marxist strategy of reading literary form in relation to subject positions and knowledge registers can be useful for ecocritical analysis. Georg Lukács' account of realism is taken as a starting point for understanding how novels might function to construct knowledge about socio-ecological relations. Lukács' attention to historical perspective is usefully supplemented by the importance of spatial relations for Raymond Williams and Fredric Jameson, because in the environmental novels of

Cohen and Richards causal relations across space and time are used to provide—and distort—perspective on environmental conditions.

Cohen's approach to environmental conditions remains firmly grounded within a realist frame, whereby the broad parameters of time, space and ecology within which the plot unfolds are known, or can be presumed to be known. In other words, ecological relations can still be mastered by empirical knowledge, or known from the omniscient subject positions of the author and reader. Richards' novels, by contrast, push into absurdity, tragedy, and the gothic to challenge the complacent middle-class, urban reader who still has faith that ecological conditions have not yet surpassed knowledge and control—that late industrial society has not yet entered ecological crisis. Despite David Creelman's insistence that "Richards repeatedly uses realism to examine the social disruptions and the economic hardships that have plagued the Miramichi region" (24), I suggest, along with Justin Edwards, that a realist reading may miss the significance of Richards' dark vision, fragmented narratives, and moral tone. Richards' novels re-frame ecological crisis as a moral crisis by casting doubt on the belief that there is some subject position that could render the complex socio-ecological relations in which we are embedded either historical or intelligible.

History, Space, and Realism

Georg Lukács argues that realist fiction provides readers with the historical perspective that can make sense of structural relationships. When a connection is drawn between large-scale, external forces and the particular experiences of everyday life, a novel creates "the feeling first that there is such a thing as history, that it is an uninterrupted process of changes and finally that it has a direct effect upon the life of every individual" (*Historical* 23). In modernist fiction, by contrast, historical perspective is absent because all is subjective: "the inner world of the subject is transformed into a sinister, inexplicable flux and acquires—paradoxically, as it may seem—a static character" (*Realism* 39).[2] For Lukács, subjective life must be juxtaposed with objective or material conditions to show individuals to be embedded in historically specific socio-economic relations. This claim to objectivity is precisely what renders realism politically suspect today: its seemingly transparent narrative perspective functions as an ideological cover.

Harry Shaw argues that while Lukács' account of realism presumes a knowable world, it does not take that world to be transparently represented. While some aspects of the world are immediately available to the reader, the

limited perspective of the character who is immersed in daily life shows that the world is not easily understood. Shaw argues that realist fiction centrally grapples with the *difficulty* of developing accurate and usable knowledge about the world: "What is being insisted on . . . is that certain aspects of external reality matter, or can be made to matter as part of a larger web of relations, if only we'll pierce beyond the veil of the familiar—not that they are self-evidently and unproblematically present for our inspection" (51-52). In juxtaposing the partial and incomplete knowledge of the characters and the total perspective of the narrator, realist fiction stages, or performs for the reader, the gap between experience and knowledge. Revealing such gaps may be useful for environmental politics, and yet not sufficient, given Beck's argument that it is not only the gap between experience and knowledge that broadens in the risk society, but also that, along with the increasing epistemological skepticism of postmodernity, all knowledge claims become simultaneously more important and less reliable.

However, Lukács' discussion of history in realist novels focuses primarily on its social dimension. The material relationship between the individual and the physical environment is of no significance in his analysis, nor does nature appear as an agent of history. Raymond Williams brings environmental considerations into Marxist criticism by making land use regimes central to his analysis of shifts in literary form and language. For some ecocritics, Williams is part of the anti-nature turn in literary criticism because of his critique of rural nostalgia.[3] Williams incisively demonstrates how Renaissance and later English country house poems construct a harmonious vision of nature by excising people, labour, and property relations. But Williams presents this critique of the naturalization of property relations to advocate for livable communities, and, in the final pages of *The Country and the City*, he emphasizes the need for critics to appreciate "the complexities of the living natural environment" (361). Williams' historicizing method does not appropriate the natural into the social, i.e. see the landscape merely as a social construction, but rather challenges the traditions in both conservative and Marxist thought that adopted an ahistorical notion of pastoral as a stable literary mode extending back through the generations. Williams argues that to read diverse literary texts from different times and places as a common form reifies diverse settlement patterns and an integrated economy into a static division between city and country.

Williams offers two ways that we might modify Lukács' analysis for an ecocritical reading of realist fiction. First, if the importance of concrete

historical context in realist fiction lies in how it makes sense of the overwhelming, trivial details of everyday life, then it may also serve to make sense of the environmental conditions of characters' lives. But to reveal the historical forces of environmental change, the landscape and not just the people must be portrayed as part of history. Without such historical perspective, the physical environment will appear to have always been as it is, rather than subject to change by natural and human forces. Second, we must recognize how spatial relations contribute to the construction and distortion of perspective. Williams proposes that it is the appearance of a spatial separation between city and country, coupled with their economic integration (e.g. on the level of goods, ownership, and travel), that has made the pastoral form appear so immutable, thereby contributing to the mystification of changing social and economic conditions. Space is also key to his analysis of class relations in realism. In dispelling the essentialist notion of the rural "knowable community," Williams notes how:

> Neighbours for Jane Austen are not the people actually living nearby; they are the people living a little less nearby who, in social recognition, can be visited. What she sees across the land is a network of propertied houses and families, and through the holes of this tightly drawn mesh most actual people are simply not seen. (203)

Williams juxtaposes two spatial scales to show Austen's "known world" is not geographically determined but socially circumscribed.

In sum, Williams' cultural materialist method functions along *two* axes of analysis: history (the changing over time of economic relations, landscapes, and literary forms) and geography (spatial relations at a particular moment in time, e.g. between city and country, colony and metropolis, land owner and labourer). The importance of space for understanding the power relations of capitalism is given even greater emphasis by Fredric Jameson. In *Marxism and Form*, Jameson suggests that realist fiction is no longer able to provide historical perspective in the modern era; in *Postmodernism, or the Logic of Late Capitalism*, Jameson argues that perspective is undermined because "depth is replaced by surface" (12):

> this latest mutation in space—postmodern hyperspace—has finally succeeded in transcending the capacities of the individual human body to locate itself, to organize its immediate surroundings perceptually, and cognitively to map its position in a mappable external world. (44)

An "alarming disjunction point between the body and its built environment" emerges as categories of space replace categories of time in the organization

of capitalism and culture (44). Jameson therefore argues that aesthetic practices oriented toward historical perspective are less useful in postmodernity than an aesthetics of "cognitive mapping" (51), a new "realism" (in the epistemological sense) that traces spatial relationships (49).

Environmental History and *The Disinherited*

Matt Cohen's novel *The Disinherited* illustrates how Lukács' account of historical perspective in realism is useful for environmental politics when extended to include environmental history. As its title indicates, *The Disinherited* makes history a central concern. The novel situates the sell-or-stay decision faced by a post-war farm family within the historical context of patriarchy, colonialism, geology, and ecology. Inheritance, as the historical and ideological tie between the individual, the family, and the land, is the foundation for European male property rights and the exploitation of nature. In the novel, the legitimacy of this claim to the land is called into question, in part, by the legacy of environmental degradation initiated with colonial settlement. This legacy is brought into perspective by the use of multiple time scales. The history of the land is not only told from the subject position of the farmers, but also from the marks natural forces have etched onto rock:

> the earth had scraped and scarred its own skin with ice . . . made long twisted scars in the bedrock and stripped it of its covering of soil so that in places now, even millions of years later, the rock showed, or worse, was only a few inches beneath the surface waiting to greet the person who was stupid enough to try and plough it or shape it to his needs. (77)

Nature is depicted as an agent of history, making changes to the land long before the appearance of human beings. Nature thereby establishes the material conditions with which human life in this place must contend: the thin, poor soil of the Canadian Shield.

The contrast between the enduring time frame of natural history and human folly can be read as a deterministic commentary on the hubris of people who fail to acknowledge the force of the material world. But the millennial time scale also enables the role of human action in shaping the land to become apparent:

> Richard had a sudden desire to let himself be taken over completely by the land . . . as if in one moment of doubt all the energy that keeps him able to impose the farm on the land might be dissipated . . . as if the farm was only a thin transparency laid over it like a decal that would be blown off easily by the wind and time so that the bodies and the hours and the effort that were buried in the immense fertility

> of this field would finally be nothing but a brief digression in its existence as a forest and a swamp. (99)

Cohen's emphasis on the "bodies," "hours," and "effort" of work show how the farm, though not the land, is a product of human labour. The farm can disappear because human labour is just one of the forces at work: "the swamp which he had spent a month surrounding with ditches so it would drain would reassert itself and then, in its own time, fill in and become part of a meadow which would be no pasture but ground fit only for juniper seed and sumac trees" (99). The farm appears as a human artefact because history extends beyond it.

Within the time period of the novel's events, Richard Thomas is the prime, though not sole, agent of environmental change on the farm. As property-owner and family patriarch, Richard enjoys the powers of a god: "Richard decided which animals would live and which would be slaughtered, which would be bred and which would be sold, which would be allowed indoors and which would have to fend for themselves, expendable and ignored, too unimportant to be worth the effort of killing" (74). The narrative places moral responsibility on Richard Thomas' land-use practices by locating the historical forces contributing to environmental change in a domain that can be known and mastered by the individual. The life-and-death decisions Richard makes and his doubts about the legacy of settlement imply that he is the one with the power to shape the landscape. As Richard lies dying in the hospital, he recalls with ambivalence the transfer of land and authority from father to son, and the ecological ethic expressed in the passed-down journals of a settlement-era poet who "begs" the original Richard Thomas—his grandfather—"to discard his plough" (60). Whereas the time scales of geology and ecology make the environmental changes wrought by farming visible on the land, the localized frame makes Richard, his father, and his grandfather responsible.

Socio-economic trends function in *The Disinherited* to underscore the significance of personal responsibility and historical perspective. Richard Thomas' two sons, Brian and Erik, represent the boosterism or fatalism that come from a fixation on external forces, reducing the future of the family farm to two reactionary options: adopting new technology or selling out and moving to the city. A real-estate developer offers to buy their lakefront land for cottages but Brian throws the man off the property, believing the answer lies in greater investment and mechanization: "Brian would fall back on the old standard, the idea of getting the machinery for corn and building a silo.

'It's the coming thing,' Brian would say over and over, the exact words the milk inspector had used" (165). By emphasizing Brian's mindless repetition of the futuristic phrase, Cohen shows how Brian clings to the illusion of agency and rationality when in fact he acts on blind faith. The technological solution is accepted as progress on the authority of the outside "expert." Erik's response is equally ahistorical, presenting the decline of the family farm as an economic and technological inevitability: "In a few years only rich city people will be able to afford to live on this kind of farm. All the food will be grown on huge farms run by businessmen. Or made in factories" (41). The underlying passivity of both positions stands in stark contrast with the agency assumed by Richard as family patriarch. In taking responsibility for their actions, the sons ultimately come of age: the adopted Brian assumes control over the farm; Erik frees himself from the patriarchal legacy of ownership and control. The primary sphere of action remains the farm; and the central issue is the relationship between each man, the family, and the land.

Geopolitical Space: *Elizabeth and After*

The shift from historical perspective to cognitive mapping outlined by Jameson is apparent in the contrast between Cohen's depiction of socio-economic forces in *The Disinherited* and his portrayal of their culminating effects in *Elizabeth and After*. In *Elizabeth*, the physical environment is not primarily shaped by individuals in one place, but by economic relations across space. The novel illustrates the transition described by Marxist geographers whereby "[p]laces are local condensations and distillations of tremulous global processes that travel through them . . . In the world of high modernity it has become virtually impossible to make sense of what happens in a place without looking beyond the local horizon" (Gregory 122). In a reconstruction of the socio-economic factors undermining the family farm, Cohen emphasizes the absurdity of focusing on the farmer as change agent:

> When the milk marketing board had told the McKelveys they'd have to renovate their operation or give up their licence, William sold his quota to go into cheese instead. When shortly after the local cheese factory was put out of business by the American conglomerate that had bought all of the township's factories only to close them down, he went into beef. (301)

William McKelvey's commodity dance is taken to extremes to underscore the limits of a belief in local autonomy. Each change is dictated from the outside: the farmer is positioned as a passive dupe who can only respond to the decisions made by others.

The reference to an "American conglomerate" reinforces the sense of William's powerlessness because decision-making power has shifted outside the country and into private hands—an even greater physical and civic distance between the individual and the forces of change than the government-created marketing board. A similar point is made with the identification of a "Toronto consortium" as the town's "biggest landlord and biggest employer" (63). The physical distance between landlord and tenant and between employer and employee makes it more difficult for tenants and employees to confront the people making decisions about their rents, living arrangements, jobs, and paycheques. The spatial detachment also makes the agents of historical change conveniently invisible and unidentifiable as human individuals—and allows the physical consequences of their decisions to remain out of their sight. A case in point is the local elder business magnate, now a Liberal senator, who sits on the "board of directors of a company that had just landed a lucrative contract selling attack helicopters to South Africa" (165). The repeated identification of historical actors and historical effects by their physical locations demonstrates, first, the nameless, abstract nature of economic forces and, second, how spatial relations buttress power differentials, with a consequent lessening of moral responsibility.

In contrast to the geological and generational perspective of the land in *The Disinherited, Elizabeth* presents a surface-level view of the land as property and image. The spatial disconnection between the places where decisions are made and the places affected by those decisions results in the homogenization of the landscape. Real-estate developers and wealthy urbanites transform bankrupt farms into country homes with "large carefully tended lawns that looked like advertisements for riding mowers" (47). Physically transformed by commodity exchange, the landscape loses its historical and geographical specificity:

> What rock? Didn't Luke Richardson, the real-estate millionaire who owned a condominium in Florida, for God's sake, know every square inch for fifty miles around? Hadn't he offered to buy this place a dozen times? "Name your price," he would say, as though challenging Arnie to recognize that in the modern world, the world of strip plazas and convenience stores, the world he effortlessly turned to profit and an endless stream of new black Cadillacs, there was nothing that couldn't be given a number. (248)

The picturesque rock where Arnie imagines building his retirement dream home is invisible to Luke because commodity exchange does not require the historical depth that knowledge of place brings. People, things, and places are interchangeable in Luke's world, acquired and disposed of as desired.

The farms' working pasts are recalled only ironically, in the name of "The Movie Barn," the video store where property-less Carl McKelvey, son of William, finds minimum-wage shift work. The gentrified landscape presents a sanitized rusticity that buries power relations under a veil of false historical continuity: "the tended streets with the expensive homes . . . had amber-lit brass coach lamps showing the way for horses that would never come" (8). The lamps allude to a life of simple means and human distances, but are materially constructed and maintained through the exploitation of natural resources and manual labour displaced to other areas. Carl, for example, goes west to BC to find primary-sector work in forestry, "piling underbrush and generally making things look pretty after the big chainsaws and tree cutters had done their damage" (48). Carl's cosmetic job shows how the destruction of ecological systems proceeds without notice or complaint when the image is taken as reality. Similarly, the lamps' faux heritage design demonstrates how history collapses into nostalgia when the local is cast as a reprieve from the global.

The emphasis on land as image in *Elizabeth* shows the historical knowledge that Richard has of his farm in *The Disinherited* provides insufficient context for understanding the operations of global capital accumulation and exchange. By foregrounding socio-economic and spatial relations, the narrative implies that the continuity of natural history is no longer key to understanding the agents driving history. But the autonomy and agency of nature, appreciated on a local scale, is not relinquished. The novel reveals an ironic gap between what are shown to be *images* of rural landscapes and what remain *actual places*, such as Arnie's field, William's farm, and British Columbia forests. The novel therefore reaffirms the value of a local and historical perspective of nature with which the image can be juxtaposed and found wanting. Moreover, in a form of cognitive mapping, the novel links distant places so that power relations and lines of responsibility can appear—to the reader, though not to the characters. Despite the powerlessness and limited knowledge of its characters, *Elizabeth* affirms the possibility of the realist novel to make sense of socio-ecological change because, for the reader, causal links are made between decision-makers, average lives, and changes in the physical environment.

Hopeless Environments: *Lives of Short Duration*

Generally described as "bleak," "grim," and "dark," David Adams Richards' fiction shows more ambivalence about the possibility of making sense and

enacting change.[4] The lives of many of Richards' early characters appear hopeless because the narrative perspective does not seem to provide any historical framework for the overwhelming immediacy of day-to-day survival in a debilitating social and physical environment. By contrast with *The Disinherited*'s emphasis on history and *Elizabeth's* depiction of spatial relations, *Lives of Short Duration* achieves a disorienting sense of meaninglessness by failing to construct spatial links or temporal continuity. A seemingly random barrage of environmental details confronts the morally debased members of the Terri family who live by their wits as bootleggers, drug peddlers, and petty entrepreneurs. George Terri's alcoholic haze runs one observation into another, without distinction or connection:

> The wine seeped between his pantlegs and dissolved in a sweet circle in the dirt. Lester Murphy's faded sign just above the hollow read: "Atlantic Salmon Centre of the World."
>
> The road signs told of bends and curves and deer crossings. He stared up at Karen's legs, the rough skin about her knees, the power-lines like a crucifixion all the way to Calvin Simms' Irving garage. (38-39)

Just as the road signs give equal significance to "bends" and "deer crossings," Richards' sentences provide description without perspective. The components of the physical environment seem to hold meaning—the signs "tell"—but because the powerlines and tourist signs appear on the same spatial scale as legs and knees, any sense of proportion or relative importance is impossible. In a similar way, the absence of links between sentences or plot development presents these details without the historical depth usually provided by causation. Everything is immediate.

Within the dense accumulation of detail, Richards ascribes significance through repetition and symbolism. The powerlines always run to the Irving garage "like crosses" (24), a "crucifixion" (39), or the "crosses of missionaries" (167). The repeated associating of crosses with Irving, the wealthy family corporation with a virtual monopoly on oil, gas, and timber in New Brunswick, calls attention to the double meaning of "power" as electrical energy and as influence or authority. The Christian imagery implies the electrical lines involve sacrifice and the imposition of foreign values, justified by their seemingly good intentions. Energy production is the *sine qua non* of modernization and regional development, enabling increased resource extraction and industrial-level production as well as the expansion of consumer markets.

Richards uses repetition rather than narrative continuity to trace this history, showing capitalist development to be ideological rather than linear

and progressive. Jingoistic phrases used to sell consumer items and experiences—"'Volare Volare—woa woa woa woa,' came the commercial from somewhere" (65); "Atlantic Salmon Centre of the World" (73, 88, 161, 204, 205)—are interspersed with absurdly optimistic statements that the benefits of economic development are worth the sacrifices: "When the woods were gone the river'd be gone, but there'd be iron ore, and when that was gone there was uranium also" (186). The flippant list shows how economic "missionaries" conceive the region and the environment solely as a source of raw materials and a market for products. The isolation of the economic pronouncements from any specific actors or places and their random appearance, like the commercials and news reports "from somewhere" (14, 63, 65, 68), makes them appear inevitable. The difficulty of contesting or resisting their logic is indicated by the impossibility of pinning down where they come from, much less whom. The decline of the salmon, the poisoning of the river, the incursion of multinational corporations are all events that seem to happen *to* the people of the river, who at best play bit roles trying to imitate or profit from the external forces that invisibly structure their lives. With the sacrifice of the forests and the life of the river come the fast food, cars, and consumer goods and styles that most of the novel's characters not only accept but yearn for, making no connection between the system that produces these goods and their own cultural decline and political disenfranchisement.

The question of knowledge is raised most explicitly in the novel by the wide gap between the localized knowledge of the characters and the broader historical and geographical knowledge needed to appreciate the relations of power in which they are embedded. A woodsman for most of his 82 years, illiterate Old Simon has never heard of the Bay of Fundy, which forms the southern boundary of New Brunswick (78). At the same time, the knowledge gained from his experience in the woods has become obsolete: "And what could you tell them? That you made 74¢ a day and had to walk 40 miles on snowshoes, and had built camps from cedar and skids with the bow ribs made from roots and had stayed up two months in the woods alone and could smell fourteen different kinds of snow?" (94). The rhetorical question shows the depth of Simon's localized environmental knowledge—too substantial to be easily relayed and explained—while ultimately demonstrating its tragic irrelevance in the globalized, consumer culture that dominates the river. In *The Disinherited*, Richard Thomas' local knowledge positions him as change agent on the farm; in *Lives*, by contrast, Simon Terri's much

more intimate and less instrumental knowledge of the river is a mark of his underclass position and his powerlessness to stop the river from being made into an environmental sacrifice zone.

In his discussion of *Nights Below Station Street*, Frank Davey interprets the gap between the knowledge of Richards' characters and narrator as "condescension" (*Post-National* 78). He argues that the "large superiority in linguistic power the narrator and novelist enjoy over their characters opens a wide political gap in the text. . . . [T]he book's characters . . . are construed . . . as better off leading passive, acquiescent, non-constructive, geographically limited lives" (78). However, Janice Kulyk Keefer, drawing explicitly on Lukács, argues that Richards' depiction of poverty involves an immediacy and totality that serves to elicit empathy for individuals and provide an understanding of the historically and regionally specific condition of their poverty: "*Lives* reveals . . . the degradation of human life and the despoiling of the natural world are not mere *fait accomplis*—alternatives exist, however shakily. For the reader to merely shrug them off is to become complicit in the very degradation and despoliation this fiction represents" (175). The force of this novel lies in bringing to public light material conditions and underpinning relations that are usually discounted and invisible—and giving this knowledge moral significance. Richards' use of repetition and structural discontinuity underscores how the material relations of place and history are neither simple nor self-evident. The reader must actively work at making sense of the disjointed narrative. As Philip Milner notes, the demands placed on the reader are the focus of many of the early reviews and criticism of Richards' fiction: he cites one reviewer who asks, "Why is Richards making me *work* so hard?" (202, italics in original).

Richards' comparison of the Miramichi with Third World conditions, but without the TV-induced sympathy or donations, is a biting indictment of middle-class Canadian complacency and ignorance:

> People with swollen bodies lay in various corners of the earth—so Anne Murray told him on television, people with their skins wracked with sores, or hungry—and he'd seen on television Begin and Sadat too, and the Palestinians—and children with flies crawling over their body, as he'd seen them crawl over Daniel Ward's children in Daniel Ward's house . . . (145)

In describing the conditions on the Micmac reserve, Richards refuses the comfortable distance offered by the TV screen and a continental divide, and immerses the reader in the ugliness of the region's desolation. Again and again the phrase "Now you might feel some discomfort" appears in the novel,

once addressed to a 19-year-old girl sent for a backroom abortion, but usually repeated without any particular audience except the reader, each repetition heightening its understatement (41, 160, 368). The purpose of this discomfort seems to be to elicit a recognition that the moral failing of "not giving up one ounce of human commitment" extends from the main characters to the larger world that they—and the novel's audience—inhabit (149, 200, 209, 322). The narrator's cultivation of discomfort alongside the dizzying shifts of the narrative perspective implies that knowledge is necessary but not sufficient for responsible action in the world. The reader may appear to have more worldly knowledge than the characters, as Davey argues, but is not placed in a position of moral superiority. *Lives* partakes of the "certain romanticism" that Christopher Armstrong and Herb Wyile associate with Richards' later Miramichi trilogy, where "the protagonists prevail—if not survive—under circumstances that position them as the moral superiors of their critics" (6).

Moral Agency: *Mercy Among the Children*

Richards' moral tone and framework has challenged critics who try to place his work into a socially progressive context. As Armstrong and Wyile point out, Davey's reading of Richards' fiction as determinist too readily discounts the way his novels valorize a form of agency not based on rationalist enlightenment, but on "religious and moral terms" (7). *Mercy Among the Children*, described by David Creelman as a "moral romance" (168), even more explicitly offers a moral response to the epistemological dilemmas of environmental degradation. In contrast to the disjointed structure and perspective of *Lives*, *Mercy* features a chronological narrative and ostensibly first person narrator. The straightforwardness of the narrative serves to highlight even more starkly the different levels of knowledge held by the characters, narrator and reader. Water contamination is implicated in the most serious turns of the plot, but does not preoccupy the main characters, who focus their attention on day-to-day survival and social acts of injustice and intolerance. The discrepancy between presumed and actual risks, and the inability to read the environment and know the consequences of one's actions, thereby becomes significant.

The relationship between knowledge and power is dramatized by Sydney Henderson's antagonistic relationship with the professors at the university. As a young man, Sydney, protagonist of the novel and father of the narrator, vows to God to "never raise his hand or his voice to another soul" (23-24). Remaining consistently faithful to this vow, Sydney and his family are taken

advantage of and persecuted by most of the people and institutions they encounter, including several seemingly well-meaning professionals in social work, the university, the legal system, and the church. The plot reveals there is no necessary link between knowledge and authority, or knowledge and ethics. As a well-read, though self-taught intellectual, Sydney is as articulate and analytical as the Marxist professor, David Scone, who patronizingly suggests he take up a trade rather than try to enter university. Sydney's knowledge brings him scorn rather than any greater capacity to improve his life or step beyond his class origins. As his son remarks, "Those men my father had done favours for, filled out application forms for, helped with their unemployment benefits, forgot him and remembered only a man who read strange books" (125). The university professors, meanwhile, lack the moral courage to defend those "strange books" for fear of being associated with a man they presume to be a backward, degenerate sexual predator. They fail to wield responsibly the power they hold because of their privileged association with a social institution that lends their words and knowledge legitimacy: "a man with a grade five education accused of being an elitist and *against* the working man, by Prof. David Scone, who had met the working class, not by calluses on his hands, but by reading Engels and Marx" (82-83, italics in original).

Armstrong and Wyile discuss similar depictions of "progressive liberalism" as ruthless and hypocritical in other Richards novels (11). They argue the effect of this didacticism, "combined with its traditional realist aesthetic, closes the reader out of the narrative" (12). Indeed, unlike *Lives*, which demands the reader to piece together meaning from the fragments, *Mercy* imposes a moral stance on the reader. But the hypocrisy of the university-based scholars also comments on the limits of knowledge. It shows they are blind to the class system in which they live (whether wilfully or merely through the complacency of privilege). This blindness is made apparent, as Shaw emphasizes in his description of the effect of opening a gap between the knowledge of characters and reader, by the broader perspective provided by the narrator. The academics appear hypocritical because the narrative perspective provided to the reader unequivocally shows Sydney to be innocent. The novel's clear-cut lines of innocence and guilt are taken to such an extreme with the depiction of the more epistemologically complicated and more humanly devastating scenario of poisoned water that the novel does not merely implicitly construct a totalizing moral framework, but confronts the reader with its moral stance.

The water subplot uses the epistemological crisis of the risk society, whereby causal knowledge about environmental hazards is imprecise, unpredicted, and difficult to establish with certitude, to separate knowledge production from morality. Whereas Cohen presents a spatial distance between decision-makers and victims in *Elizabeth*, Richards collapses that distance into the same locale in *Mercy*. Richards implicates most of his main characters in contaminating the water supply of the poverty-stricken, violent roadway where the novel takes place. The chemicals in the water are traced to pesticides and herbicides used on the woods and stored at the pulp mill run by local tycoon Leo McVicer, with the encouragement of provincial forestry officials and the knowledge of his workers, who themselves dump the chemicals during a raucous lock-out. Although a hidden graveyard reveals the workers who likely died prematurely due to their occupational exposure to the chemicals, the contamination is also linked to stillbirths and to childhood leukemia, albinism, and cancers. These are the workers' children and grandchildren (and McVicer's unacknowledged children and grandchildren), who live on the roadway. In *Mercy,* it is primarily children who embody the "sacrifice zone" of industrial development; their innocence heightens the moral stakes of the epistemological crisis.

By tracing characters' actions to their material effects, and especially in making children the primary victims of these actions, *Mercy* seems to condemn these men as harshly as it condemns the hypocritical academics. But their limited perspective is due less to social prejudice than to the epistemological complications of Beck's risk society. McVicer insists that at the time none of them knew the seriousness of the risks:

> Nothing made him more furious than to think that *these* men, *these* grown men, men *he trusted*, who used those chemicals to keep down budworm disease and clear roads—when everyone else was doing the *same*, back in the sixties—would stop using these chemicals the exact moment everyone else did, and charge that *he*, Leo McVicer, was guilty of knowing what they themselves, and even scientists, did not! (82, italics in original)

The complicit involvement of so many different individuals and institutions might show the difficulty of assigning blame for environmental health effects, especially in a culture of acquiescence, complexity and incomplete knowledge. But McVicer's failure to take responsibility for his actions—blaming the social climate and environmental ignorance of his time—is contrasted with Sydney's courageous and steadfast moral convictions, sustained to the point of sacrificing his life in trying to help another. In

the novel, the invisibility and long latency period of environmental contamination serves to show that ethical questions are so difficult—and so important—precisely because we lack the complete, omniscient knowledge offered by the realist novel or by an idealized notion of science. In place of enlightenment, the novel provides morality: it is Sydney's religious vow that enables him to make choices about how to act, rather than let himself be overwhelmed by the limits of his knowledge or determined by the values of his social milieu.

The stark moral landscape of *Mercy* provokes as much discomfort as *Lives*' hopelessness does, but for different reasons. *Lives* uses spatial distance to place a moral burden on the reader whose urban comforts derive from the natural resources and labour extracted from the Miramichi rendered as "sacrifice zone." In *Mercy*, Sydney and his family seem to become willing victims, sacrificing themselves for the sake of independent thought and human compassion. While the novel might therefore be read as self-defeating environmental fatalism that closes the reader out of the narrative, it can also be read as exposing the limits of realist conventions and expectations—in both aesthetic and epistemological terms. As Justin Edwards notes, the children's deformed bodies function both as material traces of environmental contamination and as "grotesque markers" of "the brutal figures of power, the spectral hierarchies, that have dispossessed the poor" (63). Their gothic presence points to what lies "under the surface of this region (that which is known but not thought)" (Edwards 63-64). Edwards suggests that Sydney, as an innocent figure demonized as pure evil, haunts the community after his death. But his self-sacrifice also haunts the reader. Whereas Cohen's fiction seems to presume that the narrator and reader share a common moral register (the "naturalizing" tendency for which realism is often criticized), Richards' novels confront and challenge the reader to live up to a standard of duty and compassion.

Conclusions

As a fledgling field, ecocriticism is still searching for critical methodologies to illuminate the environmental implications of literary and cultural texts. In this essay, I propose that a key task for ecocriticism is to consider how knowledge of environmental ills and risks—or the very lack or limitations of environmental knowledge—is staged in contemporary literature. I draw on Marxist approaches to realism to outline an ecocritical method that foregrounds the politics of knowledge. I show how the depiction of

environmental change in the novels of Cohen and Richards depends on the construction and distortion of historical and spatial perspective. Both sets of texts map environmental degradation onto structural relationships of class and region in a globalized economy. In juxtaposing different knowledge registers, including the gap between the knowledge of the characters and narrator, they demonstrate that knowledge of causal relations across space and time is crucial for gaining perspective on environmental conditions and attributing ethical and political responsibility—but also that such knowledge is not necessarily achievable.

However, Cohen's shift from the localized domain of the farm in *The Disinherited* to the global commodity exchanges of *Elizabeth and After* seems to affirm that the realist novel can represent socio-ecological relations. By contrast, *Lives of Short Duration* fragments into absurdity and *Mercy Among the Children* approaches Christian allegory. Richards' fiction is more ambivalent about the capacity of realist aesthetics and realist epistemologies to make sense of a socially and environmentally degraded world. Richards' depiction of environmental degradation complicates the way his novels have been read within a realist aesthetic; his novels also challenge us, like Jameson, to consider what aesthetic forms may be most appropriate for engaging with the present historical condition of ecological crisis.

NOTES

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1 For further discussion of "environmental determinism" in regional writing, see Davey, "Toward the Ends of Regionalism"; Keahey 4-7; and Calder and Wardhaugh 3-10.

2 For elaboration on how realism constructs the represented world as known and knowable, and how this shifts with modernism, see Weinstein.

3 See Buell 13 and 432-33n35, and note the absence of references to Williams in most ecocriticism. Dominic Head, however, claims Williams as an ecocritic *avant la lettre*.

4 See Kulyk Keefer 170; Creelman 147; Milner 201.

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Greg Evason

Broom Was

elephants must do
what elephants must do
as I skate
I skate up and down
the walls are made of ice
I am dreaming
they've caught me
they've found my archive of smut
gold diggers every last one of them
they pile me with my meaning
into the back of a moving truck
sold sugar for 5 cents a blast
as time was shoved into the paper
that I was drawing mice on
just then J. Joyce made an appearance
scurried out from his hiding place
and raced along the floor boards
as time began to slide off the paper
and go into the desk
the world is on the desk
I am on the chair

Martine-Emmanuelle Lapointe

Réjean Ducharme, le *tiers inclus*

Relecture de *L'avalée des avalés*

On a abondamment commenté—geste paradoxal s'il en est—le silence de Réjean Ducharme, cette troublante absence qui ne cesse encore aujourd'hui de fasciner lecteurs et critiques. Renoncer aux honneurs médiatiques, se retrancher dans une inexorable solitude, voilà une posture que rien ne saurait justifier. À l'instar de Gérald Godin qui, dans une des seules entrevues accordées par Réjean Ducharme, s'exclame : « Et vous ne voulez pas passer à la télévision! », plusieurs considèrent inexplicable le renoncement de l'écrivain. On a beau tenter de *faire parler*, voire de *faire penser* Ducharme, on obtient pour seules réponses des refus obstinés : « Je ne veux pas que ma face soit connue, je ne veux pas qu'on fasse le lien entre moi et mon roman. Je ne veux pas être connu », « Je ne veux pas être pris pour un écrivain », « Mon roman, c'est public, mais pas moi » (Godin 57). À la rigueur, l'auteur se permettra quelques boutades, affirmant écrire « pour ne pas [se] suicider » ou souhaiter « être dans le lit de Maria Chapdelaine » (Montalbetti 59). De plain-pied dans la littérature, au centre même de la fiction; mieux, dans l'alcôve, lieu d'une intimité fantasmée avec celle qui a longtemps représenté, surtout aux yeux du public français, *toute* la littérature canadienne-française, là pourrait bien être la place de Réjean Ducharme[1]. Loin des regards et des paroles publics, loin surtout des rumeurs critiques et médiatiques, l'auteur semble nous dire que le seul accueil possible est celui qui respecte le silence et la solitude de l'autre. Voilà bien l'accueil décrit par Saint-Denys Garneau dans *Regards et jeux dans l'espace*, recueil que Réjean Ducharme se plaît d'ailleurs à citer allusivement dès *L'avalée des avalés*, soit un accueil sans « compromissions de nos dons » (Montalbetti 93), par lequel l'être est tenu à distance, respecté et contemplé « dans la vallée spacieuse de [son] recueillement » (93).

Publiée à Paris par la prestigieuse maison d'édition Gallimard, *L'avalée des avalés,* le premier roman de Réjean Ducharme, a échappé aux rapatriements univoques et à la doxa néo-nationaliste et n'a pu représenter les idéaux de la communauté critique que de manière détournée. Je tenterai de cerner les enjeux de cette complexe volonté d'appropriation de l'œuvre de Ducharme. Je me propose, d'une part, de réfléchir sur la notion de génialité, laquelle a souvent servi à décrire l'écriture ducharmienne dans les premiers comptes rendus critiques. Partant de cet horizon conceptuel, je montrerai comment la critique a ensuite célébré les inquiétants écarts—de langage comme de comportement—du personnage de Bérénice Einberg, occultant la part de négativité qui leur est pourtant inhérente. Comme nous le verrons au fil de l'analyse de la réception, plusieurs critiques ont en effet insisté sur le langage ludique et festif de Ducharme, qui devenait pour eux le symptôme de la singularité et de l'originalité d'une œuvre unique et *non rapatriable*.

Or, en préférant penser l'inaltérable différence de l'œuvre, une partie de la critique ducharmienne a construit un récit, en apparence fort éloigné de la *doxa* néo-nationaliste, qui reconduisait néanmoins une forme plus souterraine de rapatriement. Ducharme et son œuvre faisaient en quelque sorte figure de *tiers inclus*, pour reprendre le concept que Pierre Nepveu a utilisé pour définir la posture de la communauté juive montréalaise[2]. Si le tiers exclu est celui que l'on nie, le tiers inclus est celui que l'on met prétendument à distance. Parce qu'il s'infiltre et s'impose insidieusement entre les partis—dans le cas présent, la critique ou l'institution littéraire et leur conception de la littérature québécoise—, il risque de perturber les relations parfois trop binaires qu'ils entretiennent. Comme l'écrit Nepveu, « faire intervenir un tiers, ce ne peut être que susciter le désordre et *nous* plonger en eaux troubles » (Nepveu 75, je souligne). C'est du moins l'hypothèse que je développerai dans les pages qui suivent. Il me semble en effet que, contrairement aux romans de Bessette, d'Aquin, de Blais ou de Godbout parus à la même époque, la première œuvre publiée de Ducharme, *L'avalée des avalés*, est devenue emblématique de la situation collective par ce qu'elle refusait d'affirmer, non par le biais de la reconnaissance du même, soit d'une parole ou d'une histoire communes, mais par la prise en compte de l'étrangeté du texte et de son auteur.

Le génie

Si Jean Éthier-Blais n'hésita pas à conférer le titre de grand écrivain à Hubert Aquin en 1965, il affiche, lors de la parution de *L'avalée des avalés*, une certaine méfiance à l'égard de Ducharme, et semble ainsi prêter foi aux rumeurs

entourant l'authenticité du manuscrit de son roman. Mais Éthier-Blais ne désespère pas : « Je veux qu'il soit un génie, affirme-t-il, l'un de ces êtres exceptionnels qui n'ont pas besoin de passer par des écoles, qui écrivent parfaitement parce que ce sont des thaumaturges du langage » (13). Ducharme répondra d'ailleurs à cette déclaration ambiguë dans la dédicace de *La fille de Christophe Colomb.* Après avoir apostrophé ironiquement le « jeune homme de lettres », il y tourne en dérision l'attente du grand écrivain, thème central des recensions de Jean Éthier-Blais : « N'attends pas après les lecteurs, les critiques et le Prix Nobel pour te prendre pour un génie, pour un immortel! . . . Songe que, s'il a attendu, Jehan Ethiey-Blez, qui n'a plus des cheveux que le support n'a reçu aucun signe[3] » (*La fille de Christophe Colomb* 7). Le signe avant-coureur, peut-être même divin[4], fait écho aux hantises des lecteurs en mal de classiques. En adoptant ainsi une rhétorique aux accents bibliques, Ducharme raille le jugement critique qui, pour le « jeune homme de lettres », pourrait bien emprunter les contours de la parole d'Évangile, voire du sacrement décidant de l'immortalité d'une œuvre et de son auteur. « Se prendre pour un génie, pour un immortel », la formule ne désigne-t-elle pas clairement la posture de l'homme de lettres, du grand écrivain?

Toutefois, la boutade n'est pas destinée uniquement à Jean Éthier-Blais. Si le critique du *Devoir* a évoqué la possibilité d'une future génialité de l'œuvre ducharmienne, certains ne se gênent guère pour la proclamer d'ores et déjà. « Or donc, ainsi enfin, une œuvre GÉNIALE. Eureka. Hourrah », s'exclame Raoul Duguay (114); « j'ai lu *L'avalée des avalés*, cet incommensurable chef-d'œuvre. Un des premiers au pays », affirme Michel Beaulieu (44); « Ce livre, tel quel, est extraordinaire, mais à mon avis, seules les premières 140 pages tiennent du chef-d'œuvre. Oui, du chef-d'œuvre![5] », nuance Henri Tranquille (47); « Et quant à moi, j'y vois une masse imprécise, dense et sombre : mais cette masse est une nébuleuse qui rayonne et, parfois, sème des étoiles », ajoute Jean-Cléo Godin (94). La proclamation de la génialité de *L'avalée des avalés* s'accompagne le plus souvent d'une célébration du caractère brut et instinctif de sa prose. Pour Alain Pontaut, le personnage de Bérénice « est amoral, instincti[f] et curieu[x] comme une petite bête » (4). L'œuvre, quant à elle, présente « un prodigieux instinct de l'écriture romanesque et poétique, un sens aigu du permanent et de la nouveauté, du bouffon, du violent, du tendre, de l'essentiel» (4). « Prodigieux instinct », « sens aigu », ces formules tendent vers l'essentialisme et laissent supposer que l'écriture ducharmienne procède de l'intuition poétique plutôt que de la cérébralité[6]. Cette opposition discutable est néanmoins reconduite par Monique Bosco dans son compte

rendu intitulé « Blais contre Ducharme ». Après avoir évoqué la rigueur et l'authenticité de la prose de Marie-Claire Blais, l'auteure affirme que *L'avalée des avalés* a « tout pour plaire et attacher », ajoutant un peu plus loin : « On sent que Ducharme aime écrire, vite, beaucoup, longtemps, bien, gratuitement et follement » (54). Ici encore, la prose de Ducharme est ramenée dans le territoire imprécis, vague et indéterminé de l'affect et de la passion. L'auteur *aime* écrire, il est donc charmé, envoûté par l'acte créateur. L'auteur écrit *bien*, mais *vite*, *beaucoup*, *gratuitement*, *follement*, adverbes laissant entendre qu'il ne contrôle pas de manière rationnelle les jeux de sa propre création.

Le génie, l'instinct, la folie, la gratuité, ces vocables s'apparentent dans la mesure où ils tentent d'exprimer une réalité fuyante : ils soulignent la force et la grandeur supposées de l'œuvre ducharmienne, s'avèrent ouvertement admiratifs, mais donnent également à lire, en filigrane, une mise à distance de l'œuvre. Tout se passe comme si l'on tenait en respect *L'avalée des avalés*. Inclassable comme le sont par définition les chefs-d'œuvre, le roman de Ducharme surpasserait ainsi les attentes des critiques qui, littéralement bouche-bée, ne sauraient plus comment parler de l'œuvre sans employer le langage creux de l'admiration. « Creux », l'épithète semble peut-être trop sévère. Elle a néanmoins le mérite de dévoiler le caractère ambigu, voire équivoque des termes « génie », « instinct » et « chef-d'œuvre » : tels des paravents, ces mots passe-partout dissimulent une arrière-scène hors de portée, jugée indescriptible et intraduisible. Comme le note Jacques Derrida dans *Genèses, généalogies, genres et le génie* :

> Ce nom, « génie », on le sait trop, il gêne. Certes. Depuis longtemps. On a souvent raison d'y suspecter une abdication obscurantiste devant les gènes, justement, une concession à la génétique de l'*ingenium* ou, pire, à un innéisme créationniste, en un mot, dans le langage d'un autre temps, la complicité douloureuse de quelque naturalisme biologisant et d'une théologie de l'inspiration extatique (11-12).

Plutôt que de bannir l'emploi du mot « génie », Derrida se propose dans la suite de son ouvrage d'en cerner le « mystère », en s'inspirant notamment de l'œuvre d'Hélène Cixous. Au fil de sa réflexion, l'auteur associe le génie à la naissance improbable, au don unique et absolu, à la jeunesse, au surgissement, à l'inhumanité, à l'immortalité et au secret, autant de traits qui ressortissent à un au-delà de la norme et du conventionnel. Il montre bien que la génialité est indissociable de l'avènement d'une œuvre unique qui « coup[e] paradoxalement avec toute généalogie, toute genèse et tout genre » (55). N'est-ce pas également ce que manifeste l'admiration sans borne de certains lecteurs de Ducharme? En qualifiant l'auteur de génie, on lui refuse le

droit d'appartenir à la communauté des écrivains contemporains[7]. On aurait tort de croire cependant que cette sacralisation de l'écrivain exclut toute forme de rapatriement. Le génie n'appartient-il pas à celui qui le couronne? La reconnaissance et l'élection ne participent-elles pas d'une forme d'appropriation? En célébrant ainsi le caractère exceptionnel de l'œuvre de Ducharme, la critique de première réception a réussi un tour de force : non sans paradoxe, elle a su ramener l'écrivain unique et son œuvre géniale dans le giron familial, dans le lieu du même; en somme, elle a su inclure le tiers dans (ou peut-être plutôt à l'origine d') une filiation dont il aurait dû être exclu.

Le ludisme langagier

S'il est un aspect de la poétique ducharmienne qui apparaîtra génial ou, plus sobrement, remarquable dans les études ultérieures de l'œuvre, c'est bien le ludisme langagier. L'auteur « casse le langage » selon Patrick Imbert (227), « ducharmise : c'est-à-dire bafoue, tourne en dérision, soum[et] à l'épreuve [d'une] écriture désintégrante » selon Marcel Chouinard (115), « fai[t] éclater le sens » selon Lise Gauvin (118), mais s'adonne également à une pratique ludique et joyeusement subversive de la littérature[8]. Tendue entre les pôles de la destruction des conventions langagières et de la recréation festive du sens, l'esthétique ducharmienne serait inséparable d'un travail constant sur le signifiant, deviendrait ainsi emblématique d'une modernité enfin soustraite aux tourments de l'écriture et aux interrogations douloureuses et mortifères de l'écrivain. Contrairement à Hubert Aquin, conscient de son manque d'originalité et hanté par un idéal romanesque inatteignable, et aux écrivains polémistes et joualisants de *Parti pris*, Ducharme aurait réussi à « inventer un langage qui lui est propre » (Cloutier 88), voire « une langue romanesque particulière[9] ». Tel un démiurge, voire un génie, il romprait avec toute tradition, créerait une œuvre dont la langue deviendrait l'emblème incontestable de sa singularité. En privilégiant l'invention langagière, sans doute l'un des aspects les plus déterminants de la poétique de Ducharme, certains critiques ont cependant occulté, parfois même condamné, le travail sur le signifié. Or, au même titre que les analyses étroitement sociologiques qui ramènent l'œuvre de manière artificielle à son contexte d'émergence, les lectures strictement formalistes de la littérature méritent d'être interrogées[10].

Kenneth W. Meadwell se présente comme un défenseur acharné du caractère antiréférentiel de *L'avalée des avalés*[11]. Dans son ouvrage, L'avalée des avalés, L'hiver de force *et* Les enfantômes *de Réjean Ducharme : une fiction mot à mot et sa littérarité*[12], paru en 1990, il réprouve ouvertement les

critiques thématiques et sociologiques de l'œuvre ducharmienne qui ont eu « tendance à passer sous silence l'unique chez l'auteur de *L'avalée des avalés* », à privilégier les « explications par trop généralisantes » (14) ainsi que les rapports entre le fait littéraire et les phénomènes collectifs. À partir des théories stylistiques de Michael Riffaterre et des études que Tzvetan Todorov a consacrées aux notions de fantastique et d'étrange, Meadwell entend cerner la littérarité du premier roman de Ducharme en « se fond[ant] sur une analyse de l'irréel engendré par la surdétermination en général et par la figuration explicite de l'hyperbole en particulier » (30). Mais en tentant de mesurer l'étrangeté du texte, l'auteur ne s'enferme-t-il pas dans un curieux paradoxe? Comment juger de la part d'irréalité d'une œuvre sans la confronter à ce que l'on considère réel, tangible, référentiel? Selon Meadwell, il apparaît « évident que Bérénice Einberg est une enfant 'littéraire' car romanesque, une structure hyperbolique dont la figuration dans *L'avalée des avalés* met en cause le bien-fondé du cliché, et en particulier tout ce que l'on associe de manière conventionnelle avec l'enfant référentiel » (48). Cette enfance « référentielle », à laquelle Meadwell se réfère d'ailleurs à plusieurs reprises, demeure pourtant indéfinie, l'auteur se contentant d'évoquer l'« enfant naturel » (35), le « stéréotype de l'enfant référentiel » (45, 48, 53), le « cliché » (48) ou l'« image conventionnelle » de l'enfance (49). La lucidité, l'ironie, la maturité de Bérénice comme le contenu et la forme de ses réflexions intimes sont ainsi confrontés à une norme « enfant » quasi fantomatique. Et qu'est-ce qu'une norme, sinon un référent, un hors-texte constitué des usages du langage et de la pensée les plus communs, les plus convenus? Si le discours des romans ducharmiens « glisse vers l'irréel », s'il se fonde « sur la transformation du signifiant » (17), il ne peut toutefois prétendre à une parfaite autoréférentialité.

Dans un article intitulé « La poétique de Réjean Ducharme » et paru dans la revue *Liberté* en 1970, Cécile Cloutier articule elle aussi son propos autour des questions de l'instinct et de la célébration du langage. L'écriture de Ducharme permettrait de « solenniser l'instinct », procéderait d'une « élaboration naturelle », serait « jaillissement » « involontaire » (Cloutier 84) et « phénomène d'ordre intuitif » (86). Son langage, fondé sur le « baroque, [le] farfelu et [l']inopiné » (88), allierait le « caractère statique de la poésie au caractère dynamique du roman » (85). À l'instar de ceux qui qualifièrent l'auteur de génie, Cloutier tente de nommer l'intraduisible et, par là même, de cerner ce qui, dans le premier roman de Ducharme, échappe aux mesures rationnelles et aux usages littéraires. En témoigne le parallèle établi par l'auteure entre *L'avalée des avalés* et le genre poétique, lequel est souvent

considéré plus expressif, plus sensible et plus hermétique que le roman.

Les termes « jaillissement », « ordre intuitif » et « involontaire », langage « baroque », « farfelu », « inopiné » employés par Cécile Cloutier dans son article renvoient à une pratique romanesque issue de l'improvisation poétique et du hasard, désignant de manière oblique le caractère peu organisé, voire désordonné de l'écriture ducharmienne. Dans l'article qu'il a consacré à l'inscription de la révolution culturelle et des clichés dans les premiers romans de Ducharme, Patrick Imbert nuance cette lecture. Selon lui, l'imprévisibilité de l'écriture ducharmienne n'est guère le fruit d'heureuses coïncidences, mais constitue plutôt la force d'une œuvre échappant au « poids du passé [et au] quotidien » dans « une recréation ludique, qui détruit l'apparence d'ordre [d']une certaine culture cartésienne » (Imbert 227). Suivant cette logique, le personnage ducharmien « ne vi[vrait] plus dans l'univers cartésien où le 'je pense, donc je suis' est valide et où la pensée est placée dans une position qui lui permet de maîtriser le langage » (230). L'auteur note, à juste titre, que Bérénice subvertit la proposition de Descartes : « C'est bien ce que démontre Bérénice pour qui le 'verbe être ne se conjugue pas sans avoir' et qui renverse le syntagme cartésien traditionnel en 'Je suis donc je pense' » (232). Imbert omet cependant de commenter les passages de *L'avalée des avalés* qui s'inspirent ouvertement des théories cartésiennes. Bérénice renverse en effet le syntagme de Descartes, affirmant : « [v]oici ce que je suis : un nuage de flèches qui pensent, qui voient qu'elles volent et vers quelles cibles elles volent. Donc je pense. Je pense! Qu'est-ce que je pense? Quelle belle question! Je choisis le rire. » (*L'avalée* 193) [13]

Si le renversement du syntagme cartésien opère une « révolution » de la pensée, il n'en demeure pas moins lié au fantasme d'une refondation de soi. Bérénice souhaite se reconquérir, reprendre le contrôle de sa vie et présider aux destinées des siens : « Le seul moyen de s'appartenir est de comprendre » (*L'avalée* 191), professe-t-elle, ajoutant quelques pages plus loin :

> Je prends, de toute mon âme, des positions. J'établis, de toutes mes forces, des certitudes . . . Pour parer à l'insuffisance qui ne me permet pas d'agir sur les choses et les activités indéfinissables de la vie, je les définis noir sur blanc sur une feuille de papier et j'adhère de toute l'âme aux représentations fantaisistes ou noires que je me forge ainsi de ces choses et de ces activités (*L'avalée* 206).

C'est donc à la maîtrise de la pensée et du langage qu'aspire Bérénice, et non à une forme de *tabula rasa* systématique et absolue. Il est vrai, comme l'écrit Imbert, qu'elle affiche « une volonté iconoclaste de briser les façades » (231), mais elle ne prétend pas pour autant rompre complètement avec les

traditions des anciens et le commerce « immonde » de ses contemporains. Elle appelle la solitude de ses vœux, mais ne réussit jamais à se « dérobe[r] . . . à l'englobement, à l'avalement, aux grilles des stéréotypes, des évidences de la culture et de l'idéologie dominante » (Imbert 233). Jusqu'à la fin, Bérénice désirera résister « de toute son âme », « de toutes ses forces » à l'avalement, mais malgré tout, malgré elle, elle sera obligée de reconnaître sa faiblesse et sa lâcheté : « On pourrit. Et on se laisse faire. Pour ne pas avoir l'air de trahir trop docilement ce qui a été beau en soi, on fait semblant de ne pas avoir faim » (*L'avalée* 374), répond-elle au fantôme de Constance Exsangue qui lui enjoint de se suicider. Faire semblant, ne s'agit-il pas d'une forme de démission? Avouant sa traîtrise, Bérénice admet du même coup avoir perdu foi en ses propres « représentations fantaisistes ou noires », en ses plus chères positions, en ses plus claires certitudes. Comment dès lors arriverait-on à célébrer la morale de la marge et le ludisme langagier des romans de Ducharme sans occulter leur part tragique, leur négativité? Dans sa conclusion, Imbert affirme néanmoins que l'œuvre est « l'expression d'une révolution culturelle véritable et une redéfinition de l'homme qui ne se laisse plus, comme on le voit dans la célèbre parabole, guider par les aveugles[14] » (Imbert 235).

J'ai insisté sur les analyses de Kenneth W. Meadwell, de Cécile Cloutier et de Patrick Imbert pour mieux mettre au jour le fondement de plusieurs des travaux sur *L'avalée des avalés*. Ces trois critiques ne furent pas les seuls à s'intéresser à l'*anormalité* du roman, loin s'en faut. Les critiques de première réception s'offusquèrent des horreurs dépeintes par Bérénice, célébrèrent l'œuvre de génie, évoquèrent la richesse et la singularité de la prose ducharmienne, stratégies discursives dévoilant une paradoxale entreprise de mise à distance. Les études consacrées à la langue ducharmienne s'inscrivent généralement dans une perspective critique similaire. Leurs auteurs tentent eux aussi de mesurer l'*anormalité*, c'est-à-dire l'éclatement, l'unicité, le désordre du texte en y observant tantôt le ludisme langagier, tantôt les traces d'une réflexion sur la réification du langage. Telle la génialité, le ludisme langagier condamne Ducharme à être enfermé dans son inaltérable différence, dans une originalité qui romprait avec les normes littéraires de ses contemporains.

La part de négativité

Certes, la langue de Ducharme, et plus encore le rapport au monde qu'elle met en scène, provoque le renversement et le détournement des clichés, des

mots de la tribu et des valeurs communes. Mais cette subversion des langages et des schèmes de référence collectifs n'est certainement pas dénuée d'« inquiétude[15] », pour reprendre le mot de Michel Van Schendel et, ajouterais-je, d'une lucidité cruelle qui se revendique comme telle, qui confine le plus souvent au désastre[16]. En ce sens, analyser la langue de Ducharme, c'est aussi et surtout exhumer la part d'ombre que dissimulent les joies et les jeux du langage. Curieusement, les critiques qui se sont intéressés à la langue de Ducharme ont pour la plupart occulté sa négativité, préférant en célébrer le ludisme et la prolifération signifiante. En outre, comme en témoignera l'exemple du bérénicien, plusieurs ont souhaité faire du texte un monde autonome, hermétique et souverain qui entretiendrait peu de relations avec le monde référentiel. Cette entreprise critique allait d'ailleurs souvent de pair avec la survalorisation d'une modernité quasi anhistorique, lieu d'une rupture éclatante avec le passé mais aussi avec le langage et les us des contemporains.

Marcel Chouinard fut l'un des premiers critiques à contester la thèse de l'écriture instinctuelle, désordonnée et inconsciente de Réjean Ducharme, préférant s'attacher au motif de la prolifération, tant littérale que thématique, qui traverse *L'avalée des avalés*. Dans son article « Réjean Ducharme : un langage violenté », il s'attarde sur l'accumulation des syntagmes et des noms propres, sur le rythme, sur l'encyclopédisme et sur la pluralité des langages, qu'ils soient biblique, mythique ou scientifique, qui entraîneraient une « atrophie du signifié » et provoqueraient une forme consciente de réification de la langue, « les mots [n'étant] plus des instruments de communication, mais des objets, opaques et irréductibles, dont la seule fonction est 'd'être là' » (Chouinard 119). Cette interprétation, fort juste au demeurant, est également retenue par François Hébert et par André Vanasse. Le premier attribue le nom d'alinguisme au traitement de la langue d'écriture chez Ducharme, « [à] cette façon laborieuse et fascinante qu'il a de parler pour ne rien dire, ce qui ne va nullement de soi et ne doit pas être confondu avec le fait de certaines personnes insignifiantes qui *inconsciemment* parlent pour ne rien dire » (Hébert 318). Selon André Vanasse, les joies du langage—jeux de mots, calembours, faux raisonnements—« servent à masquer la chose » (36) et révèlent une contradiction inhérente à l'univers ducharmien, celle qui permet de « [c]roire aux mots au détriment des choses, y croire sans totalement y croire » (39).

Les travaux qui s'attachent aux dessous de l'écriture ducharmienne font clairement ressortir le fait suivant : la célébration du ludisme tend à transformer la langue de l'auteur en un simple matériau. C'est oublier que le style

d'un écrivain va aussi de pair avec une philosophie de l'existence et témoigne par là même des relations à la fois étroites et ambiguës qu'entretiennent l'univers fictionnel, le référent socioculturel et la mémoire collective. La langue des personnages de Ducharme, comme le montre notamment André Vanasse, dissimule une vision du monde profondément tragique. Dans *L'avalée des avalés*, cette vision du monde s'avère d'autant plus grave qu'elle conduit Bérénice vers une redéfinition radicale de son rapport aux autres. Celle qui croyait fermement en ses propres créations langagières, qui inventait des mondes dans et par le langage, en viendra à douter de la pertinence même de ses constructions.

Au fil du roman, Bérénice tente de se reconquérir, de se redonner naissance dans et par le langage. Elle scelle ainsi un pacte tacite avec elle-même, par lequel elle se promet de croire en ses propres créations, en ses propres mirages, en son propre langage. Les passages illustrant cette singulière philosophie de l'existence abondent dans le roman. « J'aime croire que j'aime Christian, mais ce n'est pas lui que j'aime. Ce que j'aime, c'est l'idée que je me fais de lui » (73), avoue Bérénice. À son frère, elle lance : « [t]out nous appartient : il suffit de le croire » (117). À Constance Chlore, elle affirme : « je suis libre de croire ce que je veux et je te crois », ajoutant du même souffle : « n'est-ce pas merveilleux de croire à toutes sortes de choses impossibles? » (196) Mais Bérénice ne croit pas totalement en ses propres fictions; elle demeure malgré tout consciente de « l'inutilité de [ses] discours » (118) et de leur caractère mensonger. Désespérément lucide, elle en vient à abandonner ses anciennes croyances. Au risque de sombrer dans la « terreur et la folie », il ne lui restera plus qu'à manipuler les autres, à en faire les dupes de ses propres fables (379). C'est sans doute dans la dernière scène de *L'avalée des avalés* que se révèle le plus cruellement ce changement de cap. Incapable de se convaincre elle-même, ayant perdu foi en ses pouvoirs de recréation, Bérénice se joue des autres, donne littéralement chair à son fantasme de destruction : « Je leur ai raconté que Gloria s'était elle-même constituée mon bouclier vivant. Si vous ne me croyez pas, demandez à tous quelle paire d'amies nous étions. Ils m'ont *crue*. Justement, ils avaient besoin d'héroïnes » (379, je souligne).

Les joies de l'imagination dissimulent le tragique et la laideur des choses. Il en va de même avec les jeux du langage auxquels Bérénice tentera, pour un temps du moins, de prêter foi. L'exemple du bérénicien, abondamment commenté, mérite d'être analysé ici. Les critiques attribuent généralement une double fonction au langage bérénicien : d'une part, il permettrait de

résister au monde adulte; d'autre part, il dénoncerait l'absence de communication entre les êtres en exposant les limites du langage commun. « [R]évolte contre la société [doublée] d'une révolte contre le langage et la littérature dans lesquels s'exprime cette société » (Lefier 55), « lutte contre l'adulte, . . . révolte sacrée » (Laurent 31), manière « de 'dire' ses idéaux, des idéaux que les adultes ne connaissent plus » (Marcato-Falzoni 170), le bérénicien est jugé « opaque, aveugle comme une pierre » (Hébert 320), « flou » (Laurent 32), « sombr[ant] dans les borborygmes ou s'élev[ant] à une haute poésie, celle de l'inexprimable, essentiellement incompréhensible » (Lefier 59), « valorisant l'expressivité pure au détriment de la communication » (Seyfrid-Bommertz 55). Selon plusieurs critiques en somme, le bérénicien aurait lui aussi pour effet d'éloigner du sens et du bien communs, confirmerait de nouveau l'individualité, la singularité et la légèreté ludique du sujet. Il serait révolte pure contre l'autorité des adultes et la tradition.

Il me semble cependant que l'invention du bérénicien dévoile autre chose qu'une simple confrontation entre la pureté de l'enfance et les souillures de l'âge adulte, voire entre le parler vrai de l'enfant et la langue conventionnelle de l'adulte. Certes, le mépris de l'adulte, de son monde et de sa pensée inspire Bérénice lors de l'invention de sa propre langue qui, à bien des égards, rappelle le langage exploréen du poète Claude Gauvreau[17] : « Je hais tellement l'adulte, le renie avec tant de colère, que j'ai dû jeter les fondements d'une nouvelle langue » (*L'avalée* 337), affirme Bérénice. Mais la création du bérénicien repose sur une réflexion qui dépasse largement ce cadre restreint. Le bérénicien est également dédié à la dénonciation du fondement même des relations affectives. Il subsume un grand principe, soit « le verbe être ne se conjugue pas sans le verbe avoir », ce qui rappelle la volonté, plusieurs fois réitérée par la narratrice, d'avaler les autres plutôt que d'être avalée par eux. « Quelqu'un qui m'aborde, prétend-elle, c'est quelqu'un qui veut quelque chose, qui a quelque chose à échanger contre quelque chose qui est pour lui d'une plus grande valeur, qui a une idée derrière la tête » (22). Ce constat exhume une cruelle réalité, contre laquelle Bérénice tente de lutter : comme l'exigent les lois du marché, les relations humaines se conforment à la logique de l'offre et de la demande, se monnayent et possèdent une valeur d'échange. Ainsi « dans l'âme d'une adulte comme Chamomor, il s'est entassé tellement de visages, visages de morts comme visages de vivants, visages de choses comme visages d'animaux et d'hommes, qu'on ne s'y entend même pas parler » (124). Or, selon Bérénice, le véritable amour ne se partage pas, il est unique et exclusif, il consiste à sentir « le poids de

quelqu'un dans [son] cœur » (167) et ne se satisfait guère de « l'attendage aux portes des visages » (96). Faute de pouvoir vivre cet amour absolu, Bérénice en viendra à considérer les autres comme des « batailles » (44), les désirant soumis, avalés, conquis et possédés comme le sont les territoires et les objets.

On ne saurait en revanche contredire la thèse de l'opacité du bérénicien ou, enfin, de son signifié. Si le bérénicien est forgé à partir d'emprunts, comme le précise d'ailleurs la narratrice, il n'en demeure pas moins insaisissable aux non-initiés. Les mots « spétermatorinx étanglobe », « Mounonstre béxéroorisiduel » ou « vassiveau », même s'ils rappellent certains termes issus des « langues toutes faites » (*L'avalée* 337), demeurent opaques et font obstacle, il va sans dire, à la libre communication. Toutefois, ce langage ne vise pas uniquement à se « distancer d'autrui » (Meadwell 51-52), comme le suggère Kenneth Meadwell. Lorsqu'elle expose brièvement les fondements de sa nouvelle langue, Bérénice insiste sur le vocable « Nahanni » qu'elle définit ainsi : « 'Nahanni' est un appel à un appel » (337). Appeler, n'est-ce pas une manière de se tourner vers l'autre, de l'accueillir, de demander sa présence plutôt que de lui demander quelque chose? Cette forme minimale de communication se fonde presque exclusivement sur la dimension phatique de la parole et donne ainsi à lire le fantasme d'une parfaite communion dans et par le langage, à l'image de l'amitié fusionnelle que partagent Bérénice et Constance Chlore.

Les échanges de dialogues subreptices (*L'avalée* 179-80), les lectures passionnées des poèmes de Nelligan, les jeux complices, ces « commerce[s] clandestin[s] d'amitié » (179) contribuent à la création d'un espace hétérodoxe situé en marge du monde des autres. De même, dans la première lettre qu'elle destine à son frère Christian, Bérénice tentera-t-elle de recréer cet espace privilégié en réitérant les apostrophes, les impératifs et les appels : « Christian! Christian! Viens me chercher, j'éclate! . . . Viens me prendre! Viens me sauver! Mon amour! Mon amour! Mon trésor! Mon trésor! » (174), terminant sa missive avec le très bérénicien « décadabacrouticaltaque![18] » (175). Langue de la résistance aux codes et aux savoirs largement partagés, langue prétendant garder en mémoire les joies et les blessures de l'enfance—n'oublions pas que Bérénice l'invente alors qu'elle n'est plus une enfant—, langue des amours « incoercibles », le bérénicien porte également le deuil des idéaux qu'il entendait incarner, en manifeste l'irréparable perte. Ce versant sombre du langage bérénicien est mis au jour vers la fin du roman. Après l'ultime apparition du spectre de Constance Exsangue, Bérénice se réfugie

dans ses soliloques, imitant consciemment, et désespérément aussi sans doute, le langage de la folie :

> —Écoute, Bérénice Einberg, lard vivant! Tu te désagrèges! Bientôt, tu n'auras plus rien à sauver! Bientôt, tu ne seras plus que beuverie et coucherie! Rappelle-toi, fourbe! Tu m'avais donné ta parole! Tu m'avais promis de ne pas te laisser avoir. Comme si je n'avais pas bien entendu, je réponds : « Nahanni! Nahanni! Nahanni! » J'ai des accès de folie. J'ai des ères de vérité (374).

Mais le langage de la folie et de la vérité s'avère obscur, enferme dans une solitude inexorable, ne réussissant guère à troubler les autres, « ces vivants mous » (165) comme se plaît à les appeler Bérénice : « Je me rends sur la place du marché et là, je parle à tue-tête en bérénicien. Tout ce que j'ai dit jusqu'ici est demeuré infécond. Donc tous ces êtres humains ne peuvent pas m'entendre. Je ne fais, en criant ma haine, que ce que fait une plante en poussant » (375). Ce court passage révèle que le bérénicien était à l'origine voué à la communication, qu'il se devait d'être entendu. Or il n'en est rien : alors qu'il se voulait acte, il s'avère infécond, tragiquement opaque, et revêt les contours de la lettre morte. Aux ultimes « Nahanni! » de Bérénice, nul ne répondra. Les agressions béréniciennes, nul ne les entendra.

Le *tiers inclus*

L'exemple du bérénicien dévoile la complexité des liens qui unissent Bérénice Einberg aux autres. Malgré ses envies de solitude et de révolte, elle n'en demeure pas moins animée par le désir de recréation d'une communauté perdue, d'une sororité fondée sur la transparence du langage. Le bérénicien met également au jour le caractère aporétique des lectures opposant de manière binaire l'enfant génial et révolté à la société adulte qui l'opprime. Si Bérénice refuse l'inclusion pure et simple, elle ne peut souffrir l'exclusion absolue. Contre et avec les autres, se situant à la fois à l'intérieur et à l'extérieur des différents groupes qu'elle fréquente, elle résiste aux rapatriements comme aux mises à distance. Elle est condamnée à adopter la posture du tiers inclus.

À la lumière de l'analyse de la réception critique, n'est-il pas possible de comparer les rapports tortueux qu'entretient le personnage fictif avec sa société textuelle aux relations, tout aussi complexes, qui ont pu unir Ducharme et la critique? Tout se passe comme si le personnage de l'auteur, éternel enfant au langage génial indompté, impénétrable et ludique se confondait avec sa création, devenait, à l'instar de sa Bérénice, un exclu volontaire, une sorte de paria en rupture de ban. Dès la parution de

L'avalée des avalés, comme en témoignent les premiers comptes rendus qui en célébraient la génialité, lire Ducharme, c'était accepter, parfois malgré soi, l'excentricité—c'est-à-dire l'éloignement du centre plus que la fantaisie ou l'anticonformisme—d'une œuvre qui ne se réclamait d'aucun courant et d'aucune affiliation.

Contrairement au *Libraire* ou à *Prochain épisode*, considérés comme des modèles d'engagement et de prise en compte du destin collectif, le roman de Ducharme n'est pas choisi par ses lecteurs, il s'impose à eux. Les critiques de première réception, obnubilés par l'Affaire Ducharme, s'avéraient partagés entre la méfiance et l'admiration : ils doutaient de l'authenticité et de la légitimité de *L'avalée des avalés*, tentaient d'expliquer les silences de l'auteur, criaient au génie. Ces gestes critiques visaient, non pas à faire de l'œuvre le miroir des ruptures survenues à l'époque de la Révolution tranquille, mais à rapatrier un auteur qui *échappait*, qui *s'échappait*, peu concerné en somme par les requêtes de l'institution. Le sort réservé ultérieurement à *L'avalée des avalés* répond à cet horizon d'attente particulier. L'œuvre devient le flambeau d'une modernité formaliste et apolitique, est présentée comme le lieu de pluriels refus, refus de l'engagement, des conformismes, de l'âge adulte, des conventions langagières et sociales. Une telle lecture, si elle respecte en apparence l'univers dépeint par Ducharme dans *L'avalée des avalés*, n'en demeure pas moins réductrice : le roman ne peut prétendre à une absolue autonomie, comme il ne peut être assimilé à une vision joyeuse et libertaire de la littérature. Tel le *tiers inclus*, il déjoue la critique et les lecteurs, se glisse subrepticement entre eux et leur vision parfois trop consensuelle de la littérature québécoise. Il *échappe*, il *s'échappe* mais jamais complètement.

NOTES

1 Dans le compte rendu qu'il publia dans les pages de la revue *Études françaises* en 1967, Jean-Cléo Godin fait d'ailleurs référence aux réactions d'étonnement des critiques français, lesquels furent saisis par la modernité de l'œuvre ducharmienne : « Et le premier étonnement vient de ce que, de ce pays artisanal, puisse venir autre chanson que le chant de *Maria Chapdelaine*! » (96).

2 À propos de la posture du *tiers inclus*, voir l'article de Pierre Nepveu.

3 Élisabeth Nardout-Lafarge propose également une analyse de cette dédicace; voir *Réjean Ducharme : Une poétique du débris* (79).

4 « O Dieu, intercédez auprès de M. Gaston Gallimard. Suppliez-le », écrit Jean Éthier-Blais dans le compte rendu de *L'avalée des avalés* (13).

5 Voir aussi Alain Pontaut. Il note que « La critique parisienne n'hésite pas à prononcer [au] sujet [de Ducharme] le mot de génie » (4).

6 Jean-Thomas Bédard, dans son compte rendu intitulé « *L'avalée des avalés*. Les élucubrations d'une affamée », affirme que « [c]e roman échappe à la maladie de la cérébralisation qui contamine la littérature actuelle » (13).

7 Voir notamment le second article qu'Alain Pontaut consacre à *L'avalée des avalés* : « Après lecture, si brève soit-elle, de ce nouveau document, et si l'on a quelque sens littéraire, quelque jugement, quelque bonne foi, il n'est plus permis de douter de l'authentique, de la considérable présence de Réjean Ducharme, cette *nébuleuse* que, du haut même de sa *terrible solitude*, Jean-Cléo Godin voit entrer dans nos lettres pour rayonner, pour fulgurer et pour y semer des étoiles. » (4, je souligne).

8 Voir Imbert, Hébert et Kègle.

9 Baptisée le ducharmien, selon l'hypothèse de Lise Gauvin (107).

10 C'est également ce que soutient Pierre-Louis Vaillancourt. L'auteur passe en revue la critique ducharmienne et constate qu'elle s'est surtout penchée sur le travail du signifiant, sur les « thèmes du rien, du vide, du néant, du manque » (177). Comme il le précise vers la fin de son étude, « une fois repérées ces trois manipulations des règles, sur le langage, sur l'instance narrative, sur la progression fonctionnelle, il est possible, à condition de prendre constamment en considération ces bifurcations, d'entreprendre une explication des composantes du signifié . . . » (184).

11 Voir également Marcel Chouinard. L'auteur affirme que « c'est seulement par l'écriture que l'œuvre de Ducharme dépasse le statut de simple défoulement d'un inadapté social », ajoutant que « [l]'important est de savoir *comment* il le dit, et comment il est le seul à l'avoir dit de cette façon. C'est dans ce 'comment' que nous pourrons retrouver la spécificité de Ducharme, les caractéristiques qui fondent ses écrits en tant qu'œuvre littéraire nouvelle et singulière » (109).

12 Voir également Meadwell « Littérarité » et Meadwell « Ludisme ».

13 Voir également « Je suis, donc je pense » réitère Bérénice (*L'avalée* 315).

14 On retrouve un constat similaire dans Françoise Laurent : « Et quelle revanche dans ce verbe exalté, ludique, iconoclaste après tous ces anathèmes contre le joual, ces complexes devant les Français dont la langue s'était abreuvée à son gré à tant de chefs-d'œuvre. . . . *L'avalée des avalés* était un baume pour les blessures de l'âme! » (25). Voir également Arnaldo Rosa Vianna Neto.

15 Voir Michel Van Schendel.

16 C'est du moins l'hypothèse de Gilles Marcotte qui affirme que chez Ducharme « la fin est assurée, toujours la même : c'est le désastre. » (En arrière, 23). Dans la même veine, Christiane Kègle note que le ludisme langagier des romans de Ducharme est empreint de négativité, de tragique (52).

17 Voir Biron (215), Hébert (320) et Marcotte « Réjean Ducharme » (95).

18 Brigitte Seyfrid-Bommertz note que « [l]a demande sexuelle qui s'affiche ici directement et les références érotiques nullement voilées fonctionnent comme une pure provocation, comme un défi lancé, à travers Christian, au père et à la loi » (53).

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Roger Nash

A Fire-Festival

Phone the fire-hall. We fell asleep
last night without trimming the hurricane that blows
through the wick in your lamp. The sheets, the morning,
are on fire. The striped wallpaper jangles
like Nero, playing its astigmatic guitar,
which plays the fish in the aquarium. The walls
and my lucky dominoes keep falling.
Life goes on winning. Outside,
the road is jammed with marching bands,
and the fire-hoses can't get through.
They uncoil by themselves, and dance a snake
and a crocodile of mambo. The fire-buckets
fill with sunlight, wind and saxophones.

Dial the blaze, and ask it to cancel
the fire-truck. So that goldfish can leap up
wallpaper to spawn in smoky shallows
of ceiling. Where three all-seeing
spiders revolve on their flaunted threads,
unsinged amidst our sparks, but below the fated web
of their glittering formula. In the Great Book
of Longing, it is written: love will be fire,
and every bucket have holes in it. Our regrets, too,
will have leaks in them, never water-tight.

The glittering spiders continue to turn.
Life's brooms: always too short.

Jean-Sébastien Ménard

Sur la langue de Kerouac[1]

Jean-Louis Lébris de Kerouac, mieux connu sous le nom de Jack Kerouac, est le fils de Léo Alcide Kerouac et de Gabrielle Ange Lévesque, surnommée Mémère, deux Canadiens français qui avaient émigré avec leurs parents aux États-Unis au début du XX^e^ siècle. Il est né le 12 mars 1922, à Lowell au Massachusetts. C'est le troisième et dernier enfant de sa famille aux côtés de Gérard, né en 1917 et mort en 1926, et de Caroline, née en 1920 et morte en 1964. Jean-Louis a grandi dans un milieu francophone catholique qui baignait dans un univers anglophone, pour ne pas dire qu'il y était submergé. La langue de son entourage était le français populaire tel qu'il était parlé au Québec dans les années 1920 et 1930. C'est à l'école, vers l'âge de six ans, qu'il a appris l'anglais puisqu'il parlait toujours le français à la maison. Les Kerouac vivaient dans le quartier surnommé « Petit Canada[2] » et ils étaient issus de cette vague d'immigration qui, de 1840 à 1930, poussa quelque 900 000 Canadiens français à s'installer aux États-Unis, dans le but de trouver du travail et de fuir la misère qui les guettait dans la province de Québec.

La plupart de ces immigrants se sont établis en Nouvelle-Angleterre dans des villes situées au nord de Boston et peuplées de 25 000 à 100 000 habitants. À Suncook et Woonsock, entre autres, les Canadiens français devinrent majoritaires et formèrent pendant un certain temps 60 pour cent de la population. Cependant, ils étaient la plupart du temps minoritaires comme à Lowell (26 pour cent) ou à Manchester (40 pour cent), où ils habitaient dans des quartiers francophones comme celui des Kerouac. En 1930, 25 pour cent de la population d'origine québécoise vit dans l'Est des États-Unis, soit un peu plus de 800 000 personnes. Pendant un temps, certains

ont pu croire que le fait français se perpétuerait à jamais en Nouvelle-Angleterre, et ce, malgré la forte domination de l'anglais dans les milieux sociaux. Pourtant, l'anglicisation a pratiquement réduit à néant la présence du français en ces lieux.

Au cours de cet article, je propose d'étudier le rapport de Jack Kerouac à la langue française tel qu'il se manifeste dans ses textes littéraires, les entretiens qu'il a accordés et dans sa correspondance. Je situerai ce rapport dans le contexte de l'évolution de la langue française au Québec (ou, plus précisément, en Amérique du Nord). Je tenterai de montrer que Kerouac s'identifie à cette langue et que le rapport qu'il entretient avec elle est révélateur d'un certain état de la langue française telle qu'elle est parlée dans les années 1940 et 1950. Suite à quoi, je montrerai l'importance de l'apport méconnu, voire dénigré, de Kerouac dans l'affirmation et l'utilisation de la langue populaire dans la littérature.

Le 7 mars 1967, Fernand Séguin reçoit Jack Kerouac dans le cadre de son émission *Le sel de la semaine*, diffusée sur les ondes de la télévision française de Radio-Canada[3]. Le Kerouac qui se présente alors sur le plateau et que découvrent les téléspectateurs est un homme vieilli, gras et ravagé par l'alcool, dans les derniers kilomètres de sa vie. Il n'a plus rien à voir avec la fougue et la jeunesse qui le caractérisaient dans *On the Road* ou *Dharma Bums* par exemple. Pour le public présent dans le studio, il apparaît comme une « caricature de lui-même » (Morency 128).

Au cours de l'entrevue, Kerouac, qui s'était auparavant enivré avec Séguin, s'exprime en français bien qu'il ait été « embarrassed that the audience laughed at his pronunciation of French words, for the French-Canadian dialect in Lowell was quite different from the language spoken in Canada » (Nicosia, *Kerouac* 37). Si, sur le plateau, la manière dont il s'exprime en fait rire plus d'un, elle va participer à ce que Jean Morency nomme « l'invention de Kérouac au Québec », puisqu'elle révèle son identité canadienne-française. Comme le chante Sylvain Lelièvre :

> La seule fois que je t'ai vu
> À la télé en soixante-sept
> T'avais l'air d'un bûcheron perdu
> Dans sa légende de poète
> Si je t'ai cru presque parent
> C'était peut-être malgré moi
> Juste à cause de ton accent
> D'un vieux « mon-oncle » des États (203)

D'après Morency, « il est permis de supposer que cette entrevue va conditionner à jamais l'image de Kerouac dans la littérature québécoise » (128). Après son passage à cette émission, Kerouac incarne pour de nombreux Québécois « l'angoisse de la disparition » (129). Comme Sylvain Lelièvre le remarque encore :

> Je ne veux pas savoir pourquoi
> Pas plus loin qu'en mil neuf cent vingt
> Un bon million de Québécois
> Sont devenus Américains
> Je ne veux pas savoir non plus
> Je l'imagine et c'est assez
> Pour quelle raison t'as jamais pu
> Terminer ton livre en français (203)

Kerouac est le francophone exilé et assimilé par la masse anglophone. Il représente le destin qui menace tous les francophones d'Amérique du Nord. Kerouac se sent d'ailleurs lui-même déraciné et comprend, dès 1950, qu'il avance sur la route de l'assimilation, que le processus « d'englishizing » (229), comme il le dit, est enclenché avec succès depuis sa tendre enfance. À certains égards, il préfigure ce que pourrait être l'avenir de la langue française au Québec si rien n'est entrepris pour la sauvegarder et contrer l'anglicisation, soit : l'assimilation de la langue française par la langue anglaise et, fatalement, la disparition de la langue et de la culture françaises en Amérique du Nord. Ainsi écrit-il le 8 septembre 1950, à Yvonne Le Maître, journaliste du *Travailleur,* petit journal de Worcester, qui avait fait une critique de *The Town and the City* :

> Excuse me for writing in English, when it would be so much better to address you in french; but I have no proficiency at all in my native language, and that is the lame truth. . . . Because I cannot write my native language and have no native home any more, and am amazed by that horrible homelessness all French-Canadians abroad in America have—Well, well, I was moved. Someday, Madame, I shall write a French-Canadian novel, with the setting in New-England, in French. It will be the simplest and most rudimentary French. If anybody wants to publish it, I mean Harcourt, Brace or anybody, they'll have to translate it. All my knowledge rests in my "French-Canadianness" and nowhere else. The English language is a tool lately found . . . so late (I never spoke English before I was six or seven). At 21 I was still somewhat awkward and illeterate-sounding in my speech and writing. What a mix-up. The reason I handle English words so easily is because it is not my own language. I refashion it to fit French images. Do you see that? . . . Because I wanted a universal American story, I could not make the whole family catholic. It was an American story. As I say, the French-Canadian story I've yet to attempt. But you were absolutely right in your few complaints on this

> score. Isn't true that French-Canadians everywhere tend to hide their real sources. They can do it because they look Anglo-Saxon, when the Jews, the Italians, the others cannot. . . . The "other" minority races. Believe me, I'll never hide it again; as once I did, say in High School, when I first began "Englishizing myself" to coin a term (me—faire un anglais). (Kerouac, *Selected Letters* 229)

Conscient des imperfections de son français, le poète Beat choisit pourtant de l'utiliser dans certaines de ses œuvres. De plus, et c'est là un trait original de sa démarche d'écriture, Kerouac tente de renverser le processus d'anglicisation dont il est l'objet. C'est-à-dire qu'il se sert du français québécois pour manier différemment la langue de Shakespeare. Là résiderait, selon lui, son unique originalité dans le champ littéraire américain, soit penser en français et écrire en anglais[4].

Dans les archives de Jack Kerouac, à la Berg Collection de la New York Public Library, on peut lire différents manuscrits des œuvres de Kerouac, où l'on voit clairement qu'il traduisait souvent ses textes du français à l'anglais. On peut aussi penser à *Visions of Gerard*, par exemple, où l'on retrouve beaucoup de passages qui sont en français et qui sont la plupart du temps suivis de la traduction : « Sont-ils content? Are they happy? . . . Blanc d'or rouge noir pi toute—White of gold red black and everything is the translation. » (Kerouac, *Visions of Gerard* 3).

En fait, il semble qu'au cours des années, Kerouac écrivait souvent un premier jet dans la langue de Molière qu'il traduisait ensuite en anglais. Le meilleur exemple de ce procédé est le texte qu'il a écrit sur Céline, publié en version anglaise dans *Paris Review* (Winter/Spring 1964) puis dans *Good Blonde and Others*, en 1993, sans précision sur le fait qu'il a d'abord été entièrement écrit en français. Ce texte, intitulé « On Céline », ne contient alors qu'une phrase en français, la dernière : « Adieu, pauvre suffrant, mon docteur » (91). Autrement, il n'y reste aucune trace du texte original que l'on peut consulter à la Berg Collection de la New York Public Library.

En décembre 1952, Kerouac a de plus rédigé quelques « novellas » en français, qu'il a ensuite traduites en anglais, dont « Old Bull Ballon », et un texte intitulé « Sur le chemin, Jack Lewis » qui est devenu « The Happy Truth ». À la New York Public Library, on peut consulter la version anglaise de « The Happy Truth ». On y voit les traces de la traduction comme dans cette phrase où Kerouac hésite entre plusieurs mots : « The night of our real behasseled [or crawlsom, clawdlesome, bedawdling, folderolsome] botheratoon lives, a car came from the West, from Denver . . . » (1). Malheureusement, le texte original, en français, n'étant pas accessible, il est pour l'instant impossible de savoir quel était le mot français à traduire. Kerouac indique

toutefois au lecteur qu'il s'agit bien d'une traduction : « Translated from the French, of Mexico, Dec. 16-21'52 » (1).

D'autre part, en 1951, il a rédigé un roman d'apprentissage, intitulé *La nuit est ma femme,* entièrement en français. Kerouac a aussi écrit certains poèmes uniquement en français et d'autres en utilisant à la fois le français et l'anglais[5]. Cette pratique va influencer bon nombre d'auteurs québécois, dont Lucien Francoeur, Claude Péloquin, Jean-Paul Daoust et Denis Vanier, ainsi que d'autres membres de la Beat Generation, dont Lawrence Ferlinghetti : « I remember, from Jack's French poems, I picked up on how you can blend the French and English, and did that in some of my poems. » (Lawrence Ferlinghetti, cité par Ginsberg 318). Gerald Nicosia explique la démarche de l'auteur de Lowell : « When he was stumped by a certain passage, he would translate it into joual (Canuck French) and then retranslate it into English, thereby obtaining the most direct possible syntax and the simplest natural rythms. » (*Memory Babe* 355). Dans *Pour en finir avec Jack Kerouac*, Louis Hamelin avance, suite à Nicosia, que la présence et l'influence du *québécois* dans l'œuvre de Kerouac seraient d'une importance capitale (200). Comme le disait Jack : « I'm translating from the french that is in my head. » (Waddell 7). Ce procédé n'est pas sans répercussions formelles. Ainsi, dans *Vision of Cody*, le texte est parfois divisé en deux colonnes (l'une en français et l'autre en anglais) :

> Si tu veux parlez apropos d'Cody pourquoi tu'l fa—tu m'a arretez avant j'ai eu une chance de continuez, ben arrete donc. Écoute, j'va t'dire—lit bien. Il faut t'u te prend soin—attend?—donne moi une chance—tu pense j'ai pas d'art moi français?—ca?—idiot—crapule—tas'd marde—enfant shiene—batard—cochon—buffon—bouche de marde, grangueule, face laite, shienculotte, morceau d'marde, susseu, gros fou, envi d'chien en culotte, ca c'est pire—en face!—fam toi!—crashe!—varge!—frappe!—mange!—foure!—foure moi'l Gabin!—envalle Céline, mange l'e rond ton Genêt, Rabelais? El terra essuyer l'coup au derrière. Mais assez, c'est pas interessant. C'est pas interessant l'maudit Français. Écoute, Cody ye plein d'marde; les lé allez; il est ton ami, les le songée; yé pas ton frere, yé pas ton pere, yé pas ton ti Saint Michel, yé un gas, ye marriez, il travaille, v'as t'couchez l'autre bord du monde, v'a pensant dans la grand nuit Europeene. Je t'l'explique, ma manière, pas la tienne, enfant, chien—écoutes : —va trouvez ton âme, vas sentir le vent, vas loin—la vie est d'hommage. [sic]
>
> If you want to talk about Cody why do you do it—you stopped me before I had a chance to continue, stop won't you! Listen, I'm going to tell you—read well: you have to take care of yourself, hear it?—give me a chance—you think I've no art me French?—eh?—idiot—crapule—piece of shit—sonofabitch—bastard—pig—clown—shitmouth—long mouth—ugly face, shitpants, piece of shit, sucktongue, big fool, wantashitpants, that's worse—right in the face!—shut up!—spit!—hit it! (varge!)—hit! (frappe)—eat it!—fuck!—scram me Gavin!—swallow Céline, eat him raw your

> Genêt, Rabelais? He woulda wiped your neck on his ass. But enough, it's not interesting goddam French. Listen, Cody is full of shit; let him go; he is your friend, let him dream; he's not your brother, he's not your father, he's not your Saint Michael, he's a guy, he's married, he works, go sleeping on the other side of the world, go thinking in the great European night. I'm explaining him to you, my way, not yours, child, dog—listen: —go find your soul, go smell the wind—go far—life is pity.

On voit bien ici la manière de procéder de Kerouac qui rédige d'abord d'un jet en français et traduit ensuite son texte vers l'anglais tout en laissant à l'occasion des traces de la version originale. Le français qu'écrit Kerouac est une transcription directe de celui qu'il parle. Il ne tient pas compte de l'orthographe, il écrit au son, ce qui entraîne parfois des glissements sémantiques tels « la vie est d'hommage » plutôt que « la vie est dommage », traduction de « Life is pity ». Kerouac écrit en langue populaire, que ce soit en anglais ou en français. Il écrit comme un musicien populaire joue de son instrument, rejetant par là la figure du lettré, se réclamant davantage de celle du jazzman. Comme le souligne Jean-Marie Rous :

> Pour Kerouac, la pensée doit être fluide, c'est-à-dire s'exprimer librement par vagues et non par phrases. Si l'on en croit Ann Charters « Jack avait souvent confié à Allen [Ginsberg] qu'il s'identifiait plus volontiers à des musiciens de génie comme Bud Powell, Charlie Parker, Billie Holliday, Lester Young, Gerry Mulligan et Thelonius Monk qu'à n'importe quelle école littéraire bien établie. (57)

Ce qui intéresse Kerouac, c'est la musique des mots. La langue d'écriture reste proche de la langue d'expression orale. En fait, un réel souci de transcrire le plus fidèlement possible l'oralité, de relayer toutes les variations et tous les jeux de la langue anime Kerouac et les écrivains de la *Beat*. En ce sens, Kerouac s'apparente à des auteurs comme Ernest Hemingway, Henry Miller et John O'Hara, pour ne citer qu'eux, qui ont toujours été soucieux d'intégrer à leurs oeuvres une part d'oralité, du moins dans l'écriture des dialogues. Comme le remarque William Burroughs :

> Hemingway a été décrit comme un maître du dialogue. . . . John O'Hara, qui n'est pas un aussi bon écrivain, est un meilleur dialoguiste qu'Hemingway. Quand on lit John O'Hara, on sait qu'il s'agit de quelque chose qu'il a vraiment entendu dire par quelqu'un. (53)

Dans la littérature américaine, on fait de moins en moins parler les personnages comme des livres. Mais avec Kerouac et chez la majorité des auteurs de la Beat Generation, cette intention va jusqu'à toucher la narration, qui devient elle aussi à l'image de la langue parlée.

L'auteur n'écrit pas à son lecteur, il lui parle en utilisant le livre comme médium, ce qui constitue tout de même un paradoxe. En s'adressant ainsi

à ce dernier, l'auteur cherche à amenuiser la distance qui sépare traditionnellement l'écrivain de son public : « A person always wants to address his fellow men in their own language » (*Selected Letters* 204), écrit Kerouac. La littérature est utilisée comme un magnétophone du réel tel qu'il le perçoit. Ne pensons qu'à *Visions of Cody*, qui est, en partie, la transcription pure et simple de conversations enregistrées préalablement entre Jack Kerouac et Neal Cassady (Cody Pomeray)[6], et considérons ce souci, constant chez lui, d'entendre la musique de ses textes, pour les évaluer selon leur caractère oral plutôt qu'en termes de lisibilité[7]. C'est dans cette perspective qu'il faut comprendre le choix de la technique d'écriture qu'il utilise, le « spontaneous writing », qui consiste à tout écrire, selon le flux et le rythme de la pensée, à l'instar de l'écriture automatique des surréalistes :

> By not revising what you've already written you simply give the reader the actual workings of your mind during the writting itself : you confess your thoughts about events in your own unchangeable way. . . . Well, look, did you ever hear a guy telling a long wild tale to a bunch of men in a bar and all are listening and smiling, did you ever hear that guy stop to revise himself, go back to a previous sentence to improve it, to defray its rhythmic thought impact. . . . (Plimpton 101)

Pour Kerouac et les écrivains de la Beat Generation, écrire équivaut à se livrer de façon brute, comme dans l'expression orale. Le livre se veut dépositaire de la parole transcrite. Chacun témoigne de sa réalité, de son univers, de sa manière de parler. La langue littéraire est celle de tous les jours.

C'est donc dire que, bien avant la plupart des écrivains québécois et sans aucun souci d'engagement politique par rapport à la langue française parlée au Québec, Kerouac écrit dans une langue qui s'apparente au joual. Il réalise avant l'heure le programme des « partipristes », lequel propose de faire de la langue populaire une langue littéraire. Pourtant, il n'a rien à voir politiquement avec les écrivains de Parti pris qui, durant les années 1960, ont fait du joual un instrument de dénonciation, d'affirmation et de subversion. Et ce, pendant que Michel Tremblay pense tout le contraire de Kerouac : « le joual, c'est une arme politique, une arme linguistique que le peuple comprend d'autant plus qu'il l'utilise tous les jours » (Michel Tremblay, cité par Portelance 25). L'usage du langage parlé n'a vraiment pas les mêmes visées pour l'auteur de Lowell. C'est beaucoup plus par défaut que dans un but politique que Kerouac utilise une langue qui s'apparente au joual. D'ailleurs, Kerouac est tout sauf un écrivain engagé, contrairement à Ferlinghetti, Ginsberg et Kesey[8]. À la fin de sa vie, quand des journalistes le désignent comme le roi des beatniks et l'instigateur du mouvement hippie et de la

contre-culture, il réagit selon plusieurs de manière réactionnaire. En reniant son implication et en dénonçant certains agissements de ses amis, allant jusqu'à condamner publiquement Ginsberg et Ferlinghetti[9], il affirme par la même occasion que ce qu'il a toujours recherché, à l'instar du souhait de son père, c'est d'être un bon Américain :

> en lui s'incarne la francophonie nord-américaine, enfouie dans les salles paroissiales et les humbles quartiers besogneux en périphérie des usines de textiles, mais aussi l'éclatement de l'American Dream, aux espaces démesurés, accessibles à tous et qui marque le continent vierge comme l'orfèvre martèle sa matière première. (Antcil xx)

Kerouac, en tant que fils d'immigrant, semble animé par un désir de conformité en même temps que par une soif d'indépendance et d'originalité. Il aspire à la différence mais, paradoxalement, ne veut pas se faire remarquer. En fait, il semble porté à avoir une image négative de lui-même. En ce sens, il illustrerait l'adhésion aux stratégies intermédiaires, dont parle Hanna Malewska-Peyre dans son étude sur les enfants d'immigrants. Il intériorise l'image défavorisée renvoyée par la société, se fond dans le groupe majoritaire pour passer inaperçu, disant lui-même dans une de ses lettres que les Canadiens français ont cet avantage, ou désavantage—c'est confus—de ne pas être une minorité visible (Kerouac, *Selected Letters* 229), et tentant « de ne pas se faire remarquer, ne pas déranger, ne pas trop demander » (Hanna Malewska-Peyre, citée par Bouchard 28). Il se soumet ainsi à la pensée dominante américaine et rejette une partie de la culture franco-canadienne, soit celle d'être « né pour un petit pain » : lorsqu'il est étudiant, il veut être le meilleur footballeur et, adulte, le plus grand écrivain.

En rapport à la langue, Kerouac choisit de vivre et d'écrire en anglais mais continuera toute sa vie à employer le français pour l'un et l'autre, tout en entretenant un complexe d'infériorité—il a le sentiment de ne pas parler un bon français. Ce sentiment ne l'empêchera toutefois pas de revendiquer toute sa vie, et dans toute son œuvre, son appartenance ethnique, sa spécificité. De fait, il se présente toujours comme un *canuck,* un *french-canadian* et met ainsi la question de ses origines à l'avant-plan. Préoccupation qui l'entraîne « sur la route » vers la fin de son parcours, dans un périple qui le mène à Rivière-du-Loup, puis en Bretagne, et qu'il relate dans *Satori à Paris*. Kerouac est fier de ses origines; fier, en fait, d'appartenir à plusieurs cultures. Comme il le dit lui-même :

> My family is 5,000 years old, he says. People bug me. They say what the hell kind of a name is Kerouac, anyway? It's easy. Just a real old Irish name—keltic. "Ker" means house in keltic. "Ouac" means "on the moor". But my family travelled very

> far. They started in Ireland, travelled to Wales, then Cornwall then Brittany, where they learned the old French, then 400 years ago to Canada. Did you know that one of the Iroquois nations is named Kerouac? (Jack Kerouac, cité par Duncan 39)

Pour lui, cette équation entre spécificité ethnique et américanité va de soi. Cela est tout à fait en phase, par exemple, avec la philosophie de la Beat Generation. Tout le monde dans l'entourage de Kerouac, tant à Lowell qu'au sein de la Beat Generation, s'identifie ainsi : personne n'est simplement américain, plutôt italo-américain, canadien-français-américain, juif-américain … C'est même un des traits caractéristiques de la littérature Beat que d'insérer ça et là dans les œuvres des passages écrits dans la langue d'origine, en français-québécois pour Kerouac, en italien pour Corso, et en français normatif pour Ferlinghetti.

D'ailleurs, une grande partie des membres de la Beat Generation sont des enfants d'immigrants et leur recherche d'un moi authentique et véritable, qui s'inscrit dans leur révolte contre la société, passe par la revendication de leurs racines et de leurs caractéristiques individuelles. Ainsi, on associe à Ginsberg sa judéité, à Corso ses origines italiennes, à Ferlinghetti ses origines italo-françaises et à Kerouac ses origines québécoises (canadiennes-françaises). En fait, chacun d'entre eux cherche « les ressemblances entre les cultures en cause et [valorise], sans renoncer à sa spécificité tout en la minimisant, une forme faible d'acculturation. » (Bouchard 28-29)

Kerouac, cependant, se distingue des autres par la proximité du pays d'origine. Proximité paradoxale car comme il n'a jamais vécu au Québec, bien qu'il en ait eu le projet en 1952 (Nicosia, *Memory Babe* 429), il ne se tient pas au courant de l'actualité québécoise (que ce soit par rapport à la langue ou à la politique). Il y est certes allé à plusieurs reprises durant sa jeunesse et lors de ses vagabondages, mais il n'y a jamais résidé. De plus, il n'a jamais revendiqué son appartenance au champ littéraire québécois, au grand désarroi de certains critiques et écrivains de la belle province qui le font à sa place[10]. Comme d'autres écrivains contestataires américains (Paul Bowles, Henry Miller), il n'aime pas particulièrement l'ambiance qui règne à Montréal et à Québec, qu'il considère par trop puritaine, ce que rappelle Eric Waddel :

> [Pensons] à cette incroyable entrevue de Kérouac avec Fernand Séguin pour l'émission *Le Sel de la semaine*, à Radio-Canada, en 1967. Elle révèle non seulement la véritable identité canadienne-française de Kérouac (comme le cinéaste André Gladu l'a dit : « Si lui n'est pas Canadien français, moi je suis japonais! ») mais également la totale incapacité du Québec de l'époque de le comprendre et de l'accepter. « Le Québec (auquel il lui arrivait de rêver) n'était pas encore né, culturellement parlant, et n'aurait pas pu—ni voulu—l'accueillir. (7)

Pourtant, sur le plan langagier, comme le souligne Gladu, Kerouac est représentatif d'un état de la langue française telle qu'elle est parlée, à cette époque, au Québec par une partie de la population. Le français qu'il utilise, tant à l'oral qu'à l'écrit, est celui que le frère Untel et le journaliste André Laurendeau vont bientôt désigner comme étant le *joual*.

Il est intéressant de noter que Kerouac, en parlant de sa langue maternelle, la nomme ainsi : « Canadian Child Patoi probably Medieval » (Kerouac, *Pomes All Sizes* 26). De leur côté, les critiques américains et français la désignent comme étant le « french dialect joual (Québécois) » (Kerouac, *Selected Letters* 3) ou encore le « French Canadian Patoi » (3). Voilà les propos d'Anne Waldman à ce sujet : « His language was Quebecois and working Massachusetts and all the types and personalities around him fed into that sound. » (*Influence* 595). Et Yves Le Pellec écrit pour sa part : « Joual means the Canadian French Patoi. » (76). Il y a cette idée chez plusieurs que le français parlé par Kerouac et au Québec de cette époque n'est pas du « vrai français », pas le *Parisian French*. Cette conception relève d'un préjugé bien ancré dans la population anglophone :

> Si on en croit un article de *La Presse* de 1937, la population anglophone d'Amérique était à ce point convaincue que les Canadiens français parlaient un patois, qu'il était devenu impossible pour un Québécois d'enseigner le français dans les universités et collèges américains à moins de détenir un diplôme de l'Université McGill. (Bouchard 138)

À vrai dire, Kerouac partage aussi cet avis : « Et ne croyez pas qu'on s'est pas dit un tas de choses sur notre compte, en français et non en parisien, alors que lui ne parle pas un mot d'anglais » (Jack Kerouac, cité par Rous 177). L'idée courante veut que la langue parlée au Québec soit une langue informe, incompréhensible pour les Français eux-mêmes. Et certains critiques français leur donnent raison : « Le français canadien de Kerouac [est] difficile à suivre—on s'en rend compte tout au long du roman » (177). Parce qu'il provient d'un Français, ce commentaire sur la lisibilité est probablement plus dommageable que les préjugés des anglophones sur la qualité de la langue parlée au Québec puisqu'il établit une distinction entre le français et le joual, donnant à penser que la langue populaire du Québec est un patois.

Cette perception a des effets négatifs sur l'opinion que les francophones d'Amérique se font d'eux-mêmes, spécialement dans les années 1940 et 1950. Souvent peu instruits, ayant passé brusquement du statut de paysan à celui d'ouvrier, travaillant la plupart du temps pour des patrons anglophones, au Québec comme aux États-Unis, beaucoup d'entre eux intègrent ce préjugé,

Kerouac inclus, et ont une piètre estime d'eux-mêmes ainsi que de tout ce qu'ils font. La langue n'échappe pas à cette détérioration et se trouve chargée de valeurs négatives. Cependant, selon Kerouac, le vrai français reste malgré tout celui parlé au Québec et non le *Parisian French* : « I hate what France has done to the French language. They've RUINED it. They've fancied it up. No one in France knows how to speak French except a couple of Normans. Where they really speak French is in Quebec. » (Maher 207).

Alors que Kerouac utilise çà et là le français canadien dans ses romans et poèmes, au Québec, à la même époque, on n'estime pas cette langue digne d'entrer dans la littérature. Certes, certains auteurs intègrent des régionalismes dans leurs œuvres littéraires, comme Germaine Guèvremont et Claude-Henri Grignon, mais c'est davantage dans le souci de rendre la couleur locale. On considère que cette langue est liée au lieu où elle est parlée et qu'elle n'est pas exportable[11]. D'autres, comme Rex Desmarchais, bannissent tout usage du français québécois :

> Il me paraît incroyable que l'écrivain canadien renonce à cette langue [le français normatif] ou qu'il songe à la déformer, à la massacrer dans l'espoir qu'une langue nouvelle naisse comme par enchantement de ce massacre. L'écrivain digne de ce nom n'a pas à suivre et à contresigner de son autorité les fautes, les négligences, les lacunes, les avilissements du parler populaire—paysan ou citadin. Au contraire, il doit tendre tout son effort à corriger le parler populaire, à donner à ses écrits des modèles de précision et de pureté linguistique. (Bouchard 202)

À l'instar de Desmarchais, les chroniqueurs linguistiques condamnent toutes les formes de régionalisme. On fait la promotion du français normatif en brandissant le spectre de l'anglicisation et de l'assimilation. Le joual, qui n'est pas encore nommé ainsi, est perçu comme une tare de l'esprit, une preuve de dégénérescence, la preuve de l'aliénation de la langue tout à la fois :

> Le joual sert de repoussoir, il représente symboliquement, à ses débuts, tout ce que les Canadiens français rejettent d'eux-mêmes : l'état de colonisés (langue anglicisée), le sentiment de retard culturel (l'archaïsme), le peu d'instruction (ignorance de la syntaxe, du vocabulaire français), le manque de raffinement (la vulgarité), l'isolement culturel (langue incompréhensible pour les étrangers), la perte des racines, voire de l'identité (déstructuration, désagrégation, dégénérescence, décomposition, etc.). (230)

Dans ce contexte, l'idée de faire du langage parlé une langue littéraire, non seulement dans les dialogues mais aussi dans la narration, sans intention de dénoncer quoi que ce soit, paraît une aberration. Bien que l'on ne soit qu'à quelques années de la prise de parole des partipristes, puis des Michel Tremblay et Yvon Deschamps, on n'envisage pas encore l'utilisation de la

langue populaire et du joual dans des œuvres littéraires. Mais ce n'est qu'une question de temps bien sûr. Bientôt, que ce soit dans une visée politique ou strictement esthétique, le langage parlé fera son entrée dans le texte littéraire. Ce mouvement s'accompagnera d'un changement de paradigme. Beaucoup d'écrivains québécois vont alors se détourner des classiques français et se tourner vers les États-Unis pour y puiser des modèles, voire des maîtres à penser. C'est particulièrement le cas des tenants de la contre-culture québécoise des années 1970, Lucien Francoeur et Claude Péloquin en tête, qui finissent par s'affranchir de l'influence de la France; parvenant « [à donner] le beat sans demander l'avis de la *mère patrie* » (Francoeur 14). Or, parmi les influences américaines, se trouvent la Beat Generation et Kerouac et, avec eux, cette idée de transcrire l'oralité dans les textes littéraires, cette idée selon laquelle « parler, c'est écrire. » Beaucoup verront dorénavant l'écrivain comme un raconteur d'histoires qui utilise pour ses récits la langue du peuple. Comme l'écrit Marcel Rioux dans *Les Québécois* :

> Si le Français est discoureur et palabreur, le Québécois, lui, est raconteur. . . . Raconteur d'histoires qui peuvent être des aventures, des souvenirs, comme des idées, des sensations, des désirs. Nous nous racontons des histoires au double sens du terme. Pour nous endormir comme pour nous réveiller, pour ne pas trop souffrir ou pour souffrir ensemble, pour rire ou ne pas pleurer, pour rêver, pour errer (errance, erreur), pour savoir et protester. Nous sommes partagés entre notre tradition littéraire et philosophique française, critique, élitiste, sceptique, et notre position américaine participative, démocratique, unanimiste, grégaire, qui se croit la seule réelle et voudrait, à la limite, n'avoir pas besoin de mots, mais seulement d'attitudes, de sentiments et de gestes pour « se dire ». D'où le conflit culturellement fécond de notre discours commun tendu entre, d'une part, la nostalgie d'une « homogénéité du temps, de l'espace et de l'être », et d'autre part, la dure actualité de l'« hétéroglossie indépassable d'un tissu social déchiré » et, au sens propre, chez un Deschamps ou un Tremblay, de la langue et du langage de l'altération plutôt que de l'altérité. (Mailhot 171)

Dans une autre mesure, il est intéressant de noter qu'après son premier roman, *The Town and The City*, qu'il avait signé John Kerouac, ce dernier se fait connaître sous le nom de Jean-Louis en représentant des Franco-Canadiens américains :

> In April 1955, « Jazz of the *Beat Generation* » by « Jean-Louis » would appear in the seventh volume of New World Writing with a biographical note reading. « This selection is from a novel-in-progress, The *Beat Generation*. Jean-Louis is the pseudonym of a young American writer of French-Canadian parentage. He is the author of one published novel. » Cowley was also stuck by the fact that Kerouac was a Franco-American author who could speak for an ethnic group that Cowley believed was « seriously underrepresented in American literature. » (Kerouac, *Selected Letters* 429)

En 1957, à la parution du roman en question, finalement intitulé *On the Road*, qu'il signe Jack Kerouac, et avec la popularité qui s'ensuit, ce lien avec ses racines canadiennes-françaises s'estompe et passe inaperçu. Il faudra attendre les « effets » du passage de Kerouac au *Sel de la semaine*, en 1967, et plus particulièrement la parution de *Jack Kerouac : essai poulet* de Victor-Lévy Beaulieu, en 1972, pour que ses racines franco-canadiennes refassent surface.

On peut s'interroger sur l'atténuation de ce lien avec ses racines canadiennes-françaises. On peut aussi s'interroger sur les traductions françaises des œuvres de Kerouac : pourquoi celles-ci, mises à part celles publiées par Québec/Amérique, sont-elles traduites en français de France, y compris les séquences parlées? Comment expliquer que ces traductions ne rendent pas compte de la diversité des langues et des accents présents dans l'œuvre de Kerouac? Et de la langue maternelle de Kerouac? Est-ce en raison des incidences institutionnelles qui conditionnent ces traductions, comme la méconnaissance des traducteurs français de la langue populaire du Québec, ou leur position centrale au sein de la république des lettres?

L'apport de Kerouac quant à l'utilisation de la langue populaire dans la littérature est à considérer, même s'il nous faut admettre qu'il est difficile d'établir une filiation directe en l'absence de toute référence objective : ses œuvres dans lesquelles le français est le plus présent n'étaient pas encore publiées ou demeuraient encore peu connues à l'époque de l'émergence du joual. En 1988, Claire Quintal, pour illustrer comment Kerouac insère « du français dans ses écrits chaque fois que l'expression première de sa pensée se présente à lui 'dans la langue' » (400), cite *Visions of Gerard* et *Visions of Cody*, comme si c'était là les œuvres de Kerouac les plus importantes quant à l'utilisation du français, ce qui est loin d'être le cas. Il faut tout de même reconnaître que Kerouac et la Beat Generation de manière plus générale ont indéniablement influencé les écrivains québécois qui, après 1980, vont aller jusqu'à les inscrire au sein de leurs œuvres (Ménard, *Une certaine Amérique à lire*). Pour ce qui est du français que parle et écrit Kerouac, il est représentatif surtout de cette langue qui se parlait encore aux États-Unis il n'y a pas si longtemps et d'une certaine variation de la langue française telle qu'elle fut parlée au Québec au milieu du 20^{ième} siècle par la classe ouvrière.

NOTES

1 Cet article a d'abord été présenté sous forme de communication dans le cadre du Colloque annuel de l'ALCQ, à London, en mai 2005 et s'est mérité le Prix de la meilleure communication étudiante.

2 Les Kerouac ont déménagé environ 14 fois durant l'enfance de Jack. Selon John Sampas, beau-frère de Kerouac, ils ont habité à quelques reprises dans le « Petit Canada » (Ménard, *Entrevue avec John Sampas*).

3 Selon Denis Vanier, après l'entrevue, lui, Kerouac et Claude Péloquin ont continué à boire et à faire la fête dans un bar du Vieux-Montréal. Voir Denis Vanier, *Hôtel Putama*. Claude Péloquin, par contre, affirme n'avoir jamais rencontré l'auteur de Lowell. À ce propos, voir Ménard, *Entretiens avec Claude Péloquin*. De plus, aucun texte connu de Kerouac ne fait mention de cette aventure.

4 On pense à la surconscience linguistique dont parle Lise Gauvin.

5 Par exemples, le poème « Long Poem In Canuckian Child Patoi Probably Medieval (titre français), On waking from a dream of Robert Fournier (titre anglais) » (Kerouac, *Pomes* 26-41), et quelques poèmes dans *Book of Sketches* (65-66, 308-10, 353-61). Avec Rainier Grutman, on peut qualifier les oeuvres de Kerouac d'hétérolingue. Voir Grutman 224.

6 Voir à ce sujet Ginsberg 348-57.

7 Ce souci de Kerouac à transcrire l'oralité, lié à sa technique d'écriture, provoque beaucoup de réactions. Citons en exemple Truman Capote : « Ce n'est pas écrit, c'est simplement tapé à la machine. » voir Saporta 28.

8 Dans les années 1960, ces écrivains, avec Timothy Leary, vont déclencher la révolution psychédélique.

9 Voir Maher 200 (pour Ferlinghetti), 332 (pour Ginsberg).

10 Voir à ce titre, ce qu'en dit Chassay 68-71.

11 Voir Bouchard 202 : « 'L'indigénisme linguistique' condamnerait les œuvres littéraires, théâtrales ou cinématographiques à ne connaître aucun rayonnement hors des frontières du Québec. »

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Derek Beaulieu

this half is for the ceremony

Garry T. Morse

5 Poems by Ancus Valerius Libellus

It's more than a proper mishmash, Kosmas!
You used to be satisfied doing nothing all
day with your boy and girl. Now they've run
off together, you philosophise about nothing
and dictate to us about the nature of nothing
What do I want from you, Kosmas? *Nothing*.

Who is that stealing in the door?
Mentullus, I didn't recognize you
by your loathsome features alone.
Like Priapus, you enter *head*-first!

The last time he told the truth
Thrasyllus got a sound thrashing.
The last time he told a few lies
Thrasyllus got a sound thrashing.
Thrasyllus is quite the soothsayer.
He can always foresee a thrashing.

Pompinus is puffed up into positive
paroxysms of pleasure, like a little
bark without an oak, spit from the
foul storm, glad to still be babbling.

Who can argue with the earthy verses
of Rectus? He is a poet composed of
elemental compost. Even the stinkers
cannot take the wind out of Rectus!

David Décarie

Le secret de Manouche

Le thème de la fille-mère dans le Cycle du Survenant de Germaine Guèvremont

Extrêmement prestigieux en France depuis Balzac et Zola, le cycle romanesque[1] est apparu assez tardivement au Québec. Germaine Guèvremont fut l'une des premières à avoir pratiqué cette forme et son Cycle du Survenant—*En pleine terre (1942)*, *Le Survenant (1945)* et *Marie-Didace (1947)*—compte parmi les plus grandes réussites du genre. Ce cycle connut également un important développement paralittéraire car Guèvremont l'adapta et le poursuivit à la radio puis à la télévision. Davantage que de simples adaptations, le radioroman *Le Survenant* (CBF 1952-1955, CKVL 1962-1965), le téléroman du même nom (CBFT 1954-1957) et sa suite intitulée *Au Chenal du Moine* (CBFT 1957-1958) contiennent des intrigues et des personnages entièrement nouveaux. Le fait est aujourd'hui presque oublié, mais la matière d'un troisième roman que prévoyait écrire l'auteure a finalement donné lieu aux deux dernières séries (*Marie-Didace* et *Le Survenant,* CBFT 1958-1960) dans lesquelles Guèvremont introduisit une nouvelle génération de personnages (notamment Marie-Didace Beauchemin) et présenta le retour du Survenant. Le versant paralittéraire de l'œuvre de Guèvremont ayant été très peu étudié (ou même lu), une façon de « relire » le Cycle du Survenant semble donc s'imposer : il faut aller lire et étudier ses parties inédites[2].

Guèvremont, dans l'oeuvre inédite, explore de nouveaux terrains, notamment le thème de la fille-mère qui est un leitmotiv du versant paralittéraire du cycle. Comme nous le verrons, ce sujet était si tabou que, lorsque Guèvremont tenta de l'aborder dans le téléroman *Le Survenant* en 1957, elle fut brutalement censurée. L'auteure revint à la charge, toutefois, lors de la dernière

année de son téléroman (*Le Survenant,* 1960) en révélant que deux personnages phares de son cycle, Manouche et Marie-Didace, étaient filles-mères.

Dans son analyse du cycle, Anne Besson montre que celui-ci est une œuvre ouverte, dont l'expansion s'accompagne de constantes redéfinitions et réinterprétations. Ma lecture du versant paralittéraire du Cycle du Survenant sera ainsi suivie d'une relecture du versant littéraire, car les modifications apportées par Guèvremont en aval affectent l'oeuvre entière. En suivant le thème de la fille-mère à travers tout le cycle, nous pourrons ainsi mieux comprendre les ambiguïtés de certains personnages importants (Alphonsine, Angélina, l'Ange à Defroi), de même que plusieurs scènes énigmatiques de l'œuvre.

Les filles-mères : de Manouche à Marie-Didace

Lors de la seconde année de diffusion de son téléroman *Le Survenant* (1955-1956), Guèvremont introduisit à l'écran le personnage de la jeune Manouche. La comédienne qui a incarné ce personnage au petit écran, Michèle Rossignol, a raconté[3] la relation privilégiée qu'elle a eue avec l'auteure qui connaissait sa mère, la journaliste Lise Rossignol. Manouche aurait même été taillée sur mesure pour Rossignol, alors adolescente. Guèvremont lui présenta ce personnage comme une version féminine du Survenant. Manouche appartient en effet à la famille du Survenant : elle aussi porte un surnom, et un surnom motivé. Manouche, en effet, est l'un des noms donnés aux Tziganes[4]. Ajoutons encore que le surnom de Manouche était celui de Guèvremont dans sa jeunesse[5].

La dramaturge Denise Boucher[6] a dit du personnage de Manouche—une jeune femme sombre, mystérieuse et séduisante—qu'il s'agissait de la première femme fatale de la télévision au Québec. Après l'éros masculin (le Survenant), Guèvremont mit en scène l'éros féminin, ce qui, pour l'époque, était beaucoup plus scandaleux. Avec Manouche, surtout, Guèvremont chercha à porter au petit écran une réalité occultée de l'époque. L'auteure confia en effet d'entrée de jeu à Rossignol—pour que l'actrice, alors mineure, sache ce qui l'attendait—que son personnage portait un lourd secret qui serait éventuellement révélé : Manouche était fille-mère. Guèvremont jouait gros en cherchant, dès 1955, à porter l'indicible à l'écran. Ce faisant, elle rejoignait Gérard Pelletier, qui publia, au début des années cinquante, un reportage sur l'horreur vécue par les orphelins des crèches[7], et Michel Roy, qui écrivit, en 1954, un article intitulé « Le scandale des crèches ». Saisit-on bien, encore aujourd'hui, l'ampleur du phénomène? De 1848 à 1948, 40,000 mères

célibataires passèrent par l'Hôpital de la Miséricorde de Montréal, fondé et dirigé par les Soeurs de Miséricorde[8]. Toutes connurent également la honte, l'humiliation et le secret qui furent le lot des mères célibataires de l'époque. Les mères célibataires arrivaient souvent à l'Hôpital de la Miséricorde à la noirceur afin de ne pas être vues et reconnues par quelqu'un. Celles qui utilisaient le service privé logeaient dans l'hôpital. Lorsqu'elles circulaient à l'intérieur, celles-ci se recouvraient le visage d'un voile afin de ne pas se faire reconnaître par le personnel de l'hôpital ou les visiteurs[9]. De plus, pour protéger leur anonymat, celles-ci se voyaient attribuer un nom d'emprunt : « Il s'agissait surtout de noms inusités comme Héraïs, Calithène, Potamie, Rogata, Macédonie, Gemelle, Nymphodore, Extasie, Symphorose. Si ces appellations étaient bizarres, d'autres comme Humiliane ou Fructueuse étaient lourdes de sens. » (Lévesque 125).

Préparé de longue date par divers indices, l'épisode de l'aveu allait être joué lorsque, quelques heures avant la mise en ondes, la direction de Radio-Canada décida de le censurer. Selon le réalisateur Maurice Leroux[10], il n'est pas impossible que les autorités ecclésiastiques aient joué un rôle dans cette censure. Les téléromans étant alors joués en direct, on fit venir Guèvremont en catastrophe pour qu'elle réécrive le scénario. Le secret de Manouche devint donc, le 22 janvier 1959, une histoire échevelée de contre-bande d'alcool!

Dans cette scène, Manouche rencontrait le fils de l'Acayenne (appelée la Grosse Madame dans le téléroman), Jeffré Varieur, qui n'était autre que l'homme qui l'avait abandonnée alors qu'elle était enceinte de lui :

MAN La Grosse Madame! C'est moi! J'ai fini de bonne heure!
JEF (SUR LA DÉFENSIVE)
G.M. (SOURIT) La pétiote! (HAUT) Avance, que j'te fasse acconaître … le fi à mon Varieur.
MAN (EST DANS LA PORTE. REGARDE JEFFRÉ.)
G.M. Reste pas là, comme une statue d'sel. Avance.
MAN (DANS UN SOUFFLE) Jeffré!
JEF De quoi c'est que c'te comédie-là? Un complot entre vous deux.
G.M. Vous vous connaissez?
JEF Comment ça s'fait que t'es pas à Cap-Chat … Gracia …?
G.M. Vous vous connaissez! (AUPRÈS DE MANOUCHE) Puis tu te souviens de lui, Manouche?
(Guèvremont, Le Survenant, Téléroman, 22-01-1957, 37)

Le récit du scénario bifurque alors de la version originale à la version censurée. Le manuscrit raturé du scénario constitue, à n'en pas douter, un document important pour l'histoire de la censure au Québec :

Version originale

MAN J'ai une bonne raison de me souvenir de toi, Jeffré.
JEF (ATTEND)
MAN J'ai eu un enfant de toi.
JEF T'as pas faite la bêtise de l'élever, au moins?
MANOUCHE S'ENFUIT DE LA PIÈCE

Version censurée

MAN J'ai une bonne raison de me souvenir de lui.
JEF J'vois pas de quoi c'est qu'a nous gazouille là.
MAN J'ai fait de la prison pour l'amour de toi.
JEF Dis-moi pas que tu m'as vendu!
MANOUCHE S'ENFUIT DE LA PIÈCE
(Guèvremont, Le Survenant, Téléroman, 22-01-1957, 37)

Rossignol se souvient que Guèvremont, bouleversée, pleurait de déception en réécrivant la scène. L'auteure, toutefois, n'avait pas dit son dernier mot …

En 1957, changeant de titre et de réalisateur, Guèvremont écrivit le téléroman *Au Chenal du Moine* qui se déroule après le départ du Survenant (et qui constitue l'adaptation du roman *Marie-Didace*). Un an plus tard, ayant épuisé la matière des romans, l'auteure fit faire un bond chronologique à son cycle en écrivant le téléroman *Marie-Didace*, dont l'action se situe autour de la crise de 1929. L'unique descendante des Beauchemin, Marie-Didace, jouée par Patricia Nolin, en devint l'héroïne. En octobre 1959, enfin, le titre du téléroman changea pour la dernière fois, redevenant *Le Survenant*. La série, en effet, présentait le retour au Chenal du Moine du Grand-dieu-des-routes, barbu, vieilli et balafré par la guerre. Le Survenant n'est toutefois pas le seul « revenant » de la série : Manouche revient également et, avec elle, le refoulé, le censuré. On apprend ainsi, au début de la série, que celle-ci a épousé Joinville Provençal, décédé à la guerre, et qu'elle a eu un enfant de lui : Dollard Provençal. Le rival du Survenant, Odilon Provençal, demande à ce neveu inconnu de venir vivre chez lui et ce dernier accepte. Manouche, craignant de remuer le passé, suit toutefois son fils pour tenter de le convaincre de quitter le Chenal du Moine. Peine perdue, car celui-ci est tombé amoureux de sa cousine, Desneiges Provençal. Le projet de mariage des amoureux bute toutefois sur l'interdit de l'inceste et il reviendra à Manouche, aidée du Survenant, de lever cet interdit. Le 25 février 1960, Manouche, malgré sa honte, avouera donc à la famille Provençal qu'elle était fille-mère et que son fils était déjà né au moment de son mariage avec Joinville.

Ajoutons que Guèvremont, dans cette dernière année du téléroman, mit en scène non pas une mais deux filles-mères. Marie-Didace, l'héroïne principale du téléroman, disparaît en effet mystérieusement. Le lecteur d'aujourd'hui—comme le téléspectateur d'hier—met toutefois quelque temps à s'en rendre compte, car sa mère adoptive, Angélina, donne épisodiquement des nouvelles de Marie-Didace, qui refuserait de sortir de sa chambre. On finit cependant par deviner que c'est Angélina qui l'a enfermée et le secret de cette disparition finit par être révélé : Marie-Didace est folle. On apprend cependant, à la dernière émission, le 23 juin 1960, qu'un secret peut en cacher un autre :

ODI Veux-tu l'savoir de quoi c'est que le monde va penser? Il va finir par penser que Marie-Didace est pas folle. Mais … que (HÉSITE) v'là trois mois, quatre mois, que tu la tiens enfermée?
ANG J'ai pas compté.
ODI On va penser que … Marie-Didace a fêté Pâques avant les rameaux.
ANGÉLINA VA SE LAISSER TOMBER DANS SA CHAISE.
ANG (CRI) Non! Assez … assez … assez … par pitié …
(Guèvremont, Le Survenant, Téléroman, 22-06-1960, 21)

L'expression *fêter Pâques avant les rameaux*, on l'aura deviné, signifie « avoir des relations sexuelles avant le mariage ». Angélina, loin de nier la chose, semble en avoir elle-même la révélation :

ANG (COMME ASSOMMÉE) … fêté Pâques avant les rameaux. (RENVERSE LA TÊTE) Mais … avec qui? (FERME LES YEUX) Avec qui, mon Dieu?
(Guèvremont, Le Survenant, Téléroman, 22-06-1960, 21)

La nouvelle tue d'ailleurs littéralement Angélina, qui ne se relèvera plus. On comprend d'ailleurs, à demi-mot, qu'elle craint que Marie-Didace ait été mise enceinte par le Survenant. Toutes ces révélations métamorphosent le Chenal du Moine.

Le secret

D'un point de vue rhétorique, le secret est une stratégie qui consiste à suggérer sans dire. Le secret de Manouche, l'entrevue avec Rossignol le montre, fut ainsi ourdi de longue date, tissé d'innombrables allusions et indices que la révélation devait à la fois conclure et pleinement mettre en lumière. Le secret joue d'ailleurs un rôle important dans le téléroman (et dans la paralittérature en général) : il aiguise la curiosité des spectateurs et contribue au suspens. L'une des caractéristiques du cycle est justement de combiner le plaisir de l'achèvement du volume et celui de l'inachèvement de l'ensemble (Besson 110).

Le secret participe à ce jeu, car s'il est vecteur d'inachèvement (quelque chose manque littéralement à la compréhension de l'intrigue), sa révélation sera un moment fort de l'achèvement. La satisfaction éprouvée par le téléspectateur devant la révélation du secret sera proportionnelle à la durée du secret, mais également au nombre de « trous » que la révélation viendra remplir dans la trame narrative. Le dévoilement constitue ainsi le point de départ d'une relecture et d'une réinterprétation de l'ensemble du récit. La révélation du secret de Manouche renouvelle ainsi le Cycle du Survenant dont la trame narrative doit être réinterprétée.

La première censure de l'épisode prolongea la période latente du secret. On connaît la légende du roi Midas dont le secret, confié par son barbier à un trou dans le sol, sera révélé par le murmure des roseaux bruissant au vent. La censure put supprimer la révélation du secret de Manouche, mais fut incapable d'empêcher le texte de le murmurer. L'univers de Guèvremont, au terme du téléroman, n'est toutefois pas purgé du secret, car le secret engendre le secret … La double révélation induit une série de questions : qu'est-ce qui est vrai, qu'est-ce qui est faux? Quand commence le secret? Le Cycle du Survenant en entier, à bien tendre l'oreille, murmure, et dès *En pleine terre*, le secret de Manouche.

Alphonsine

La naissance de Marie-Didace, dans le roman *Le Survenant*, est nimbée de mystère :

> Elle avait hâte de se retrouver seule avec Amable. Un profond secret les unissait davantage depuis quelque temps : Alphonsine attendait un enfant. Amable avait voulu aussitôt annoncer la nouvelle à son père, mais la jeune femme s'était défendue :
>
> – Non, non, je t'en prie. Gardons ça pour nous deux. Les autres le sauront assez vite.
>
> Devant la grande gêne d'Alphonsine, sorte de fausse honte inexplicable, il avait résolu de se taire aussi longtemps qu'elle le désirerait. (Guèvremont, *Le Survenant* 266)

Ce « profond secret », cette « grande gêne », cette « sorte de fausse honte inexplicable » sont bien étranges et le seront encore davantage dans le second roman, *Marie-Didace*. Grâce à sa grossesse, en effet, Phonsine pourrait avoir le dessus sur l'Acayenne, la rivale qu'elle déteste. Jouant un rôle important dans l'intrigue, le secret qui entoure la grossesse de Phonsine ne sera jamais élucidé. La jeune femme fait tout pour cacher son état : « Phonsine,

s'efforçant de paraître encore plus maigre, abaissa lentement la vue sur son ventre. Non, personne ne pouvait deviner son état de grossesse » (Guèvremont, *Le Survenant* 196). Phonsine, de plus, mange peu et maltraite son corps, allant jusqu'à marcher de Sorel à Sainte-Anne : « Des enfants, à la sortie de l'école de Sainte-Anne de Sorel, trouvèrent Phonsine prostrée contre la clôture » (Guèvremont, *Marie-Didace* 244). Cette marche, d'ailleurs, provoquera un accouchement prématuré.

La grossesse de Phonsine possède de nombreuses caractéristiques associées à la grossesse d'une fille-mère : la honte, le secret, le désir d'avorter. La culpabilité de Phonsine pourrait, certes, expliquer cette réaction. L'enfant n'est-il pas conçu au cours de l'année de la venue du Survenant. Dans le radioroman, le maire Pierre-Côme Provençal explique justement sa phobie des survenants : « J'ai quatre grand'filles. La première qui met les pieds su Didace Beauchemin, j'attendrai pas qu'à vinssît fêter Pâques avant les rameaux . . . j'la tire au fusil[11]. » (Guèvremont, Radioroman *Le Survenant*, 22-10-1962, 6) La crainte de voir des jeunes filles avoir des relations sexuelles avant le mariage s'exprime à plusieurs reprises dans l'œuvre paralittéraire :

> On a une paroisse PROPRE. On n'a pas à ma connaissance parmi [sic] les filles qui ont fauté, qui ont été obligées d'aller se promener en ville, plus longtemps que de coutume. Eh! ben, aussi longtemps que je pourrai la garder propre . . . la paroisse j'la garderai. (Guèvremont, *Le Survenant,* Radioroman, 14-11-1962, 5)

Pourtant, Pierre-Côme l'oublie, une jeune institutrice est précisément allée, dans *En pleine terre,* se promener en ville plus longtemps que de coutume : Alphonsine. Le mariage d'Amable et d'Alphonsine est, d'entrée de jeu, confronté au non-dit. La jeune femme, demandée en mariage, ne répond pas :

> Alphonsine se taisait toujours. Le silence, un grand silence étranger et hostile, élevait entr'eux un mur que chaque seconde alourdissait d'une pierre. Ah! la belle avait bien tenté de lui expliquer ses sentiments tout d'amitié pour lui, puis sa volonté de rester libre un an et de s'engager à Montréal . . . (Guèvremont, *En pleine terre* 13)

Le travail, les études ou les voyages servent fréquemment, à l'époque, à expliquer le départ des mères célibataires parties accoucher à l'extérieur. Pourquoi vouloir « rester libre un an » (et pas deux ou trois)? Pourquoi une institutrice désirerait-elle se faire domestique? Guèvremont, de nouveau, n'explique guère les motivations de la jeune femme. Phonsine disparaît à Montréal à la fin juin et revient le 24 décembre. La jeune femme est transformée : « Phonsine, qu'as-tu fait des roses fraîches de tes joues et de la lumière de ton regard brillant?[12] » (Guèvremont, *En pleine terre* 17)

Le voyage vers la ville revient toutefois dans un roman inédit paru en feuilleton dans la revue *Paysana*, « Tu seras journaliste ». L'héroïne, une jeune institutrice du nom de Caroline Lalande (nom qu'il faut rapprocher d'Alphonsine Ladouceur[13]), quitte son village et l'homme qui la demande en mariage pour se rendre à Montréal afin de devenir écrivaine.

Montréal représente à la fois l'espace du désir et du voyage. Caroline et Phonsine, pour reprendre les termes que Lori Saint-Martin a appliqués à Gabrielle Roy, sont des « prisonnières » échappées et devenues, pour une brève période, des « voyageuses » (Saint-Martin, *La voyageuse et la prisonnière*). Phonsine sera d'ailleurs appelée, dans *En pleine terre*, une survenante. Les voyageuses ont hélas, pour reprendre une expression chère à l'auteure, du plomb dans l'aile : « Mais la réalité, rogneuse d'ailes, lui eut tôt fait savoir que moins rares que les dieux sont les hommes de chair qui exhortent les belles filles à autre chose qu'à la littérature. . . . » (Guèvremont, « Tu seras journaliste » 12) Guèvremont, dans *Marie-Didace*, évoquera également les « offres honteuses » faites à Phonsine derrière des « portes closes » par ses « maîtres hautains » (Guèvremont, *Marie-Didace* 123).

« Tu seras journaliste » débute d'ailleurs par l'évocation d'un autre tabou : Caroline, blessée par la ville, fait une tentative de suicide. Un scandale, on l'a vu, peut cependant en cacher un autre. Guèvremont, décrivant l'accouchement de Phonsine, reprendra ainsi, et presque mot pour mot, sa description de l'agonie de Caroline :

Suicide de Caroline Lalande

> Le mystère approchait. Soudain, des fleurs du papier-tenture surgirent des mains gigantesques qui la soudèrent à son lit en feu, tandis qu'un roulis faisait tanguer les meubles. (Guèvremont, « Tu seras journaliste » 13)

Naissance de Marie-Didace

> Des mains de feu la pétrissaient, la poussaient, l'entraînaient; elles l'abandonnèrent, solitaire, dans la rouge vallée de la maternité. Un cri résonna à travers la maison : le mystère commençait. (Guèvremont, *Marie-Didace* 247)

Ajoutons que la nouvelle « Chauffe, le poêle », qui raconte le voyage de Phonsine à Montréal, débute et se termine le soir du réveillon de Noël, fête de la nativité.

Stéphanie Martin, dans sa thèse de maîtrise, a mis au jour les résonances christiques dans l'œuvre de Guèvremont (*La figure du Christ dans l'oeuvre romanesque de Germaine Guèvremont*, 1991), mais la fascination de la

romancière pour Marie n'a jamais été soulignée (voir par exemple « Prière »; Guèvremont, *En pleine terre* 35-40). Or, si l'on se fie à la statue imposante sculptée par Louis-Philippe Hébert entre 1888 et 1889, qui se trouvait au niveau du choeur de l'ancienne chapelle de la Miséricorde de Montréal et qui montrait une jeune fille agenouillée devant une Vierge Marie portant l'enfant Jésus[14], on peut imaginer que la mère de tous les hommes représentait un modèle important pour les mères célibataires, en raison de l'idéal de chasteté qu'elle représentait[15], mais peut-être également en raison du fait que Marie, l'Évangile le dit en toutes lettres, aurait été répudiée par Joseph en raison de sa grossesse n'eût été de l'intervention d'un ange. La prière que Manouche adresse à Marie lors de l'épisode de l'aveu rappelle ainsi l'expérience religieuse que vécurent de nombreuses mères célibataires de l'époque. Sa prière, de plus, n'est pas sans évoquer la « Prière de l'indigne » que cite Victorin Germain dans un livre qu'il consacre aux crèches :

> MANOUCHE EST AGENOUILLÉE AU PIED D'UNE STATUE DE NOTRE-DAME DES SEPT-DOULEURS … TRÈS PIEUSE … TRÈS FERVENTE …
>
> Notre-Dame des Sept-Douleurs, qui avez conçu par l'opération du Saint-Esprit, obtenez de votre Divin Fils, flagellé, crucifié, couronné d'épines, que le mien m'accepte, pauvre pécheresse. (PAUSE) Je promets de faire le sacrifice de pas garder Dollard tout à moi. Je promets de l'abandonner à son choix …
> (Guèvremont, Téléroman *Le Survenant*, 25 -02-1960, 33)
>
> PRIÈRE DE L'INDIGNE
>
> Je supplie votre miséricorde de l'enlever tout jeune de la terre s'il doit porter en lui le triste héritage des passions qui nous ont perdus
>
> J'accepte de souffrir, j'accepte de mourir pour que mon enfant soit marqué du sceau indélébile des enfants de Dieu
>
> O Vierge Marie, soyez touchée de ma profonde misère et, par votre si puissance médiation, obtenez pour la mère indigne, pour le père égoïste et pour le malheureux enfant, la bénédiction de votre fils, Jésus-Christ
> (Germain, *Allô! Allô! Ici la crèche (plaidoyers et nouvelles)* 99-101)

Angélina Desmarais

Si Alphonsine, la mère biologique de Marie-Didace, est liée à Noël, sa mère adoptive, Angélina Desmarais, est associée à Pâques. Celle-ci, dans le roman *Le Survenant*, vit en effet des Pâques glorieuses lorsqu'elle entend, en sortant de l'église, le rire du Survenant dont elle craignait la disparition. Le rire de Venant est de plus associé par Angélina à la cloche de Sainte-Anne de Sorel, nommée la Pèlerine[16] :

> Ce grand rire! . . . Elle l'entendait encore. Il faisait lever en elle toute une volée d'émoi. Le grand rire clair résonnait de partout, aussi sonore que la Pèlerine, la

cloche de Sainte-Anne-de-Sorel quand le temps est écho.
(Guèvremont, *Le Survenant* 105)

Cette métaphore, le jour de Pâques, s'incarne littéralement alors que le cœur d'Angélina, le rire du Survenant et la Pèlerine battent à l'unisson :

> Tout à coup, elle s'arrêta, éblouie : éblouie et à la fois effrayée de se tromper. Son cœur battait fort contre sa poitrine comme pour s'en échapper et courir au devant du bonheur. Elle le comprima à deux mains et écouta : dans le midi bleu, un grand rire clair se mêlait à la cloche de l'angélus et les deux sonnaient l'allégresse à pleine volée. (Guèvremont, *Le Survenant* 218)

La métaphore de la Pèlerine s'explique avant tout par association de sonorités : le rire est un « homonyme » sonore et rythmique du son de la cloche, mais des allées et venues ont lieu entre le son et le sens. Guèvremont parachève le lien sonore existant entre la cloche et le rire du personnage par le contenu sémantique du nom de la cloche … La Pèlerine appelle son pèlerin et celui-ci est bien le Survenant : « Une fois de plus, l'inlassable pèlerin voyait rutiler dans la coupe d'or le vin illusoire de la route, des grands espaces, des horizons, des lointains inconnus. » (Guèvremont, *Le Survenant* 265) Une homonymie semblable a lieu dans l'épisode de Pâques : la Pèlerine n'y est pas mentionnée, c'est l'angélus qui sonne. À l'association pèlerin-Pèlerine correspond ainsi celle d'Angélina et d'Angélus (ange). La métaphore permet littéralement la rencontre d'Angélina et du Survenant : elle les marie—symboliquement—sur le perron de l'église.

Les cloches occupent une place considérable dans la symbolique de Pâques. Les cloches d'église cessant de sonner du Jeudi saint au Samedi saint, on racontait aux enfants qu'elles s'envolaient—on les représentait donc, graphiquement, avec des ailes—pour aller chercher des friandises, interdites depuis le début du carême (Rodrigue 244). Tenant à la fois de l'ange (angélus) et de la cloche, le pèlerin qu'est le Survenant est une cloche ailée, une cloche de Pâques :

> Il [le Survenant] aperçut Angélina; de sa démarche molle et nonchalante, il s'avança vers elle. Et déboutonnant son mackinaw, il en tira une bonbonnière à moitié déficelée :
>
> – Tiens, la Noire, un cornet de bonbons pour toi! (Guèvremont, *Le Survenant* 219)

Marquant la fin du carême, la fête de Pâques exprimait également les désirs les plus charnels … La bonbonnière possède d'ailleurs de fortes connotations érotiques (le Survenant se déboutonne) tout comme la cloche : celle-ci représente en effet l'union des sexes féminin (la paroi de la cloche est ainsi appelée la « robe » de la cloche) et masculin (le battant). Les Pâques

d'Angélina et du Survenant constituent ainsi une noce sublimée. La cloche, enfin, par sa rondeur, symbolise la maternité. La fête de Pâques, on l'a vu, est justement, chez Guèvremont, associée aux filles-mères par l'expression *fêter Pâques avant les rameaux*. Guèvremont, dans le téléroman, associera d'ailleurs ce souvenir pascal à l'indicible, au secret[17], faisant dire à Angélina : « Y a ben d'autre chose que j'ai pas dit . . . que j'ai jamais dit à âme qui vive . . . Que j'ai plié dans mon cœur pour toujours. » (Guèvremont, Téléroman *Marie-Didace*, 2-04-1959, 2)

Une scène curieuse du téléroman ressort avec beaucoup de relief une fois que l'on sait que Marie-Didace devient fille-mère, soit le dernier voyage de la jeune fille à Sorel pour voir l'homme qu'elle aime, Patrice Braconnier. Angélina ordonne à Marie-Didace de venir la rejoindre avant l'angélus du midi mais celle-ci désobéit :

> Ang Pas déjà l'Angélus … Marie-Didace …
> Curé Commence les premiers mots de l'angélus : « L'ange du Seigneur annonça à Marie … (À COMPLÉTER). »
> (Guèvremont, Téléroman *Le Survenant*, 8-10-1959, p. 23)

La scène peut justement se lire comme une scène d'annonciation. D'autant plus que, dans le même épisode, tout le monde cherche son amant, Patrice Braconnier, mystérieusement disparu.

Angélina est également liée à la cloche de Pâques par sa blessure d'enfance : Angélina boite, ou encore, comme le dit Félicité, l'autre boiteuse de l'œuvre dans la nouvelle autobiographique « À l'eau douce » : « je cloche d'un pied. » (Guèvremont, « À l'eau douce » 76) Selon toute vraisemblance, Félicité exista vraiment et inspira à l'auteure le personnage d'Angélina. Joli-Cœur, le survenant dont s'amourache la vieille fille dans « À l'eau douce », est toutefois un véritable escroc. Lorsque Félicité quitte tout pour l'accompagner à la fin de la nouvelle, Valentine, la mère de la jeune Germaine, surnommée Manouche, souligne la morale de l'histoire :

> Tu vois ce qui arrive aux filles qui écoutent les garçons trompeurs?
>
> Trop jeune pour attacher du prix à la morale, Manouche devait se la rappeler plus tard. Sans toutefois en faire son profit. (Guèvremont, « À l'eau douce » 82)

Angélina Desmarais n'apparaît pas dans *En pleine terre*. Un autre personnage, pourtant, partage son nom : Marie-Ange, jeune fille du Chenal du Moine surnommée l'Ange à Defroi. Marie-Ange est élevée par son père, Defroi, en conformité avec son prénom à la fois angélique et marial : son éducation se résume à « trois choses : croire en Dieu, craindre l'herbe

écartante[18] et mépriser l'argent » (Guèvremont, *En pleine terre* 84). Pourquoi inspirer cette crainte de l'herbe écartante? Pour éviter que Marie-Ange ne s'aventure dans le « marais profond » voisin de la maison. Ce n'est pas seulement le marais, évidemment, mais la réalité même qui menace l'idéalisme fruste de l'univers qu'a construit le père pour son enfant. Mais la réalité, comme il se doit, finit par rejoindre l'Ange :

> Et Marie-Ange grandit dans la pauvreté et la joie jusqu'à ce qu'elle eût seize ans. Un midi, en allant comme à l'ordinaire puiser l'eau à la rivière, elle vit, dans une embarcation à la dérive, un jeune étranger qui lui souriait. Sous la caresse du chaud regard, elle rougit et, sur le chemin du retour, il lui sembla que les oiseaux chantaient un chant nouveau et que le vert du feuillage s'était soudainement attendri. (Guèvremont, *En pleine terre* 85)

Ce seul regard du jeune étranger suffit à provoquer un coup de foudre qui abolira l'univers paternel. À l'âge de la puberté, l'idéal virginal et angélique exprimé par le nom de la jeune fille est vaincu par son humanité : par son corps, ses sens et son sang (« elle rougit »). La fée a soif. L'Ange, habitant un monde réel, ne peut qu'être rebelle et déchu. La première version insistait sur l'aspect angélique de l'étranger :

> Marie-Ange plongea ses yeux dans le regard de l'autre : elle y vit une lueur sans nom. Elle ne se demanda pas comme les bergers, devant l'étoile de Bethléem : « Quel est donc cet astre? », mais en se penchant au-dessus de l'onde, elle comprit pour la première fois qu'elle portait de la beauté. (Guèvremont, « La fille à Defroi » 11)

L'ange visite Marie

Marie-Ange, suite à cette visite, contrevient aux « commandements » paternels : ne craignant plus l'herbe écartante, cessant de mépriser l'argent, elle « gagn[e] le marais » (Guèvremont, *En pleine terre* 86) pour chasser la grenouille et ainsi pouvoir se payer les vêtements qui lui permettront de conquérir le jeune étranger. Le nom d'Angélina Desmarais, renvoie justement à cette transgression. Un moment battu en brèche par la révolte de Marie-Ange, l'idéalisme fait toutefois retour, avec violence : cruellement punie de ses innocentes transgressions, Marie-Ange tombe malade et se met à vomir du sang. La mort de l'Ange est des plus dramatiques : « Un matin, à l'aube, Defroi qui veillait sa fille, perçut un bruit étrange : le glouglou d'une bouteille qui se vide. La mort avait passé et Marie-Ange n'était plus de ce monde. » (Guèvremont, *En pleine terre* 87) La mort par hémorragie, rappelons-le, était la mort la plus fréquente des filles qui se faisaient avorter ou qui tentaient elle-mêmes l'opération. Un curieux sentiment se mêle de plus, à la fin de la nouvelle, au deuil de Defroi, le père de l'Ange : la honte …

> Et depuis, jamais on ne le vit, au cœur de la grand'route, marcher à pleines foulées et porter la fierté comme un roi, la pourpre; mais honteux, à la dérobée, il prenait les chemins creux, mal marchants, solitaires que seules, les bêtes recherchent, et son regard comme rivé à la terre qui garde pour toujours son Ange bien-aimée. (Guèvremont, « La fille à Defroi » 11)

Rien, dans la nouvelle originale, ne permettait d'expliquer cette « sorte de fausse honte inexplicable ». Guèvremont, lors de la parution en volume, ajouta toutefois un passage important :

> Quand les trois fils, noirs, chétifs, peureux comme des lièvres et maraudeurs en plus, virent Marie-Ange endormie à jamais, fanées les violettes de ses yeux, terni l'or de sa chevelure, ils s'approchèrent de Defroi et, d'un cœur lâche et sournois, ils abordèrent leurs tristes racontages. (Guèvremont, *En pleine terre* 88)

Fille-mère / mère-fille

Il convient, en guise de conclusion, d'essayer d'expliquer l'importance de ce thème dans l'imaginaire de l'auteure. Il n'est pas impossible, bien évidemment, que Guèvremont, de près ou de loin, ait été mise en contact avec l'âpre réalité des filles-mères, mais rien, dans ce qu'on connaît de sa biographie—il est vrai fort peu de chose—ne témoigne d'une telle rencontre. Les récits autobiographiques de l'auteure permettent cependant de deviner une longue rêverie enfantine de la jeune Manouche sur le sujet de son origine. L'on rejoint ici la théorie de Marthe Robert selon laquelle le fantasme de l'enfant trouvé ou de l'enfant bâtard serait à la source du métier de romancier. Manouche, nous raconte Guèvremont, était friande de contes mettant en scène « une pauvresse en oripeaux mais belle comme le jour, à la vérité une princesse ravie en bas âge à ses nobles parents par un truand justement puni » (Guèvremont, « À l'eau douce » 76). Le surnom de la jeune fille ne put qu'alimenter ces rêveries d'enfant trouvé[19]. Les Tziganes, objets de tous les fantasmes, avaient notamment la réputation d'être des voleurs d'enfants. Une version plus élaborée de ce fantasme apparaît dans un souvenir autobiographique :

> Un matin je fus réveillé par des éclats de voix; mon arrière-grand'mère qui se querellait avec sa sœur Adèle au sujet de leurs descendants. Ma tante Adèle en parlant de moi disait :
>
> C'est dommage que ta petite-fille ait des yeux de chats. . . .
>
> C'est ainsi que j'appris que je n'étais pas une belle petite fille. J'en éprouvai un cuisant chagrin.
>
> Peu de temps après, ma mère qui ne partageait pas les opinions de ma tante Adèle décida de peindre mon portrait. Loin d'en éprouver du plaisir, j'en ressentis une peine violente, une de ces peines d'enfant qui nous marquent pour la vie. (Guèvremont, « Le tour du village » 10)

Le souvenir se cristallise autour du mot *belle* : « C'est ainsi que j'appris que je n'étais pas une belle petite fille. » L'expression est porteuse d'ambiguïtés, à commencer par le terme *petite fille* qui fait écho à l'injure de la tante (« C'est dommage que ta petite-fille ait des yeux de chats ») et qui introduit, derrière l'adjectif, l'idée d'une parenté reniée, soit le fantasme de ne pas être la petite-fille de ses grands-parents ou, plus précisément, de ne pas être une Labelle. Encore proche du fantasme de l'enfant trouvé, l'imaginaire, dirait-on, cherche une voie vers la version plus « évoluée » du fantasme de l'enfant bâtard (Guèvremont, reniant sa famille maternelle, laisse intact son ascendant paternel). La rêverie sur la fille-mère sera justement l'une de formes principales que prendra le fantasme de l'enfant bâtard chez Guèvremont.

NOTES

1 Selon Besson, qui étudie les cycles et les séries, « le retour d'au moins un personnage ou d'au moins un nom propre p[eu]t être considéré comme la condition *sine qua non* de constitution d'un ensemble. » (Besson 22)

2 Grâce, notamment, au dépôt fait par la Succession Guèvremont des archives personnelles de l'auteure à Bibliothèques et archives Canada (FONDS GERMAINE GUÈVREMONT, LMS 0260, 2004-03).

3 Entrevue téléphonique avec Michèle Rossignol, automne 2002.

4 Est-il besoin d'insister sur l'affinité du peuple Manouche et du Grand-dieu-des-routes. Contre toute attente, une manouche apparaît d'ailleurs dans le roman *Le Survenant* : « Devant le campement de bohémiens, la jeune gipsy, maintenant seule, sourit au Survenant. De ses longs yeux pers, de ses dents blanches, de tout son corps félin, elle l'appelait » (Guèvremont, *Le Survenant* 241). Angélina, dans cette scène, ne peut s'empêcher d'anathématiser la gitane : « Ah! les campions de maquignons! pensa avec mépris Angélina » (241). Campions, maquignons.… Angélina aurait pu ajouter : manouches.

5 Voir par exemple Guèvremont, « Le premier miel » xxi.

6 Entrevue avec Denise Boucher, hiver 2003.

7 Qu'il publia plus tard en livre (voir Pelletier, *Histoire des enfants tristes*).

8 Information prise au Musée des Sœurs de Miséricorde de Montréal, 20 avril 2007. Je remercie Julie Duchesne, la coordonnatrice, pour ses judicieux commentaires.

9 Information prise au Musée des Sœurs de Miséricorde de Montréal, 20 avril 2007.

10 Entrevue avec Maurice Leroux, été 2004.

11 Que vient faire le fusil dans tout cela? C'est que le maire est aussi garde-chasse. Le suborneur, dans l'imagerie paysanne, est associé au braconnier (le verbe *braconner* signifiait d'ailleurs, au Moyen-Âge : « 'avoir les droits du seigneur sur une fille qui se marie,' c'est-à-dire exercer le droit appelé plus tard 'de cuissage' … Il a été repris (1718) pour 'chasser sans en avoir le droit,' cette reprise due à *braconnier* … pouvant succéder à des emplois régionaux plus anciens, et continuer une métaphore sexuelle sur le sens féodal (*braconner sur les terres d'autrui*). D'ailleurs, le sens figuré galant de 'racoler, lever (une femme)' réactive

l'ancien usage médiéval du verbe » (Rey 277). Dans le téléroman, l'amant de Marie-Didace et le père probable de son enfant se nomme justement Patrice Braconnier.

12 La narration, curieusement, n'indique pas à quel personnage il faudrait attribuer cette interrogation.

13 Caroline Lalande est à la fois le double de Phonsine et celui de sa fille Marie-Didace (comme Caroline Lalande, celle-ci devient journalistes à Sorel). Les mères et les filles, chez Guèvremont, s'amalgament. Carol*ine La*lande et Alphons*ine La*douceur doivent d'ailleurs la moitié de leur nom à la mère de Guèvremont, Valent*ine La*belle. Derrière tous ces amalgames mère-fille, ne faut-il pas voir se profiler la créature chimérique qu'est la fille-mère?

14 On retrouve également une peinture du même sujet au Musée des Sœurs de Miséricorde de Montréal. La jeune femme de la statue représente-t-elle une mère célibataire? Compte tenu de l'endroit où se trouve la statue, il me semble à tout le moins justifié de dire que cette sculpture suggérait aux jeunes mères célibataires de s'identifier avec la jeune femme agenouillée.

15 De même, Marie-Madeleine, la courtisane repentie, était l'objet d'une dévotion particulière chez les Soeurs de la Miséricorde. Certaines des mères célibataires, en effet, choisissant de devenir religieuses, entraient dans l'Association des Filles de Ste-Madeleine, devenaient des Madeleines (Musée des Sœurs de Miséricorde, Montréal, 20 avril 2007).

16 J'ai étudié en détail cette figure dans : « Résonances. Interfiguralité chez G. Guèvremont », Annette Hayward 315-33.

17 Comment ne pas citer le début du poème « Les cloches » d'Apollinaire, qui met en scène une fille-mère mise enceinte par un Manouche : « Mon beau tzigane mon amant / Écoute les cloches qui sonnent / Nous nous aimions éperdument / Croyant n'être vus de personne / Mais nous étions bien mal cachés / Toutes les cloches à la ronde / Nous ont vus du haut des clochers / Et le disent à tout le monde » (Apollinaire, « Les cloches » 98).

18 « Sitôt que les petits enfants seuls passent là où elle pousse, la mauvaise herbe leur monte aux yeux, les aveugle, et plus jamais ils ne retrouvent le chemin de la maison. » (Guèvremont, *En pleine terre* 84)

19 Guèvremont garda d'ailleurs toute sa vie un fort goût pour l'usage des pseudonymes (par example : Jeanrhêve, La Passante, La femme du Postillon).

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Michelle Elrick

256 Paper Machine

Machine work packs the hours into cartons
a dozen at a time, six to six
sometimes sunrise looks a lot like sunset
and the hour on the punch clock is no help

The windows are meant to remind us
which shift is day, which shift is night
by the colour of the light out there,
blue or butter yellow

We take our turns at the window, staring
at the cottonwood grove across the river
noting the casual sway and flickering leaves
when the wind combs through

After sundown, the night is heady perfume
I press my face against the screen
listen under the factory roar and clatter
for birds

The thin wire gives a little
against the weight of my face, nose and lips
make marks in the dust, caught
like ordinary white moths biding their time

Colin Hill

Canadian Bookman and the Origins of Modern Realism in English-Canadian Fiction

Canadian fiction was transformed with the emergence of a dynamic, experimental, and polemical modern-realist movement in the 1920s. Authors, critics, readers, and publishers of the period greeted this movement with marked enthusiasm, and heralded it as an indisputable and long-sought revolutionary break with outmoded aesthetics, including both romanticism, still the dominant mode of Canadian fiction in 1920, and the European nineteenth-century realism that had been exerting sporadic influence in Canada since about 1850. While the emergence of modern realism is among the most significant events in the early development of Canadian fiction, it has rarely been granted more than passing critical attention. This neglect may in part be the result of the uneven attention Canada's literary histories have paid to the two formative little magazines of the 1920s: *The Canadian Forum* and *Canadian Bookman*. While these literary histories often praise the *Forum* for its intellectual rigour and cosmopolitanism, the *Bookman* is almost always dismissed as uncritical and backward looking. Sandra Djwa argues, for example, that the *Forum* "provided the only forum for critical discussion of modernism in general," and "became the first modern Canadian magazine," regardless that it began publication a year after the *Bookman* (7, 9). Mary Vipond's "The Canadian Authors' Association in the 1920s: A Case Study in Cultural Nationalism" sums up the popular view of the relationship between these two journals, arguing that "the *Forum*, although committed to fostering Canadian culture, always insisted as well that they sponsored objective criticism," and that this contrasts with the "boosterism" of the CAA and its house organs, including the *Bookman* (74).

These and other critics are certainly correct to assert that the *Forum* played a central role in the development of modernist Canadian poetry. I wish, however, to challenge conventional appraisals of the *Canadian Bookman* and reveal that this eclectic little magazine was the site of a crucial and now forgotten debate about modern Canadian fiction. This debate indicates that the realist strain of Canadian fiction from the 1920s until after mid-century was not a belated, derivative, inconsistent, and largely insignificant response to nineteenth-century European and American movements. Rather, it was a spiritedly contested experimental and modern movement whose participants had coherent aesthetic principles and a strong belief that the form of realism they advocated was modernizing Canadian fiction. James Mulvihill, in "The 'Canadian Bookman' and Literary Nationalism," contrasts the *Bookman* to the *Forum* and concludes that the former is "certainly . . . not a modernist organ" (51). Yet the debates in the *Bookman* of the 1920s reveal that Canada's modern realists considered themselves part of the international phenomenon retrospectively termed modernism, and that, in Canada at least, literary modernism and realism are neither opposed nor conflicting aesthetics. Such a reconfiguration of literary aesthetics in interwar Canada accords with recent work by Glenn Willmott who, in *Unreal Country: Modernity in the Canadian Novel in English*, negotiates the labyrinth of "isms"—realism, romanticism, naturalism, modernism—that is early twentieth-century Canadian fiction, and reveals that the standard definitions of these loaded terms do not easily apply in the Canadian context. Most importantly, the *Bookman* debates of the 1920s about modern realism demand a new understanding of Canadian literary history. Contrary to most interpretations, the *Forum* was not the sole champion of new and experimental Canadian writing in the 1920s; the *Forum* advocated a "cosmopolitan" modernist poetry but ignored Canadian fiction. Even before the *Forum* began publication, contributors to *Canadian Bookman* concerned themselves with the creation of a modern-realist Canadian fiction that was contemporary, innovative, "homegrown," with important affinities with international modernist forms.

Canadian Bookman published its first issue in January 1919 under the general editorship of B.K. Sandwell,[1] and appeared regularly until 1939—with the exception of a few issues that did not appear in 1937—when it merged with the official publication of the Canadian Authors Association, *The Canadian Author*, to form *The Canadian Author and Bookman.* Very shortly after its inception, the magazine became an object of derision for writers and critics who felt it exemplified and encouraged the worst tendencies in

Canadian writing.[2] The reprobation of the *Bookman* has been persistent, and seems to derive primarily from the fact that it was, for a very brief period from 1921-22, an official publication of the Canadian Authors Association, which was much maligned in the 1920s by the group of modernists clustered around *The Canadian Forum*.[3] The CAA did not emerge as an organization devoted to the high and international critical standards that the *Forum* contributors sought, but rather as "a trades guild for Canadian writers, to protect them *vis-à-vis* the other interests involved in the publishing business . . ." (Vipond 69-70). When the *Bookman* became affiliated with the CAA, "the policy of the magazine was adapted to the needs of that essentially conservative and professional oriented organization, resorting in the twenties to a noisy boosterism that favoured quantity over quality and patriotism over literary worth. Deservedly or not, the reputation of both the Association and its house organs has suffered from this stigma ever since" (Francis 458). *Canadian Bookman*, a vocal, prolific, and visible supporter of Canadian publishers, became synonymous with the CAA and an easy mark for critics and writers with all sorts of complaints about Canadian writing: its low critical standards, nationalism, social conservatism, commercialization, regionalism, prudishness, ignorance of foreign writing, not to mention the proliferation of fiction by women. But, while the *Bookman* is "guilty" of all of these "affronts" to some degree, as Mulvihill suggests, many of these critics "had as their immediate target the Canadian Authors Association and to some extent the *Bookman* was simply caught in the crossfire" (51).[4]

Whatever the value of these often overstated and persistently echoed criticisms of the *Bookman* as a whole, a small group of the magazine's most serious and thoughtful contributors directed Canada's nationalistic impulse in a more serious and literary direction and changed the course of Canadian literary development profoundly. They advanced a new modern-realist fiction that in just about every way imaginable was unlike the romantic, conservative and uncritical forms of fiction that the magazine is infamous for endorsing. They considered modern realism to be fully engaged in the contemporary moment, socially conscious and often progressive, frequently anti-nationalistic and critical of accepted "values," technically radical by Canadian standards of the period, profoundly concerned with human psychology, and as thematically modern as any but the most radical works of high modernism. A series of articles published in the *Bookman* in the 1920s spoke in the language of the manifesto as they established a sense of urgency about Canada's need for modern writing and offered initial definitions of the

new modern realism and its characteristics. This effort was reflected in many of the book reviews that the *Bookman* printed from the early 1920s through to its amalgamation with *The Canadian Author* in 1939. Although the essential works of modern-realist fiction would not be published in the *Bookman* (which published very little creative work), the magazine's series of manifestos for a modern realism would have a wide-ranging and formative impact on Canadian literature for decades to come.[5]

The *Bookman*'s unsigned prospectus, which appeared near the beginning of the inaugural January 1919 issue, revealed that the magazine considered itself a revolutionary force in Canadian literature, and sought to oppose status-quo literary values with a new, modern form of realistic writing. Like other innovative modes of expression, including most of the movements that collectively make up literary modernism, modern realism began with a manifesto, or a "testimony of a historical present tense spoken in the impassioned voice of its participants. The manifesto declares a position; the manifesto refuses dialogue or discussion; the manifesto fosters antagonism and scorns conciliation. It is univocal, unilateral, single-minded" (Lyon 9). The *Bookman*'s first manifesto, "The New Era," firmly establishes the magazine in the "historical present" and declares boldly that "[t]he first issue of the new *Canadian Bookman* appears at a moment which happens also to mark the beginning of a new era in the history of mankind, and, very particularly, in the history of Canada" (1). It demonstrates the "antagonism" of the modernist manifesto, clearly refusing any "conciliation" between the obsolete past and the new era it is initiating: "we stand today, along with the other great nations of a purified world, at the beginning of a new era which will certainly be vastly different from both the era of force and the era of materialism which preceded it" (1). While the prospectus is certainly making reference to the sense of a new national era dawning in the wake of the Great War, it defines this era specifically in cultural and literary terms, and places the *Bookman* by implication at the centre of a Canadian literary coming-of-age that will contrast favourably with a materialistic era that culminated in war: "it will be in one respect an era of ideas, an era of profound and general thought . . . [I]f this era is to be an era of ideas, it follows that it is also to be an era of books, since books are the one great medium through which ideas of [sic] communicated and perpetuated. . . . The *Canadian Bookman* itself is one of the phenomena of the new era" (1). This sense of the arrival of a "new era" is found everywhere in the pages of the magazine: it is the only magazine of the 1920s to regularly publish reviews of new works of Canadian

fiction, it speaks out on most of the pressing cultural issues of the day, and it shows a strong interest in the social and political development of Canada.

The *Bookman*'s prospectus also "declares a position" in support of a new form of modern writing worthy of this "new era": the new books will not be "the merely sentimental, narcotic, idea-less books, miscalled books of the imagination, which have formed the literary food of too many of us who did not wish to be bothered with ideas" (1). While this first manifesto would not define the new writing specifically in terms of the modern realism it would shortly advocate, it hinted at the nature of this new fiction and called for

> real books, containing real ideas about the important things of life, whether expressed in the form of fiction, or of religion, or of philosophy, or of poetry, or of history, or of science in the broader and deeper sense of the word. It was this conviction, of the coming of an era of ideas and of books, which was strong in the minds of the founders of the new *Canadian Bookman* and which led them to select the present as an appropriate time. (1)

The leap from a call for "real books" and "real ideas about the important things of life" to demanding a literary realism up to the task of exploring the modern world was subsequently made in short order, and over the next few months and years numerous authors and critics weighed in on the subject, defining and refining the modern-realist form. These contributors—including Frederick Philip Grove, Raymond Knister, Robert J.C. Stead, Lorne Pierce, Lawren Harris, Georges Bugnet, Beaumont S. Cornell, Marcus Adeney, Lionel Stevenson, among others—were diverse in their writerly and ideological dispositions. While all of them advocated a modern form of Canadian realism, they were not wholly in agreement about its specific aims or aesthetic properties, and the spirited disagreement that often enlivened their exchanges suggests that the *Bookman* of the period was a site of ideological and aesthetic contestation in the best modernist sense.

Although the *Bookman*'s 1919 prospectus might be called a manifesto for a new and distinct literature, the magazine is best read as a series of small manifestos that, in their totality, offer a passionate and persistent call for a Canadian modern realism, enumerate its characteristics, and offer critical commentary on the first exemplary creative works as they emerged across Canada in the 1920s.[6] The enthusiastic and urgent spirit of the prospectus would carry on unabated in virtually every aspect of the *Bookman* until the arrival of the 1930s and the scaling back both of nationalistic pride in Canada in general, and in the size and format of the magazine itself. While this enthusiasm would often translate into the celebratory attitudes and

expressions mentioned earlier, it would also lead a number of individuals, in numerous articles published in the magazine, to turn their attention seriously to the task of determining exactly what was wrong with Canadian literature, and what writers and critics needed to do to bring it into the modern era. Their solution, in short, was for writers to engage the contemporary world with their fiction, and for critics to advocate a new realist aesthetic against what would prove to be considerable odds.

The first significant *Bookman* article to follow the prospectus and call for a modern realism was J.M. Gibbon's "The Coming Canadian Novel," published in July 1919. Gibbon, after praising both English and American literature for veracious "observation of contemporary or recent life," laments the lack of a similar quality in Canadian fiction, revealing that, from the start, there were important *Bookman* critics interested in looking judiciously at the national literature and directing it toward realism: "the novel should realistically reflect contemporary life. . . . There has been no memorable picture in fiction of either Montreal or Toronto, for instance, although Montreal has a population almost as large as Boston, and Toronto is no mean city" (13-14). The premise of Gibbon's article is relatively straightforward, and he states concretely what many of the anticipators of Canadian modern realism had been saying in approximate terms all along. But the shifting of focus to the "contemporary" setting distinguishes this new attitude from that of many earlier writers who believed that while Canadian writing ought to be about Canada, this writing could as easily be romantic as realist. Gibbon also suggests that the new realism will render the contemporary Canadian subject matter in a style of writing that is both creative and documentary: "wherever in the modern world there is activity, there is the creative and imaginative reporter" (14-15). Gibbon even anticipates the proliferation of Canadian social-realist novels of the 1930s and 1940s—including Callaghan's *Such Is My Beloved*, *They Shall Inherit the Earth*, *More Joy in Heaven*, Irene Baird's *Waste Heritage*, and Gwethalyn Graham's *Earth and High Heaven*—when he argues that the new realism ought to reflect a contemporary environment because of its social importance: "the host of English realists from Dickens to the present day are such creative reporters, voicing the problems and the spirit of a century of social turmoil and upheaval" (15). It is important to emphasize that Gibbon is *not* acting as a "booster" of the Canadian fiction that already exists: he advocates a new, modern fiction that he hopes will emerge. His discussion, in fact, laments the absence of a flourishing modern realism in Canadian literature: "the Englishman who looked for a representative picture

of Canadian life in the Canadian novel would be disappointed" (14). Gibbon echoes the revolutionary tone of the *Bookman*'s prospectus, and frames his own article as a manifesto, by closing with a prophetic summons for modern realists to appear on the Canadian literary scene and describe the contemporary Canadian "spirit" as Gorki and Balzac did for Russia and France in their own periods: "Canada is still waiting—but will not have to wait long—for her prophet—or more likely her group of prophets who shall interpret her many-sided, but always vigorous, life to her own people and to the Nations who have accepted her as Come of Age" (15). Gibbon's article, though still cloaked in the rhetoric of romantic nationalism and celebration of the Canadian spirit, takes the important step of redirecting the "boosterish" impulse away from an uncritical celebration of Canadian literature as it is, toward a confident and enthusiastic advocacy of what it might be, should the modern-realist moment come to pass. Interestingly, Gibbon is also looking beyond Canada's borders for modern influences, much as the *Forum* contributors who assailed the *Bookman* were doing at the same period in their discussions of the new Canadian poetry.

While Gibbon defines Canadian modern realism largely in terms of its documentary properties, other 1920s contributors to the *Bookman* would define this aesthetic in more complex and exacting terms. One of the first Canadian critics to argue that the new writing in Canada ought to do more than simply and accurately reflect a Canadian environment or society was Beaumont S. Cornell, writing in "The Essential Training of the Novelist," which appeared in June 1921. Cornell, himself the author of two novels of the period—*Renaissance* (1922) and a realist novel set in Ontario, *Lantern Marsh* (1923)—vigorously argues that the new writing in Canada must supplement its documentary impulse with philosophical and psychological interpretation. Cornell argues that literature ought "to be an exponent of life's meaning," and that this requires a movement beyond "the boring, even distressing, facts of actual existence" (46). Cornell concedes that the novel is essentially a realistic form of expression—"[t]he novel is tied up inseparably with actuality. It is the next thing to reality because it is always an estimate of human life"—but adds that higher forms of literature require a "subjective" interpretation of the world to supplement an "objective" rendering of reality:

> The noblest intention of fiction, then, is to interpret life; and since this requires much more than a skilful pen, the essential training of the novelist begins when he commences to observe life reflectively. . . . He must appraise, compare, judge, select, emphasize—in short interpret . . . for he is dealing with the great objective

> reality. . . . It is not sufficient that he should be a reporter, standing aloof, coldly observing the pageant of existence. . . . (46)

While Cornell's argument that literature ought to strive to be "subjective" appears unnecessary, even foolish, by contemporary critical standards, his suggestion that "objective" writing is already, in 1921, becoming the default style for modern Canadian writing—the *Bookman* had already praised the realism of novels by Robert J.C. Stead, Douglas Durkin, and Arthur Stringer—gives a clear indication of the quick pace of change in Canadian literary circles of the period. More importantly, Cornell is beginning to define the "modern" component of Canadian realism. Contrary to a popular interpretation, Canadian writers of the 1920s were not engaged in the unproblematic transplantation of a nineteenth-century realist aesthetic into a Canadian milieu. While more precise definitions of the modern and interpretive component of realism would be articulated by later critics, Cornell is, however dimly, highlighting a problem with nineteenth-century realism that led to some of the more experimental high-modernist techniques. While neither Cornell's article nor his own novels explicitly advocate or exhibit the subjective techniques of modernist innovation—which include multiple and unreliable narration, stream of consciousness, and a psychological emphasis—his argument problematizes realism in the Canadian context, and demands that it do more than document and reflect. And the discomfort that Cornell expresses with writing that is "engaged simply in 'holding up the mirror to nature'" is loudly echoed in the writings of the important modern realists who would follow and explore this problem much more rigorously and exhaustively.

A more precise definition of the new modern realism and its characteristics would begin to take shape with the publication of Adrian MacDonald's article, "English Realism to a Canadian," in September 1922. MacDonald draws some important contrasts between Canadian realism, and the form and spirit of realism in the European, or essentially English, traditions. MacDonald's musings on the English novel touch upon a number of concepts of relevance to the development of modern realism in Canada. The most crucial of these observations is that, on some level at least, the new modern realism is essentially incompatible with an idealistic nationalism. In reviewing his selection of European high-realist fictions, MacDonald remarks that these novels "recount not the vain successes of men, but their failures," and that "[a]ll this dismal sense of failure is quite foreign to the optimistic spirit of our dominion. We Canadians are born with the

conviction that . . . there are no limits to what we may accomplish" (234). Building upon Gibbon's assertion that the new modern realism ought to explore primarily the contemporary world, MacDonald suggests that to do just this will mean extending the scope of the Canadian novel beyond those areas of life, contemporary or otherwise, that can be easily idealized, idyllized, and celebrated. This would be the realization behind an essential shift in the mindset of Canadian writers as modern realism began to proliferate in the later 1920s and 1930s. One need only compare romantic prairie novels written in the 1910s and early 1920s—Stead's *The Homesteaders* (1916) or Ethel Chapman's *God's Green Country* (1922), for example—to their bleaker, more famous, "prairie-realist" counterparts, published later, to find evidence of a shift in writerly disposition.

MacDonald's 1922 article would also enumerate some of the characteristics of modern realism, or, as he called it, "the method of the new school" (235). Not surprisingly, a prominent feature of this "method" would be the high-realist's assertion that a writer ought "to be exact in detail" (235). MacDonald also identifies the fictional representation of a "deep sense of the ineffectiveness of man" (234), again emphasizing the need for fiction to cast off its romantic and idealistic sensibilities in a manner reminiscent of European and American Naturalists—Zola, Ibsen, Strindberg, Hardy, Dreiser, Norris, and Crane. On the subject of style, MacDonald advocates a "simple, idiomatic, carefully wrought English" (234), which is the one feature that perhaps most immediately distinguishes Canadian modern-realist fiction, both from its European high-realist counterparts and from most of the very few pre-1920s fictions written in Canada that gesture toward a realist aesthetic, most notably Duncan Campbell Scott's *In the Village of Viger* (1896), Ralph Connor's *The Man From Glengarry* (1901), and Sara Jeannette Duncan's *The Imperialist* (1904). A related aspect of style advocated by MacDonald, and one that would become an almost ubiquitous feature of modern-realist fiction, is a form of narrative "objectivity," at least insofar as this concept is synonymous with an author's attempt to "avoid the appearance of over-conscious artistry" (234) and to support an "appeal to the scientific spirit" (235). MacDonald also defined the new modern realism as having an instructive purpose: "The novel is no longer to be looked upon as the mere amusement of an idle hour, but its covers are to be opened with minds alert for revelations of new truths." He argues that it ought to be actively involved in "criticizing our existing institutions" (235). Such an impulse underlies the didacticism in many social-realist novels in Canada. The most enigmatic

characteristic identified by MacDonald was "psychological realism," though this feature would also rise to prominence in the modern-realist novel and would be one of the chief characteristics distinguishing the early modern-realist fictions of Raymond Knister from the more romantic works that preceded them (235). Finally, MacDonald left no doubt that he believed this new realism ought to be pursued by Canadian writers, and he recalls the earlier manifestos published in the *Bookman* with his assertion that "[a]ny Canadian with a taste for letters will soon find himself reacting favourably to the art of these stories . . . his staple food in the way of fiction will henceforth be novels flavoured with the spirit of realism" (235).

Lorne Pierce would champion the emerging realism from the conservative angle in "Canadian Literature and the National Ideal," which appeared in the *Bookman* in September 1925. Pierce's celebratory tone in praise of the new trend in Canadian literature is easily detectable, and he reveals that in a few short years modern realism has moved beyond its initial phase: "We have happily left behind the times when Canadian literature was supposed to ape the themes and methods of England, and also those hectic days when the proper attitude towards our new school of native letters was one of sheer rhapsody, as noisy as it was uncritical" (143). Among the features of the new writing that elicit Pierce's approval, and, in his view, follow naturally from our "National Ideal," is "Realism," which among other things is defined as follows: "everything crystal clear, and 'facts-is-facts'" (144). Pierce's conservative credentials in both the social and literary realm are evident: he was an influential and long-serving editor of Ryerson Press, a Methodist and later United Church minister, and his landmark anthology, *Our Canadian Literature: Representative Prose and Verse* (1922), co-edited with Albert Durrant Watson, had only recently revealed in its preface an "insistence upon the physical and ethical quality of men and women" (xiv), and offered a view of literature in which "[t]he actual poet is he who presents reality in the beautiful garments of revealing art" (xvii). Displaying his conservative biases in his *Bookman* article, Pierce praises Canadian realism because, despite its proliferation as a literary form, "we have escaped sex, psycho-analysis, and morbid ventures into the dim unknown" (144). And, like many of the other critics who openly advocated a new realism in the pages of the *Bookman*, Pierce would phrase his call for this new literature in the language of the manifesto: "We are at the very beginning of things—not the end. For the rest we need . . . Utter fidelity to the truth . . . A determination to be ourselves" (144). Of course, Pierce's most conservative comments reveal that he was not

advocating the same kind of realism as were most other critics of the day. But they are testimony that the new realism was being noticed by all segments of the Canadian literary world by the mid-1920s. Certainly, modern realism owes some of its success and proliferation as a form because it appealed both to the more radical, innovative segments of the Canadian literary community, who saw it as a modern form that reflected and commented upon a contemporary society in transition, and to a conservative segment of the literary world, that included Lorne Pierce and much of the membership of the Canadian Authors Association, which, except in the very few cases in which "realist" and "sexually explicit" could be conceived as synonymous, felt that realism was an unthreatening form. The conservatives also were attracted to the new realism because it had the potential to offer morally inoffensive sketches of small, local environments: as Vipond writes, "[f]or them, the real roots of the English-Canadian identity lay in its rural and small town past" (73). Furthermore, with its purported fidelity to facts, truth, and scientific principles, realism could be made to seem an antidote to the amoral, relativistic, experimental high-modernist fiction that was making its presence felt through reviews of foreign works in both the *Bookman* and *The Canadian Forum* in the 1920s.

Most of these and other initial *Bookman* articles discuss modern realism in passionate but relatively general terms. They communicate why a new Canadian fiction is needed and offer an overview of the immediate characteristics of the new realism they advocate. While these articles obviously consider the new realism to be "modern," not all of them discuss it in a manner that immediately or obviously suggests its affinities with other forms of modernist literature. Of course, exact boundaries between realisms and modernisms are difficult to draw in any literary tradition, and the Canadian tradition provides no exception. "What makes Canadian realism 'modern'?" is a question that most Canadian critics of the early twentieth century rarely asked and almost never answered directly. Probably, the new modern realism was so unlike the Canadian fiction that preceded it that critics and writers felt no need to question its essential modernity. From a contemporary perspective, however, it appears problematic that Canadians were writing modern realism while dissimilar forms of modernism were being written in other countries. Were Canadians ignorant of modernism? Did they see their modern realism as a national branch or regional application of international modernism? Were such issues of any interest to writers of the period? Certainly, modern realism in Canada is to a degree a hybrid

genre that incorporates techniques commonly associated with both high realism and high modernism, while remaining distinct from both. The literary-historical time line further complicates distinctions—modern realism's rise to preeminence in Canadian prose fiction in the 1920s occurs at a time when the European and American realist traditions had been all but eclipsed by a new generation of innovative high-modernist authors. And a majority of Canadian critics and writers appears not to have perceived that a shift to modernism, in radical terms, was taking place in any literary tradition, Canadian or foreign.

Other articles printed in the *Bookman* of the 1920s begin to answer these questions by articulating what made the new realism "modern," and how it was related to the literatures of other nations. The most articulate and incisive, and certainly one of the most prolific, critics of the new modern realism was Lionel Stevenson. Best known for his critical work *Appraisals of Canadian Literature* (1926), Stevenson was a frequent contributor to the *Bookman* in the mid-1920s, and his articles enumerate many of the key characteristics of modern realism. In "The Fatal Gift," published in the *Bookman* in 1923, Stevenson would echo many of his contemporaries with a call for a more refined and immediate use of language in literature:

> The man who undertakes to write to-day has too many words at his command. Impressive words and whole glib phrases are stored profusely in his memory and transfer themselves thence on to paper with scarcely an effort of the intellect . . . If our language is to be vitalized, it must first be condensed. (236)

Here, Stevenson draws an important contrast between the modern-realist novel and both the European novel of the nineteenth century, and the early twentieth-century Canadian novel. The form of writing that Stevenson favours contrasts with the verbose, philosophical, expansive novels of George Eliot, Dickens, Thackeray, or Canada's Sara Jeannette Duncan. Stevenson argues for a language that exhibits "extreme simplicity. Every word is brief and entirely familiar; not a phrase is distorted or far-fetched" (235). The sort of unencumbered, direct writing that Stevenson advocates here is not unlike the less-experimental strain of modernist prose—perhaps best exemplified by writers such as Ernest Hemingway, Jean Rhys, Robert McAlmon, and Sherwood Anderson—that would have an important impact on so many Canadian writers, including Knister, Callaghan, and to a lesser extent MacLennan.

Stevenson believed this new style, and the realism that it both reflected and facilitated, to be inarguably modern. In "The Outlook for Canadian Fiction,"

which was published in the *Bookman* in July 1924, Stevenson concedes "the most beautiful prose written in Canada" to the romantic novelists writing around the turn of the century (158). The modern writing, or "new impulse," he celebrates involves a rejection of "beautiful" words in favour of a "harshness that is loosely termed realism" (158). The new, and even revolutionary, direct style Stevenson endorses involves more than a refinement of language; it involves an exacting and realistic treatment of its subject matter: "the tradition is no longer satisfactory. Almost without exception, the note-worthy new novels show a determined effort toward more serious treatment of life" (158). The realist aesthetic, then, is both new and experimental, but Stevenson is hardly celebrating experiment for its own sake. To him, and to so many Canadian writers and critics of the period who expressed similar views less articulately, realism was both new and very familiar, and as such it embodied a complex but workable contradiction. Modern realism represented an unmistakable break from the literary style that preceded it. Yet it did so by offering a representation, not of the new and uncharted high-modernist terrain of the unconscious, or of the obscure and *outré*, or of the spiritual and symbolic, but rather of something that was very well-known, albeit under-represented to Canadian writers: the familiar, actual conditions of Canadian life.

In his enigmatic 1927 article, "Is Canadian Poetry Modern?" Stevenson takes his call for a national literature to a new level, and in the process offers a view of what makes Canadian realism modern that is broadly in line with the working definitions of other critics and writers. Stevenson begins by showing contempt for the most experimental high-modernist writings: speaking of Gertrude Stein's work, he remarks, "In such cases 'modernity' consists in a startling extreme of a current fashion, sweeping into temporary notoriety by ostentatious novelty, making an almost physical assault on the sensibilities of the reader" (195). Modernity, to Stevenson, is not located in the experimental, or technical features of a literary work. Yet modernity is an essential and desirable feature of literature: "modernity is the essential characteristic which distinguishes true and permanent literature from mere word-spinning" (195). Where, then, can the essence of a text's modernity be located if not in its technical aspects? Stevenson offers his answer in terms that provide the central tenet of a definition of Canadian modern realism: he insists upon drawing a distinction between "genuine modernity and revolutionary innovation" (196). He argues that modern writers are involved with

> fully interpreting the actual vital spirit of their times, free of outworn conventions and yet avoiding all self-conscious affectation of revolt; their eyes turned neither

> toward the past nor toward the future, but . . . absorbed in the entertaining spectacle of life around them, and their transference of that life into art was immortal because the spark of actual life was in it. . . . there is nothing apologetic or experimental or defiant in the attitude of the true modernists . . . the satisfying effect of utter reality . . . results from the author's complete identification with the immediate subject matter. (196)

Realism, in Stevenson's view, is modern when it is engaged in capturing its contemporary spirit to the fullest degree possible, and this is a revolutionary act: "[d]irect identification with the spirit of any age means necessarily a severance from moribund traditions, even though they are still observed by the majority" (196). Yet literary experiment and technical innovation are neither characteristic nor atypical of the modern; a modern literature is involved in a representation of its contemporary environment by whatever technical means necessary. This view, although rarely articulated by the earliest critics of modern realism, would appear to have been very widely held in Stevenson's day, judging by the number of modern-realist authors that do exactly as Stevenson advocates, and the number of later critics and writers who say more or less the same thing.

Stevenson's observations begin to explain why Canadian realists believed they were creating a modern literature in the 1920s at the same time that high-modernist experiments in the literary magazines seemed, from a contemporary perspective, to be contradicting them. It also begins to explain why so many of the experimental techniques that Canadian writers of the period attempt—Grove's temporal shifts in *The Master of the Mill*, Knister's eclectic handling of multiple points of view in his short stories, the direct "reportage" method of Baird and Callaghan, MacLennan's "kaleidoscopic" technique from his unpublished first novel, and Martha Ostenso's cinematographic realism in *Wild Geese*—do not closely resemble related techniques in high-modernist fictions. The Canadian modern realists are not being self-consciously experimental; they are being modern in the sense that they are attempting to represent their contemporary environment, and for the most ambitious of these writers, this activity leads them to employ new forms that might best be viewed as complementing this realism, rather than dimly reflecting high-modernist methods.

The legacy of the *Canadian Bookman* of the 1920s comprises mainly these and other articles that advocate and define the new modern realism. The *Bookman*'s role in our literary history is crucial: it provided a vital forum where writers and critics could articulate the purposes and tenets of their new aesthetic. Without such a forum, it is difficult to imagine how so many literary

figures of the day might have reached (or discovered) a near-consensus about the essential modernity of their realist form. The *Bookman* invites critics to view Canada's early twentieth-century realism, not as a dim reflection of foreign realisms, but rather as a particular national application of an international and cosmopolitan sensibility, as a loosely coherent pan-national movement that is Canada's contribution to the international collection of movements and aesthetics that constitutes literary modernism. In light of the *Bookman*'s definition and advocacy of modern realism, critics might reexamine the problematic aesthetics of both canonical and marginal writers of the period: Irene Baird, Bertram Brooker, Morley Callaghan, Ethel Chapman, Philip Child, Douglas Durkin, Wilfrid Eggleston, Hubert Evans, Hugh Garner, Gwethalyn Graham, Frederick Philip Grove, Raymond Knister, Vera Lysenko, Hugh MacLennan, Joyce Marshall, Edward McCourt, Thomas Murtha, Martha Ostenso, Len Peterson, Sinclair Ross, Jessie Georgina Sime, Robert J.C. Stead, A.M. Stephen, Arthur Stringer, and Christine Van Der Mark, among others. Furthermore, the neglect of the *Canadian Bookman* and its advocacy of modern realism has had a significant impact on conceptions of Canadian literature as a whole. If Canada's modern realism did not arise from an aesthetic debate that involved numerous writers and critics, then it becomes possible to view early twentieth-century authors through a popular stereotype, and they become isolated, idiosyncratic, and ignorant of the work of other writers from Canada and beyond. If the realism of Canada's writers is not a deliberate aesthetic choice, it becomes possible to locate its origins in deterministic geographical forces that override individual artistic agency with an inescapable mimetic realism. Without a modern-realist fiction that grows out of a national debate, in a national magazine, with creative advocates from all parts of Canada, realism can seem an inevitable mode for writers engaged in regionalist projects; in the regionalist paradigm, realism is associated with mimesis and rural representation, and ceases to be a cosmopolitan and modern, even experimental, form of writing. The *Canadian Bookman* and its debate about modern realism invite a reexamination of some of the fundamental conceptions of Canada's literary development, and the suppositions at the foundation of many of Canada's enduring critical practices.

NOTES

1 B.K. Sandwell was a journalist and McGill University lecturer, and would become one of the founders of the Canadian Authors Association, and a contributor of informal essays on Canadian culture to *Saturday Night*, which he edited from 1932-51.

2 An unsigned opening editorial published in *The Canadian Forum* in May 1921 criticized the *Bookman*: "Bad reviewing and cheap advertising of literature are just as injurious to high ideals as bad legislation and they are harder to control" (230). A.J.M. Smith expressed his negative opinion of the *Bookman* poignantly in a 1927 letter to Raymond Knister: "it seems to me that before Canada can have a modern and individual literature our critical standards must be thoroughly overhauled and some counter irritant provided to offset the traditional gentility of journals like The Canadian Bookman [sic] . . . which [is] vitiating public taste and distorting literary values" (Burke, "Some Annotated Letters" 122).

3 The *Bookman* was not initially affiliated with any organization. After the founding of the CAA in 1921, the *Bookman* served as its official organ from June 1921 to December 1922, after which Sandwell resigned his editorship, and the *Bookman* and the CAA severed official ties. The size and substance of the magazine remained fairly constant from 1923 to the early 1930s, when issues of the magazine became less frequent and substantial. As Mulvihill writes, "By the mid 1930s a typical number might consist of little more than a lead article followed by sundry short book notices and perhaps some ads. . . . In 1937, frequency became irregular and several numbers simply failed to appear" (57). A brief attempt to restore the magazine to its former glory began in 1938 and continued until lack of support meant the cancellation of the journal after the final issue of Oct./Nov. 1939.

4 For a discussion of 1920s debates about literary values see Vipond and Harrington.

5 E.L. Bobak captures the sense in which realism emerged in the 1920s as a coherent and rebellious movement by suggesting that it met with considerable resistance from a conservative literary culture: "[o]pposition to realism was often extreme" (86). Bobak does not define this movement and considers Canada's realism fundamentally derivative, and proposes that it was transplanted belatedly from abroad: "Realism, an ideal medium for the objective reporting of social phenomena, had still not made its way into Canadian fiction in the early decades of the twentieth century. . . . Even today in Canada, the nineteenth-century realists are exerting fresh influences" (85-86). T.D. MacLulich has looked more closely than any other critic to date at many of the primary sources on realism that have gone unnoticed. He argues that "[t]here are several reasons why modernism took a long time to make its influence felt on Canadian fiction" (88). MacLulich acknowledges the significant place of the *Canadian Bookman* in 1920s literary culture, but suggests that it "defended the milder forms of realistic fiction" (91). While he does draw an important link between "the movement towards realism" and "the arrival of modernism in Canadian fiction," he still positions these forces in adversarial roles, and suggests that Canadian "realism" impeded the arrival of foreign "modernism" to Canada: "our first generation of modernist writers did not venture very far into the more experimental regions of modernist technique. . . . modernism came into Canadian fiction in . . . a tentative and unspectacular fashion" (88-89).

6 There are about three dozen "core" modern-realist novels—including Knister's *White Narcissus* (1929), Ostenso's *Wild Geese* (1925), Grove's *Fruits of the Earth* (1933), Callaghan's *They Shall Inherit the Earth* (1935), and MacLennan's *Two Solitudes* (1945), to name only the most famous works by the most prominent authors. There are several dozen additional novels that, while not wholly "modern-realist," can be counted as part of the movement. These include multi-generic works that blend modern realism with other modes, including romance (e.g. Stead's *The Homesteaders* [1916]), satire (e.g. MacBeth's *The Land of Afternoon* [1924]), and socialist realism (e.g. Allan's *This Time a Better Earth* [1939]). There are also, among these peripheral modern-realist works, a number of novels that are significant to the movement mainly because they anticipate later modern-realist

works—e.g. Stringer's prairie trilogy (1915-22)—or demonstrate modern-realist writers working in closely related modes—e.g. MacLennan's unpublished modernist novels of the 1930s. I am not suggesting that all of Canada's early twentieth-century realists participated in or were even immediately aware of the debate about modern realism in the *Bookman*. While many writers of the period clearly were, including Knister, Grove, and Callaghan, the debate is perhaps most significant for what it indicates generally about writerly attitudes to realism, and the relation of modernism to realism in Canadian fiction.

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Barry Dempster

Groin

Drop your drawers, doctor-talk, making me
feel like a wardrobe stuffed with wrinkled shirts
and clumps of socks. Inhuman to be
naked here, *Calvin Klein*s twisted around my ankles.
An X-rated cartoon, a bare-assed platypus.
Turns out I'm also swollen lymph glands,
a groin bulging with the need for attention.
It all started with an infected tooth, but that's
not important as I stretch out on the table
like luncheon meat. I'm breeze where breeze
rarely goes, new hands lifting and squeezing,
fingers joined together in a tiny oh. I'm a startled
glow, a testicle pearling with fluorescent light,
surrendering its eggy code of secrecy.
Beyond dirty thoughts, further out than
erections can reach, a strange tenderness
softly prickles, pores exhaling, saggy and sallow
smoothing their entanglements. This *is* human
after all, a scrutiny that only love can muster:
the desire to really know.
I lie there, held, seen, wondered, as we talk
about the marvels and mishaps I've always been.

Lisa M. Gasbarrone

Le chronotope au féminin
Temps, espace et transcendance dans *Les Anciens Canadiens* et *Angéline de Montbrun*

I. Temps, espace et transcendance

Les romans de Philippe Aubert de Gaspé et de Laure Conan sont des ouvrages fondateurs de l'expression littéraire québécoise. Parmi les plus connus de leurs écrits, *Les Anciens Canadiens* de Gaspé et *Angéline de Montbrun* de Conan ont bénéficié—et depuis longtemps—du statut d'ouvrages « classiques », avec tous les avantages et les inconvénients qui s'attachent à cet honneur. L'avantage pour un texte que l'on a jugé classique est très clair : la lecture en est ainsi assurée pour les générations futures. L'inconvénient est pourtant tout aussi évident : l'interprétation d'un ouvrage classique a tendance à se figer de période en période, chaque lecture et relecture fixant ainsi le sens d'une manière qui peut même finir par fausser le texte. Tout en continuant à reconnaître la valeur d'une lecture de Gaspé ou de Conan, on risque de les lire, en tant que classiques, plutôt par habitude, d'une manière irréfléchie ou indifférente, et sans souplesse. L'importance d'une relecture bakhtinienne de ces ouvrages consiste justement en la déstabilisation d'une lecture trop rigide. À travers le concept du chronotope, par exemple, on peut redécouvrir les « surprises » de ces romans et célébrer ainsi les potentialités créatrices et libératrices qui sont au fond du discours dialogique du roman tel que Bakhtine le définit[1].

La relecture des textes de Gaspé et de Conan proposée ici prend donc la théorie bakhtinienne du chronotope comme point de départ. Ce concept d'un temps-espace discursif, figuré et en même temps créé par le roman, est toujours pertinent à l'analyse d'un texte littéraire, puisqu'il joue sur deux dimensions indispensables du récit : la temporalité (*chronos*) d'une part, et

l'espace (*topos*) d'autre part. De quoi s'agit-il dans le roman, après tout, sinon de se situer dans un certain espace afin d'articuler ou de raconter un certain rapport avec le temps? Bakhtine précise sa notion de chronotope dans plusieurs écrits, mais l'élaboration la plus développée de ce concept est sans doute dans son essai « Formes du temps et du chronotope dans le roman »[2]. Dans cet essai, Bakhtine explique que le mot *chronotope* désigne ce qu'il appelle la « fusion » des indicateurs temporels et spatiaux qui changent selon le genre du récit : « Nous appellerons *chronotope*, ce qui se traduit, littéralement, par 'temps-espace', la corrélation essentielle des rapports spatio-temporels, telle qu'elle a été assimilée par la littérature. » (Bakhtine 237) Bakhtine établit par la suite une liste de chronotopes dont les traits caractéristiques sont évidents dans les divers genres du récit qu'il examine : il cite le chronotope de l'idylle, de l'agriculture, du mythe ou de la légende, celui du roman d'aventures, et le chronotope folklorique, entre autres. Chaque genre de récit dont il fait la liste comporte ainsi un ou des chronotope(s) que l'auteur(e) met en jeu, et qui peuvent co-exister, se disputer et même se désavouer dans un seul texte.

Dans cette fusion des temps-espaces, Bakhtine privilégie la dimension temporelle, le temps étant, écrit-il, « le premier principe du chronotope » (239)[3]. Paul Ricœur avance cette notion d'un privilège attribué à la temporalité quand il écrit dans *Temps et récit* que « l'enjeu ultime, c'est le caractère temporel de l'expérience humaine » (Ricœur 17). C'est à travers le récit que le temps devient « visible », selon Bakhtine, et c'est le traitement du temps dans le récit qui donne sa signification à la dimension spatiale qui lui est associée : « l'espace s'intensifie, s'engouffre dans le mouvement du temps, du sujet, de l'histoire » (Bakhtine 237). Comme Ricœur, Bakhtine nous rappelle qu'on ne peut raconter l'expérience humaine qu'à partir du chronotope, ou plutôt à partir *des* chronotope*s* au pluriel, puisque l'on finit toujours par raconter une pluralité de concepts spatio-temporels en combinaisons diverses et parfois surprenantes[4]. L'intérêt de la lecture (ou de la relecture) d'un texte, classique ou autre, réside dans l'articulation, la négociation et la tension entre chronotopes concurrents. Selon Ricœur, qui s'inspire dans *Temps et récit* de sa lecture des *Confessions* de Saint Augustin, cette pluralité vient du fait que nous naviguons toujours entre deux pôles de l'expérience temporelle, entre le temps vécu comme continuité et le temps éprouvé comme rupture[5]. Les chronotopes divergents reflètent ces deux pôles de l'expérience spatio-temporelle, et on trouve dans les récits et les divers genres une variété de résolutions possibles du paradoxe des temps-espaces que l'on éprouve et

que l'écrivain(e) veut évoquer à travers les expériences, les observations et les réflexions de ses personnages.

Dans le contexte de la littérature québécoise du XIX^e^ siècle, on peut identifier au moins deux chronotopes traditionnels et opposés : celui de la campagne et celui de la ville[6]. Dans cette opposition, on retrouve encore des aspects de la réflexion de Ricœur, pour qui les deux extrêmes de l'expérience humaine du temps sont représentés par ce qu'il appelle la « dispersion » et le « rassemblement » (Ricœur 50). Le chronotope de la campagne, comme on le voit bien chez Gaspé et Conan, reflète le désir de la continuité avec un temps passé (rassemblement), alors que le chronotope de la ville met l'accent plutôt sur le changement, sur l'expérience du temps comme évolution mais aussi comme discontinuité ou rupture (dispersion). Si le chronotope de la campagne est un espace qui se veut extratemporel, en dehors de l'ordre historique, le chronotope de la ville représente un espace plutôt menaçant qui est celui de la politique et de l'Histoire. Pour Blanche, l'héroïne des *Anciens Canadiens*, et son disciple Angéline de Montbrun, l'articulation de ce que j'appellerai un chronotope *au féminin* constitue une troisième voie, une critique implicite des deux autres options. L'effort de négocier leur propre rapport au temps et à l'Histoire représente de la part des protagonistes féminins un désir de transcender les chronotopes de l'imaginaire québécois qui ont été, traditionnellement, gouvernés par un discours masculin[7].

II. L'imaginaire des chronotopes québécois

Dans *La Formation de l'imaginaire littéraire québécois*, Maurice Lemire identifie les trois espaces bien connus de la topographie littéraire du Québec—la campagne, la ville et la forêt. Ma lecture se concentre sur les deux premiers (la campagne et la ville), mais il faut s'arrêter un instant sur le troisième, qui est celui de la forêt ou des pays d'en-haut. Ce troisième temps-espace de l'imaginaire québécois est, comme les deux autres, formulé par un discours principalement masculin, mais le chronotope des pays d'en-haut rejoint curieusement le projet de Blanche et d'Angéline. Selon Lemire, la campagne québécoise est le site de la continuité temporelle, l'espace de la « quotidienneté » qui « symbolise avant tout la permanence » (Lemire 47, 52). La ville est justement le contraire : c'est l'espace de l'impermanence. La forêt constitue une troisième voie, un « hors-temps » ou un chronotope à part, où l'explorateur ou le voyageur cherche à réaliser une certaine transcendance de l'ordre temporel normal, que ce soit celui de la campagne ou celui de la ville[8]. Le temps-espace de la forêt désigne ainsi un chronotope

qui, comme le chronotope au féminin, cherche à se libérer des contraintes imposées par le temps cyclique de la tradition (la campagne) et le temps linéaire de l'Histoire (la ville).

Le chronotope de la vie rurale est sans doute le plus « authentique » et le plus stable des chronotopes québécois traditionnels. Il est idéalisé au même degré par Gaspé et Conan, et pour les mêmes raisons, dans leurs textes autrement divergents. Pour ces deux auteurs, la campagne délimite dans l'espace et dans le temps le cœur et l'âme de l'expérience québécoise. Cette vie rurale à l'allure folklorique (Gaspé) ou idyllique (Conan) s'incarne dans la maison seigneuriale de la famille d'Haberville, les anciens Canadiens du titre du roman de Gaspé, et dans le village, la maison et surtout le jardin du bien nommé Valriant où habitent Charles de Montbrun et sa fille Angéline. Il s'agit en chaque instance d'un espace où règnent l'abondance et le rythme cyclique de la nature. C'est le chronotope du folklore ou de l'idylle selon Bakhtine, caractérisé par la répétition cyclique, le retour perpétuel aux origines et l'absence du dynamisme ou du changement en dehors des révolutions cycliques, comme celles qui sont tracées par les saisons ou par le trajet normal d'une vie humaine, et qui rentrent ainsi dans l'ordre de la nature.

Selon Bakhtine, le chronotope de l'idylle manifeste une temporalité caractérisée par « [un] temps cyclique normal, idéalisé, des travaux agricoles, qui s'entrelaçait avec le temps naturel et mythologique » (367). Il ne s'agit pas d'un espace en dehors du temps (comme la forêt), mais d'un espace d'éternel retour aux sources ou aux origines. C'est donc le chronotope du Québec traditionnel, où l'authenticité identitaire est garantie par une expérience temporelle qui n'échappe pas entièrement au temps lui-même, mais qui transcende néanmoins le chronotope ou les chronotopes de la ville. La ville est marquée par le mouvement ou le déplacement (aspect spatial) et par le changement ou la progression (aspect temporel), alors que la campagne est construite comme un lieu où le temps et le mouvement se ralentissent pour devenir presque imperceptibles. Pour Gaspé comme pour Conan, ces deux chronotopes (campagne et ville) constituent des temps-espaces rivaux qu'il faut réconcilier ou—faute d'une réconciliation possible—entre lesquels il faudrait choisir. Ce qui est surprenant chez Blanche et Angéline, c'est qu'elles refusent ce choix imposé de l'extérieur et veulent, par un acte créatif et créateur, concevoir un avenir qui leur est propre.

Le chronotope de la campagne représente l'espace de la tradition. C'est le chronotope qui assure la continuité identitaire, menacé depuis toujours, que ce soit au Québec ou ailleurs, par le chronotope de la ville. Celui-ci

représente la modernité et signale la perte ou la rupture qui s'ensuivent forcément de l'introduction du temps linéaire de l'espace urbain. Le chronotope de la ville constitue ainsi le domaine non seulement de la modernité, mais aussi de l'Histoire. L'Histoire intervient dans *Les Anciens Canadiens* avec la Guerre de Sept Ans et la Conquête qui en résulte; elle intervient dans *Angéline de Montbrun* avec la mort prématurée (et donc en dehors de l'ordre naturel) du père d'Angéline. Ces pertes ou ces ruptures, qui se font écho d'ailleurs (la mort du père rappelant la séparation qui fait du Québec un orphelin comme Angéline), recréent la chute du paradis terrestre, dont le chronotope de la ville constitue précisément le contraire[9]. Alors que la campagne assure la stabilité de la tradition, la ville est le site du changement, du développement, de la négociation et de l'échange. C'est l'endroit où le progrès et son mouvement linéaire l'emportent sur le rythme cyclique, la constance ou la permanence de l'espace rural.

L'opposition de ces deux chronotopes est bien évidente dans la variété de formes narratives employées dans les deux romans. Chez Gaspé, la temporalité du récit change aussitôt que la guerre entre en jeu. Si le début du roman est épisodique et parsemé de récits traditionnels et de sagesse orale et campagnarde, la fin est racontée d'une manière plutôt linéaire. *Les Anciens Canadiens* reflètent ainsi dans la forme narrative de la dernière partie la perte du chronotope folklorique et l'entrée forcée dans le temps-espace de l'Histoire. De même, dans le roman de Conan, le récit passe de la première personne du style épistolaire, une forme plus lyrique et conforme à l'idylle, à la troisième personne du récit linéaire pour raconter d'un point de vue « historique » la mort du père et l'accident qui défigure Angéline. C'est seulement dans la troisième partie que la narration retourne à la première personne pour faire valoir la voix d'Angéline elle-même. Face aux déceptions des autres chronotopes, Angéline écrit à la première personne pour articuler dans ses lettres et dans son journal un projet qui se révèle incertain et hésitant, mais qui voudrait dépasser les limites imposées par le chronotope masculin, que ce soit celui de l'idylle ou celui de l'Histoire. Pour mieux comprendre les contraintes auxquelles Blanche et Angéline s'opposent, il faut remonter à d'autres ouvrages classiques, même féminocentriques, où la fin est prescrite par un scénario masculin. En refusant cette sorte de clôture, les héroïnes de Gaspé et de Conan ne sont pas forcément heureuses, mais elles réussissent à échanger le destin traditionnel réservé aux femmes dans les romans contre la possibilité d'un devenir bakhtinien auquel elles pourraient participer d'une manière active et créative.

III. Le mariage, la mort, ou la résistance féminine

Dans *The Heroine's Text, Readings in the French and English Novel, 1722-1782*, Nancy Miller identifie deux types de dénouements possibles dans le roman féminocentrique du XVIIIe siècle. À la fin du texte euphorique (Miller cite *La Vie de Marianne*), l'héroïne est mariée. À la fin du texte dysphorique (*Manon Lescaut*, par exemple, ou *Les Liaisons dangereuses*), l'héroïne est morte[10]. Le texte euphorique tend vers le chronotope de l'idylle, où le mariage réaffirme une certaine continuité ou une permanence : les générations passent, mais le mariage assure la continuité familiale ainsi que la stabilité identitaire incarnée dans les valeurs et les traditions d'un peuple. Le texte dysphorique insiste plutôt sur la rupture et s'accorde à un chronotope de la perte et de l'absence. La campagne rentre dans l'euphorique, alors que la ville est ou tend à être dysphorique. Pour Gaspé alors, le mariage de Jules, le frère de Blanche, à la fin des *Anciens Canadiens*, un mariage qui relie les communautés française et anglaise dans un geste de réconciliation à la suite de la Conquête, semble autoriser une fin au moins partiellement heureuse ou euphorique.

Le grand obstacle pourtant à un dénouement pleinement euphorique dans *Les Anciens Canadiens*, c'est que le couple (Jules d'Haberville et la « charmante Anglaise » anonyme avec qui il se marie) n'est pas le couple qu'il faut pour bien résoudre l'histoire. Le véritable dénouement ne se réalise pas, parce que la véritable héroïne, Blanche—qui devait épouser Arché, un ancien officier britannique et l'autre héros du roman—choisit de rester célibataire. Il s'agit alors d'une euphorie déplacée, effectuée par le mariage de Jules, mais qui suffit pour autant à récompenser, sinon à racheter pleinement le passage du chronotope des anciens Canadiens à celui des nouveaux. Ces nouveaux Canadiens seront situés fermement dans le temps-espace de l'Histoire et pourront—puisqu'il le faut—s'adapter à la temporalité urbaine. On voit ce même refus du « happy ending » chez Conan, qui va plus loin dans son refus du texte euphorique : Angéline, comme Blanche, rejette le mariage et choisit de rester seule à la fin.

Que faire alors des textes qui ne se rangent facilement ni d'un côté ni de l'autre, des textes où le protagoniste féminin, ayant évité ce que Miller appelle « the ideologically delimited space of an either/or closure », n'est ni marié ni mort à la fin de l'histoire (Miller xi)? Nos deux héroïnes, Blanche et Angéline, rentrent ici dans l'excellente compagnie des femmes comme la princesse de Clèves ou la merveilleuse Zilia des *Lettres d'une Péruvienne*, qui refusent le mariage, refusent le dénouement euphorique et tentent ainsi d'échapper aux exigences du récit masculin[11]. Si le regard rétrospectif sur des romans

féminocentriques révèle de possibles antécédents d'un chronotope au féminin, un regard prospectif révèle aussi la possibilité de disciples. Dans un article sur l'autobiographie féminine au Québec, Mary Jean Green note dans *Les Manuscrits de Pauline Archange* (dont le nom évoque les mêmes associations que les prénoms de Blanche et d'Angéline) « [a] . . . pattern of rejection, resistance, and liberation » qui, pour Marie-Claire Blais, fait partie intégrale de l'expression littéraire de l'expérience féminine (Green 130). Dans *Les Anciens Canadiens*, Blanche prépare la voie du refus et de la résistance, tout en n'allant pas aussi loin qu'Angéline sur le chemin d'une certaine libération.

Blanche d'Haberville est aimée d'Arché, le meilleur ami de son frère Jules. Ce gentil ami de la famille, de qui Blanche tombe amoureuse, devient, malgré lui, l'ennemi de son pays, grâce à l'intervention du temps historique dans le récit. Archibald Cameron de Locheill est l'orphelin d'un père écossais et d'une mère française; il est élevé au Canada par son oncle et, comme son meilleur ami Jules, il est éduqué chez les Jésuites au séminaire de Québec. Quoique catholique et victime lui aussi, historiquement, d'une autre Conquête par le même ennemi (celle de l'Écosse vaincue par les Anglais protestants)[12], Arché reste fidèle à son devoir de sujet britannique et devient officier pendant la guerre. Pour sa part, Blanche est tout aussi amoureuse de lui, mais malgré toutes les réconciliations effectuées à la fin des *Anciens Canadiens*, elle ne peut pas oublier le rôle brutal qu'Arché a dû jouer pendant la guerre. En tant qu'officier britannique, Arché ne peut pas empêcher l'exécution d'un ordre donné par son officier commandant de mettre le feu à la maison seigneuriale des Haberville, qui est alors détruite comme tant d'autres domaines de la vallée du Saint-Laurent. Cette destruction par le feu est le signe le plus explicite de la fin d'une vie idéale et d'une rupture définitive avec un temps folklorique qui ne reviendra plus.

Pour Blanche, malgré son amour pour l'estimable capitaine écossais, Arché représente la souffrance de sa famille, la défaite de son pays et la perte du chronotope de l'idylle qui était la vie rurale des anciens Canadiens. Elle pourra pardonner ses actes à Arché, mais dans un moment révélateur, où elle insiste pour l'appeler « capitaine de Locheill », Blanche lui dit qu'elle ne peut pas oublier les actes du soldat. Elle explique au capitaine que « [c]e serait une ironie bien cruelle que d'allumer le flambeau de l'hyménée aux cendres fumantes de ma malheureuse patrie » (Gaspé 316). Par le refus du mariage avec Arché, Blanche s'établit comme la gardienne de la mémoire de la Nouvelle-France au moment même où celle-ci disparaît. Son sacrifice (s'il en est) se fait par fidélité au passé et à une certaine idée non pas de la France

mais du Québec. Le chronotope des anciens Canadiens survivra en elle dans sa forme la plus pure, et par ce geste Blanche devient l'expression vivante du désir de transcender un ordre temporel pourtant inévitable dans lequel les autres personnages seront récupérés. Elle le fait, en tant que femme, par le seul moyen qui lui est disponible : elle dit « Non ». Angéline fera de même.

Le refus de Blanche contrebalance (et rachète peut-être) le mariage de son frère Jules avec la « charmante Anglaise », un mariage qui signale dans le roman la transition de la défaite, rendue honorable par cette alliance, à un programme pratique de renouvellement de la famille et de la patrie sous le nouveau régime anglais. Lorsqu'elle explique sa décision à son frère, Blanche fait appel aux limites de sa condition féminine : elle n'est pas soldat, dit-elle, et elle ne peut exprimer sa fidélité à son pays autrement que par ses sentiments que Jules et Arché qualifient d'« exaltés » et même de « trop exaltés » (Gaspé 317, 349)[13]. L'amant et le frère finissent pourtant par admirer et honorer la décision de Blanche, qui leur paraît aussi belle, aussi pure que son prénom le suggère : la jeune femme sert en fait de substitut au pavillon blanc qui ne flotte plus au-dessus de la ville de Québec et dont ils regrettent la disparition (Gaspé 326).

Malgré le poids symbolique que porte Blanche à la fin du roman, renforcé par son prénom qui signale (comme celui d'Angéline) sa pureté et son lien à la transcendance spirituelle, elle n'est jamais au centre du roman de Gaspé. Malgré son beau geste, Blanche d'Haberville reste à la périphérie du récit, tandis que le refus d'Angéline—qui est elle-même curieusement marginale au début de sa propre histoire—finit par être le geste définitif du roman qui porte son nom[14]. Blanche sert de précurseur, et son patriotisme d'expression féminine ouvre la voie aux possibilités poursuivies par Conan dans son roman. Par le refus à la fois du mariage et de la mort, du dénouement euphorique et dysphorique pour son héroïne, Laure Conan ouvre un espace romanesque qui vise à dépasser les chronotopes masculins pour en construire un qui serait propre aux femmes[15].

Le mariage heureux enferme la femme dans un espace d'intégration sociale et de bonheur domestique. Si l'homme (comme Jules ou Arché) doit continuer à négocier le chronotope de la ville et de l'espace public, l'épouse peut, pour sa part, recréer au foyer l'espace de la « quotidienneté » ou de la permanence par lequel la ville se réconcilie avec la campagne. De même, quand l'héroïne romanesque meurt à la fin du récit, elle rentre aussi dans l'ordre masculin, et l'instabilité (une forme de « désordre » naturel) que représente une femme qui mène une vie solitaire meurt avec elle. Le mariage aussi bien que la mort ont l'effet de faire taire l'héroïne, en l'enfermant dans le silence soit

du ménage soit du tombeau[16]. Le refus de ces choix alternatifs, par Blanche d'abord et ensuite par Angéline, contribue à ce que Lucie Robert appelle « l'émergence d'une parole féminine autonome, c'est-à-dire d'une parole qui construit son propre point de vue » (Robert 102). C'est ce « propre point de vue » féminin qui s'articule dans le chronotope singulier que Laure Conan construit à travers le dénouement, si triste et si beau, d'*Angéline de Montbrun*.

Il y a au moins trois chronotopes mis en jeu dans *Angéline de Montbrun*, et ils correspondent chacun à la forme narrative particulière utilisée dans chacune des trois parties du récit. Le premier chronotope, raconté dans un échange de lettres, c'est le paradis terrestre de Valriant. Le deuxième, bref et raconté à la troisième personne, c'est celui du temps linéaire qui est aussi celui de la ville ou de l'Histoire. Et le troisième, raconté à la première personne, c'est celui qu'Angéline elle-même veut créer à travers la longue méditation troublée et incertaine de son journal intime qui constitue la troisième et dernière partie du roman. La troisième partie est la plus innovatrice et la plus importante en ce qui concerne l'ouverture d'une parole féminine. C'est surtout dans cette dernière partie que l'on trouve une « affirmation du féminin sur le plan esthéthique » (Robert 102). Cette esthétique féminine exprime une « soif de l'absolu » et révèle une « insatisfaction » des limites de l'univers discursif masculin (Robert 105).

Dans la première partie épistolaire, Angéline se trouve entre deux hommes, son père Charles, qui est veuf, et son futur fiancé Maurice Darville, le frère de son amie Mina. Elle se trouve également partagée entre deux chronotopes, deux visions du temps-espace québécois qui correspondent à l'univers préféré de chaque homme. Charles de Montbrun règne dans l'espace familial et patriarcal, qui « symbolise avant tout la permanence » (Lemire 52). Maurice, qui est avocat, appartient plutôt à la ville, au chronotope urbain où il doit rentrer après l'idylle de son séjour à Valriant. Après quelque hésitation, Montbrun consent à donner sa fille en mariage au jeune homme, mais il s'inquiète du changement que le mariage introduira. Il a moins peur de perdre sa fille que de la voir disparaître dans un domaine qu'il ne peut pas approuver et qu'il trouve menaçant. Montbrun donne sa permission au jeune couple, mais il insiste sur le fait que le futur marié ne devrait pas s'engager dans la politique : « le patriotisme, cette noble fleur, ne se trouve guère dans la politique, cette arène souillée » (Conan 42). « [L']arène souillée » se trouve dans la ville, l'espace où la politique—et avec elle les négociations et les compromis—se fait. C'est pourtant un avenir moderne et urbain que Maurice envisage : il compte poursuivre une carrière d'avocat qui

va l'entraîner dans le domaine public, l'espace du progrès et de l'arbitrage qui représente le chronotope de l'Histoire par excellence. Maurice aime l'espace idyllique de Valriant, incarné pour lui par Angéline, mais il ne choisira pas le chronotope de l'idylle que préfère son futur beau-père.

La division entre les deux hommes et les chronotopes qu'ils représentent sera encore plus évidente après la mort du père, une mort qui signale le début de la fin de l'idylle, la chute du paradis. Et bien sûr, cette chute était inévitable puisque tous les paradis terrestres, y compris celui de Valriant, sont éphémères. Le chronotope de l'idylle, pour Charles autant que pour Maurice, dépendait d'une certaine image d'Angéline, continuellement construite et reconstruite par le père et le fiancé dans les lettres de la première partie. Cette image d'Angéline (dont la voix est absente au début) tourne autour de sa beauté et de son innocence. Comme toute femme dont l'image est chargée d'un tel poids symbolique, Angéline est condamnée par ces deux regards à ne pouvoir que les décevoir, puisqu'elle ne pourra rester ni belle ni innocente. La mort inattendue du père détruit l'illusion du paradis terrestre, surtout pour sa fille. Sans le patriarche, le chronotope de la campagne ne pourra revivre ni en elle ni pour elle, et bientôt après cette mort, l'autre possibilité de fixité ou de permanence, l'amour de son fiancé Maurice, se révèle tout aussi illusoire.

Angéline perd sa beauté à la suite d'un accident qui fait écho à celui de son père, mais dont elle sort défigurée. Maurice veut bien l'épouser, même après sa défiguration. Il ne cache pas pourtant le fait que sa passion, sinon son amour, ne paraît pas avoir survécu à la perte de sa beauté. Malheureuse, incertaine et confuse, surtout au début de la troisième partie, Angéline finit par choisir le chemin difficile de la solitude et d'une certaine fidélité à elle-même. En perdant son père, son fiancé et la beauté si nécessaires au paradis de l'un et de l'autre, Angéline trouve pourtant sa voix. Comme Blanche d'Haberville, elle finit par choisir un espace à part où elle pourra recréer continuellement, à travers l'écriture, le chronotope singulier qui représente, pour elle, la seule forme de liberté et d'expression possible.

Cette troisième partie du roman, où elle cherche à se construire un temps et un espace à part, s'oppose d'une manière frappante à la première partie, où l'on ne trouve que deux lettres, quelques pages, écrites par Angéline elle-même. Il faut attendre la mort de son père et la rupture avec Maurice pour qu'elle puisse s'exprimer pleinement dans son journal. C'est par l'acte d'écrire qu'elle réalise une certaine liberté ou une autonomie, chemin déjà indiqué par Blanche dans le roman de Gaspé, bien que Blanche s'exprime plutôt par

ses actes que par l'écriture. Dans le processus d'écrire, Angéline découvre, travaille et retravaille l'expression de sa propre compréhension du monde. Lucie Robert a noté que le projet qu'elle poursuit est toujours celui de son père, et ici encore il y a des échos de Blanche : « Ce projet est celui de la survivance française en Amérique. Toute l'ambition féminine du roman y demeure soumise » (Robert 104). Mais malgré les élans du patriotisme et la prose exaltée de ses écrits intimes, le projet d'Angéline constitue le début d'une ambition qui dépasse celle de son père. Quel que soit le style de l'expression, qui est pourtant moins soumise qu'elle ne semble, Angéline esquisse une première version du projet qui aboutira à ce que Robert appelle « une parole féminine autonome » (Robert 102)[17].

Longuement et difficilement Angéline explique son choix de la solitude, son refus du texte faussement euphorique, dans la lettre qu'elle écrit à Maurice à la fin du roman. Cette lettre est pleine du langage de la résignation et de la dévotion chrétienne qui marque tout le roman, juxtaposant les chronotopes de cette terre à l'éternité divine qui les rend tous insuffisants et illusoires. Mais à travers ce langage de la dévotion catholique, il est possible de discerner les dimensions d'un chronotope alternatif, un temps-espace où elle pourrait trouver pour elle-même, et par elle-même, ce qu'elle cherche. Toute dévote qu'elle soit, après tout, elle rejette non seulement le mariage, mais aussi—contrairement à son amie Mina—le couvent. Comme Blanche, elle cherche le calme, la tranquillité, le pardon (d'elle-même et des autres), la profondeur et l'honnêteté, mais elle ne les cherche pas au sein de l'Église. Plus sage que Maurice, elle refuse le mariage et un amour qui ne peut pas durer pour chercher à leur place une transcendance bien plus difficile à réaliser. Comme elle l'explique elle-même dans sa dernière lettre, « le bonheur et la tristesse m'ont débilitée; mais si je suis courageuse, si je suis fidèle, avant qu'il soit longtemps j'aurai la paix » (Conan 193). Faut-il voir ici, comme chez la princesse de Clèves, un indice de la mort prochaine et souhaitée? Ou faut-il entendre plutôt la voix d'une femme qui est en train de découvrir les moyens d'exprimer, et ainsi de réaliser, son propre destin? Un destin qui n'est pas heureux, mais qui est authentique, et « bakhtinien » par son immanence, par la nécessité de le reconstruire continuellement par l'écriture?

IV. Un chronotope au féminin?

Caryl Emerson n'est pas la seule à croire que Bakhtine « had no interest at all in gender questions », ce qui n'est guère surprenant étant donné la chronologie de sa vie (Caryl Emerson, citée par Downing 27). Cela n'a pas empêché un

certain nombre de tentatives d'assimiler la théorie bakhtinienne à la critique féministe. Dans leur recueil d'essais, *A Dialogue of Voices*, Karen Hohne et Helen Wussow soutiennent l'idée qu'un « lively dialogue between the heteroglossic languages of Bakhtin and feminist theory » est non seulement possible mais nécessaire (Hohne and Wussow viii). Elles font appel aux « possibilities that his concepts, such as heteroglossia and dialogism, hold for feminist writers » (ix), et elles encouragent l'exploration d'un « female chronotope » (xiv). Citant Michael Holquist, Hohne et Wussow voient le chronotope comme l'instance d'un « je », un sujet, ou des matrices à travers lesquelles le discours est filtré : « A female chronotope may well go beyond the Bakhtinian equation of space and time to include gender in these matrices and/or to discuss gender as a whole new dimension. » (xiv)

Dans le même recueil d'essais, Suzanne Rosenthal Shumway explore l'exploitation féministe du concept de chronotope dans sa relecture d'un autre roman féminocentrique, un autre ouvrage « classique » du XIX^e^ siècle, *Jane Eyre* de Charlotte Brontë. Shumway propose le chronotope de l'asile (« the asylum ») « as a new tool with which to examine texts like *Jane Eyre*, in which female madness figures prominently » (Shumway 157). Tout comme l'espace discursif ouvert par Blanche et développé par Angéline, « the chronotope of the asylum works toward subverting and distorting the primary narrative » (Shumway 157). Ce chronotope de l'asile refuse les règles ou les contraintes des chronotopes masculins, transcendant le récit « normal » de l'espace et du temps qui est celui du « dominant masculine narrative » (158). Selon Shumway, Brontë raconte dans *Jane Eyre* la quête entreprise par son héroïne Jane, qui cherche avant tout sa propre voix, un langage ou un discours indépendants de ses divers maîtres masculins.

Comme toutes les quêtes, celle de Jane est marquée par une série d'épreuves : « Every one of Jane's spoken outbursts, each of her explosive and rebellious utterances, is characterized by a loss of linguistic and emotional control that is somehow reminiscent of, and compared to, insanity. » (Shumway 159) Shumway explique que Jane doit trouver un chemin entre le langage séduisant et autoritaire (que ce soit celui de Rochester ou de Saint-John) et son opposé, le chaos linguistique (la folie menaçante de Bertha Mason) : « In other words, Jane must find a middle way between the two extremes of communicative possibility; she must avoid not only the stultified and confining discourse of authority but also the all-too-liberating discourse of madness. » (159) De même, Angéline doit trouver un chemin qui n'est suborné ni par le chronotope oppressif du rassemblement (son

père) ni par celui qui entraîne la menace de la dispersion (Maurice).

Le chronotope au féminin s'exprime à travers toutes les héroïnes que j'ai citées, de façons diverses et parfois contradictoires. En cela il ressemble aux divers chronotopes masculins énumérés—que ce soit celui du folklore, de l'idylle, de la ville, de la guerre, de la politique ou de l'Histoire. Mais le temps-espace désiré et recherché par Blanche et Angéline se veut « autre », et « autre » en fonction de leur statut de femme. Le chronotope au féminin, tel qu'on peut le trouver chez Gaspé et Conan, sera résigné, solitaire et chaste—oui. Mais il se construit aussi comme distinct, et même subversif, par rapport aux chronotopes proposés par les pères, les frères, les fiancés et les amants; le chronotope au féminin cherche à se libérer des contraintes (même littéraires) imposées par ceux-ci.

Le temps-espace littéraire ouvert par Blanche et approfondi par Angéline ne se ferme pas par la suite, ni pour Conan, ni pour les auteures québécoises qui viennent après elle. La voix de ces femmes ne sera pas soumise à celle d'un mari, ni enfermée trop tôt dans le silence de la mort. Elles n'auront pas à parler à travers « l'infranchissable grille d'un cloître », telle que celle qui sépare Mina du monde (Conan 100). À la fin d'une histoire qui est devenue la sienne, Angéline rentre à Valriant, « chez elle », pour écrire l'histoire intime qui, d'une certaine façon—de la seule façon possible—transcende le temps et l'espace chaque fois que quelqu'un lit ou relit ce texte classique.

NOTES

1 Selon Gary Saul Morson, le roman dialogique résiste à la clôture (et à ce qu'il appelle l'anti-clôture, qui a le même effet) en pratiquant plutôt « what I prefer to call *aperture*. A work that employs aperture avoids relying on any moment that does not invite continuation. It renounces the privilege of an ending » (Morson 1079). Comme le roman dialogique qui est son objet, l'interprétation dialogique de la littérature adoptée par Bakhtine résiste aussi à la clôture d'une analyse surdéterminée par les idéologies ou les théories dominantes.

2 C'est un des quatre essais principaux de Bakhtine sur le discours romanesque, regroupés sous le titre *Esthétique et théorie du roman* et publiés en français par Gallimard en 1978.

3 Anthony Wall et Clive Thomson notent que la critique bakhtinienne insiste parfois trop sur cette présupposition du privilège temporel, et que l'espace peut, dans certains contextes, prendre le dessus : « in addition to the chronotopic space that the work organizes, there is a chronotope within which this very organization occurs. It is in the extra-artistic chronotopic world of representational practices where we see no need, or use, for stressing time at the expense of space » (Wall; Thomson 74).

4 La surprise est aussi une idée importante dans le contexte bakhtinien. Pour être vraiment ouvert, un texte doit rester imprévisible ou surprenant : « The novel represents the interaction of developing social mileus and distinct individuals who gradually change in surprising ways. » (Morson 1083)

5 Dans une méditation sur le temps dans le Livre XI des *Confessions*, Saint Augustin contemple l'expérience paradoxale du temps qui est vécu à la fois comme éphémère et constant, deux perceptions contraires qu'il décrit par les termes de *distentio* et *intentio animi*. Comme Ricœur nous l'explique dans *Temps et récit*, « Tandis que la *distentio* devient synonyme de la dispersion dans la multiplicité et de l'errance du vieil homme, l'*intentio* tend à s'identifier avec le rassemblement de l'homme intérieur » (Ricœur 50). Le temps peut donc être éprouvé comme permanence aussi bien que rupture ou, pour articuler le paradoxe d'une manière plus douce, comme continuité aussi bien que changement.

6 Pour une excellente élaboration de la signification des trois espaces principaux de l'imaginaire littéraire québécois, la campagne, la ville, et la forêt, voir Lemire.

7 Lucie Robert note que dans *Angéline de Montbrun* « le jugement que les femmes portent sur l'univers masculin est sans appel. . . . Cet espace ainsi condamné est, spécifiquement, celui de la ville, de la politique partisane, des mondanités, des amours superficielles. » (Robert 103) L'univers masculin serait alors un chronotope marqué par la discontinuité.

8 Écoutez Tocqueville, qui décrit son expérience de la forêt nord-américaine dans un ouvrage qui s'appelle *Quinze Jours dans le désert* : « l'âme, à moitié endormie, se balance entre le présent et l'avenir, entre le réel et le possible » (Tocqueville 67). Tocqueville continue ainsi : le seul bruit qu'il entend, c'est le battement de son propre coeur « dont chaque pulsation marque le passage du temps qui pour lui semble ainsi s'écouler goutte-à-goutte dans l'éternité » (67). Pour les hommes qui s'en vont s'aventurer là-haut (qui ne sont pas tous, bien sûr, aussi rousseauistes, ni aussi éloquents que Tocqueville), la forêt peut s'apparenter à une expérience de l'éternel qui transcende le temps cyclique de la campagne et le temps linéaire de la ville. Blanche et Angéline, pour leur part, cherchent une transcendance pareille, mais à l'intérieur des limites imposées à l'expérience féminine par un ordre résolument masculin.

9 Thomas Carr a bien noté le rapport entre la Conquête et la mort de Charles de Montbrun : « Angéline loses her father, her beauty, and her fiancé within the space of three pages against a backdrop formed by the memory of the loss suffered at the Conquest. » (Carr 997)

10 Dans le roman de Laclos, il y a bien sûr (au moins) deux héroïnes. Si la présidente de Tourvel est morte à la fin, Mme de Merteuil est plutôt, comme Angéline, défigurée. Au contraire d'Angéline pourtant, la marquise ne peut pas choisir son propre chemin, mais se laisse chasser par une société dont elle a reconnu et accepté les règles.

11 Pour une lecture comparative de *La Princesse de Clèves* et *Angéline de Montbrun*, voir l'article de Mary Jean Green, « Laure Conan and Mme de Lafayette. »

12 Le père d'Arché est mort à la bataille de Culloden en 1746.

13 L'ironie est évidente ici : quels sont les sentiments d'honneur et de patriotisme qui ont motivé Arché et Jules sinon des sentiments « exaltés » ou « trop exaltés »?

14 C'est encore une raison de voir dans *Angéline de Montbrun* un précurseur important de la fiction autobiographique féminine au Québec, examinée par Mary Jean Green dans son article, « Structures of Liberation ».

15 Il est certain que les gestes de Blanche et surtout d'Angéline comportent un élément religieux. Le catholicisme est une partie importante de la tradition dont Blanche veut conserver la mémoire, et il constitue en lui-même un autre chronotope qui est en jeu dans les deux romans : l'espace transcendant de l'Infini et le temps également transcendant de l'Eternité. Thomas Carr a bien développé la signification religieuse du refus d'Angéline, qui est une forme de la résignation chrétienne. Voir son article « Consolation and the Work of Mourning in *Angéline de Montbrun* ». En cela aussi—le sous-texte catholique—il y a une comparaison à faire entre Mme de Lafayette et Conan.

16 Il y a en fait une troisième possibilité: le couvent. Mais comme on le verra bien dans *Angéline de Montbrun*, où cette option est exercée par Mina Darville—et comme on le voit dans bien d'autres textes—, le couvent est représenté comme une forme de mort vivante. Victor Hugo est peut-être le plus expansif sur ce point dans *Les Misérables*, où il parle du cloître comme du seuil de la mort. L'entrée au couvent par Mina signale donc l'acceptation implicite du dénouement dysphorique dicté par l'univers romanesque masculin.

17 Je vois une certaine ironie dans les lectures contemporaines d'*Angéline de Montbrun* qui, par leur insistance sur la ferveur catholique de l'héroïne, semblent vouloir réaffirmer l'interprétation imposée par l'abbé Casgrain qui, par sa préface à la première édition du roman, voulait absolument empêcher la lecture du roman comme un projet d'écriture féminine autonome. Il y a des lectures, même féministes, du roman, qui répètent ainsi le geste de Casgrain, dont l'interprétation diagnostique et, pour ainsi dire, préventive, a réussi pendant très longtemps à enfermer le texte de Conan dans un discours critique masculin.

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Michael deBeyer

Vista of the Cold House

We never minded missing what was hidden,
but hate to miss that which is apparent. Now
everything's apparent. In the same way,

we didn't clear the land for use but use
its clearing, or wait, in a sense, for it to fill,
as though we've always been late for the event,

pleased to have arrived. Through the first days
we wait at the window for any movement
on the dun plain to quantify our waiting. We wait

for night to fill with night eyes; we sleep out
fitful shifts in case we miss that which has become
apparent. The animals that must be here

grow less fearful under our watching. We know
there must be deer in the hidden reach of the treeline.
We expect they will appear, in a ritualistic sense:

a blessing on a winter morning. A blessing, we say.
We hold hands in the sung church of the overcast sky,
in the night church of silent light, our faces pale discs

in the darkened window, and so become apparent,
marrying ourselves to that which remains hidden.

Tissus et voix muettes

J.P. April
Les ensauvagés. XYZ 27,00 $

Monique Genuist
La petite musique du clown. Prise de parole 20,00 $

Compte rendu par Matthew Jordan Schmidt

Univers tordu et misogyne, regorgeant de viols et de violence, le monde des *Ensauvagés* de J.P. April explore non seulement la connexion entre l'Histoire et le langage, entre le genre et la langue, mais de surcroît, il jauge et indique les dangers d'une humanité rendue muette, dépouillée de toute faculté d'expression et condamnée à errer dans le gouffre béant qui s'ouvre entre le silence animal et la loquacité humaine.

Afin de comprendre l'apparition de trois enfants « ensauvagés »—qui ne parlent aucune langue connue—à la gare de Rivière-du-Loup, le docteur Paradis pénètre dans les vieilles forêts du Québec où il découvre Raham, messie d'une nouvelle religion sylvaine, qui se livre à la suppression de la « langue de la ville »—et avec elle, son Histoire—, à laquelle il substitue un nouveau code linguistique qui cherche à écraser l'expression féminine.

Non seulement cet ouvrage poursuit-il le travail sémiotique sur la langue et le genre entamé par Gaétan Soucy dans *La petite fille qui aimait trop les allumettes*, continuité évoquée par de nombreux intertextes (Franceline Pelletier, « la fillette aux allures masculines »; Sthé, « Le plus jeune . . . ou plutôt, LA plus jeune ») mais il élargit également l'étendue de cet examen pour pénétrer au coeur de la question *ontologico-linguistique*.

En effet, l'ouvrage semble suggérer que seul le langage sait apprivoiser l'animal chez l'homme. Plus Alexandre Paradis s'enfonce dans l'inceste clos de la forêt, plus la langue se perd, plus domine une violence animale. À Poilu, homme à griffes et à poil, à Lionel, lion à griffes mal soignées, à Zac, violeur d'ourses qui se balade dans la peau de ses victimes, et à Élaï, femme-oiseau (sauvagement violée par tous ces hommes-animaux), il manque un savoir linguistique. Personne ne connaît le mot « viol », Lionel ignore que la guerre a pris fin, Zac, idiot, ne maîtrise pas les principes élémentaires de la déglutition. Et Élaï . . . Seule femme au sein de ce clan d'hommes libidineux, elle cherche à redécouvrir la langue de la ville, mais ses espoirs d'envol sont récompensés par l'échec de la chute, échec qui s'intensifie par une perte subséquente de toute connaissance linguistique. Elle s'animalise à l'extrême, devient oisillon dans le nid des buses, se retrouve circonscrite par le silence féminin.

Mais si April cherche à valoriser le rôle de la langue dans la construction de l'identité et de l'Histoire, Monique Genuist, par contre, choisit de souligner l'importance des mains dans la confection de la même tapisserie. Dans *La petite musique du clown,* elle expose la dissolution graduelle de la mémoire de la mère et la dégradation du foyer parental. Genuist puise dans la brume d'un récit temporellement divisé—la

narratrice du présent cherche à mettre au jour l'histoire passée de la démence et de la mort finale de sa mère—et aussi dans celle du monde physique, situant son histoire à la fois dans les îles humides de la Colombie-Britannique et sur les rives brumeuses de la Meuse. Cette épaisse couverture moite représente à la fois la disparition de la mémoire de la mère moribonde, mais également la vaste fresque familiale dont la narratrice devient peu à peu l'héritière principale.

Également, les draps de la mère, tissus autrefois propres et délicieux, sont maintenant troués et minces, tout comme son indépendance, sa force, son identité. La question qui s'impose, là voici : « Comment est-ce possible, elle si fière de son linge? »

La narratrice raconte des souvenirs d'enfance, les échecs de son père alcoolique et les difficultés d'une vie vécue dans la soumission féminine. Ici revient le motif des mains (« Nous, les femmes, faisions la vaisselle et passions un coup de balai »), d'une identité fondée sur des serviettes ourlées, sur des mouchoirs repassés.

Si l'histoire de Raham s'écrit en mots inventés, celle de la narratrice de Genuist—et de sa mère—s'écrit en tissus manipulés. C'est justement ce tissu qui enveloppe la narratrice, même sur son île reculée, où elle suspend elle-même son linge sur la corde, où elle s'occupe de sa famille, où elle s'inquiète de l'alcoolisme atavique dont quelques-uns de ses descendants risquent un jour d'hériter. Un mouvement d'acceptation habite le récit, un désir de comprendre l'amour qui rattache tous les personnages les uns aux autres et qui les unit en dépit de leurs différences. Genuist saisit une réalité essentielle : nous habitons tous nos îles, tout en participant toujours à des tissus communs, à des familles, à des relations, à des systèmes qui construisent notre identité, et surtout, qui nous offrent un amour qui est à la fois difficile et nécessaire.

Comparative Citizenship

Irene Bloemraad
Becoming a Citizen: Incorporating Immigrants and Refugees in the United States and Canada.
U of California P US $21.95

Reviewed by Jerome H. Black

Democratic polities that receive large numbers of immigrants would do well to ensure that newcomers naturalize and become politically active. This is the point of departure in Irene Bloemraad's excellent *Becoming A Citizen*. If the foreign born are not politically incorporated, "not only is the sense of shared enterprise undermined, but so, too, are the institutions of democratic government." With most western countries facing ever-larger waves of immigrants, the stakes are high.

The volume's central message, sustained by a comparison of Canada and the United States, is that the reception given the foreign born greatly affects their political incorporation. While immigrants' characteristics (e.g., education, language skills) play their part, government can promote an "active citizenship" by encouraging naturalization, offering material and nonmaterial settlement support and formally recognizing cultural diversity.

Bloemraad's eclectic theoretical framework emphasizes institutional context, opportunity structure, the social and organizational nature of immigrant communities and the participation potential of newcomers and their leaders. Essentially, she argues that government interventionist discourse and policies open up psychological and action spaces that enhance stakeholding and political interest, which, in turn, increases naturalization and participation. Some effects are obviously "instrumental," resulting from resources provided by government (e.g., funding, access); some are "interpretative," flowing from language that validates newcomer diversity and political engagement.

A rich array of both quantitative and qualitative materials comprise the study's empirical base. Secondary sources include census reports, survey statistics and documentary evidence, while key primary material comes from 151 in-depth interviews, mostly conducted within the Portuguese and Vietnamese communities, both in Toronto and Boston.

Bloemraad rightfully emphasizes how little research has been done comparing Canada-US political integration even though the countries' similarities, including liberal naturalization regimes, make them an ideal pairing for study. At the same time, she brings their differences into sharp relief. Government in Canada promotes citizenship more intensively, offers assistance for settlement and integration and officially advances multiculturalism to facilitate newcomers' sense of belonging. By contrast, the US is more oriented toward border control than integration, is generally laissez-faire about naturalization, provides few settlement services (except for refugees) and, with an almost exclusive focus on race relations, lacks a formal diversity policy that helps immigrants *qua* immigrants. Major indicators of political incorporation confirm the superior Canadian record. Already in the introduction, naturalization differences are highlighted: the rates similar for such a long time begin to diverge in the 1970s—"at exactly the point that Canada established a policy of multiculturalism and expanded government intervention in newcomer settlement." Other measures reveal a greater proportion of foreign-born legislators in the House of Commons compared to Congress, and more community organization and advocacy in Canada.

Bloemraad is not the first academic to argue that Canada does a better job incorporating immigrants (e.g., Kymlicka's *Finding Our Way*), but hers is the first systematic treatment—characterized by theoretical specificity and by creative and meticulous methodology. Consequently, her arguments are more solidly based and provide understanding of how government matters. With regard to methodology, the choice of the same two communities in two similarly sized cities (a matching-cases strategy) provides focus by reducing the number of variables needing consideration; another methodological highlight is a constant preoccupation with rival explanations.

The theoretical linkages are richly detailed (and empirically sustained) in the individual main chapters, each illuminating a specific area of knowledge, even as it is a constituent part of the larger contribution. Chapter 2 demonstrates the social underpinnings of political incorporation—how networks of family and friends and community organizations and leaders operate to encourage citizenship acquisition and participation. Chapter 3 details Canadian and American differences in policies, practices and program delivery in the three domains of naturalization, settlement and diversity. Chapter 4, drawing heavily on the interview data, portrays some of the interpretative effects flowing from these differences: Portuguese and Vietnamese immigrants in Toronto feel more connected to the new country than their American counterparts. On the instrumental side, chapter 5 demonstrates how greater government support facilitates more numerous, diverse and active organizations within the two Canadian communities, while chapter 6 shows how this organizational robustness assists community leaders to run for and win elective office. The final chapter, building on the positive Canadian evidence, champions the country's multiculturalism model and argues it is still worth emulating even if it is falling out of favour elsewhere.

Areas needing more attention? The author correctly notes a lack of dedicated surveys directly comparing immigrant political incorporation in the two countries, but she could have juxtaposed results

available from individual national surveys, thus bolstering the study's generalizability (including consideration of other measures of participation). As well, Bloemraad's analysis of differences in public opinion and party politics in the two countries is too underdeveloped to dismiss their contribution to the stronger Canadian record. Also given insufficient consideration is the complicating impact of US illegal immigration.

None of this, however, takes away from the fact that *Becoming A Citizen* has now set a new standard in the field.

On the Warpath

Joseph Boyden
Three Day Road. Penguin $22.00

Reviewed by Donna Coates

In the "Acknowledgements" to *Three Day Road*, Métis (Scots, Irish, Cree/Ojibway) writer Joseph Boyden writes that he wishes to "honour the Native soldiers who fought in the Great War," for their "bravery and skill do not go unnoticed." But the few historical accounts which have appeared by Fred Gaffen, L. James Dempsey, Janice Summerby and Adrian Hayes (the latter specifically on the forgotten hero Francis Pegahmagabow, a much-decorated sniper Boyden claims to have inspired his novel) are far from definitive, and to date, no other writer has examined Aboriginal participation in the Great War in fiction. These oversights are surprising given that, as Boyden noted in a recent interview, "[A]boriginals often volunteered at a rate three times that of the white population," so that "oftentimes full reserves were cleared of eligible men." Because neither the Indian Affairs Department nor any other branch of the Canadian government kept accurate records of enlistment figures, historians can now only estimate that between 3500 to 7500 Aboriginal men served in the Great War.

Boyden's novel draws attention to these previously neglected histories by telling the story of two Cree friends, Xavier Bird and Elijah Weesageechak, who volunteer for duty in 1915 with the Southern Ontario Rifles and fight at major battles such as the Somme, Vimy Ridge and Passchendaele until near war's end in 1918. Both excel as scouts and snipers, transferring to the battlefield the tracking and hunting skills they have learned while struggling to survive a harsh existence in the bush near Moose Factory, Ontario. In suggesting that these Native warriors distinguished themselves on the battlefields because of their experiences in the bush, Boyden ironically supports the common perception held by Canadians at the time (and to some extent ever since) that recruits came from rural backgrounds and hence could ride and shoot when, as historian Jonathan Vance's *Death So Noble* asserts, most of the men who enlisted in the Canadian Army came from cities, a fact which validates Boyden's claim that Aboriginal men raised in the bush were better trained for war than their non-Aboriginal counterparts.

Boyden also argues that, even before Xavier reaches the front, he possesses the best traits of an officer—"the ability of judgment under duress, the will and strength to carry out unpleasant and dangerous duties, decisiveness"—most of which he has absorbed from the spiritual and practical knowledge passed onto him by his Aunt Niska, with whom he has lived since he was a child, and who ultimately saves his life when he returns from the war severely wounded in body and spirit. But Xavier is also trained in the "art of war" by two knowledgeable and thoughtful officers (their sadistic and cruel commanding officer, by contrast, becomes known as "Bastard Breech"). By investigating the kinds of leadership skills necessary for success (or, in Breech's case, failure) on the battlefield, Boyden also offers a departure from traditional historical accounts of Canadian military history, for an analysis

of the ways in which officers and men interacted with each other while pursuing their military duties is almost entirely missing from Canadian historiography, and Canadian literature as well.

Although Boyden's Xavier continues to demonstrate his leadership skills and becomes a dedicated and superb fighter, he is denied promotion because he is Aboriginal. The prejudice against Native soldiers has a basis in historical fact, for according to Brock Pitawanakwat, the Canadian Armed Forces displayed "little respect for their fighting or leadership abilities" and thus refused such soldiers a commission. Elijah does receive a promotion, but primarily because he speaks "better English than the English" and attempts to downplay his Indigenous heritage. The two friends' attitudes continue to diverge as the war grinds on: while Xavier dislikes killing and does so only to survive, Elijah takes pleasure in the slaughter of his enemies and eventually commits horrendous atrocities on the battlefield. Boyden argues that Elijah has been morally corrupted by his "education" at residential school, where he was emotionally deprived, harshly disciplined, taught to believe that his language and culture were inferior and sexually abused. Boyden thus makes powerful links between the destructive European war and the cultural genocide of the residential schools.

While *Three Day Road* is not Boyden's first work of fiction—his collection of short stories, *Born With a Tooth*, about life on the reserve in Northern Ontario, appeared in 2001—*Three Day Road,* a compelling and meticulously researched account of the brutality of trench warfare, has already become a Canadian classic. It was nominated for the 2005 Governor General's Award, won the 2005 Rogers Writers' Trust Fiction Prize, the 2005 McNally Robinson Aboriginal Book of the Year Award and the 2006 Books in Canada First Novel Award.

Recent Canadian Drama

Morwyn Brebner
The Optimists. Scirocco Drama $14.95

Daniel Danis; Linda Gaboriau, trans.
In the Eyes of Stone Dogs. Talonbooks $15.95

Daniel MacIvor
Cul-de-sac. Talonbooks $15.95

Judith Thompson
Capture Me. Playwrights Canada $16.95

Reviewed by Wes Folkerth

In Morwyn Brebner's *The Optimists*, Chick, a 40-year-old Toyota salesman from Canada, has come to Las Vegas to marry Teenie, a young woman who works as a receptionist at the dealership. Joining the couple are Chick's childhood friend Doug, who is in the middle of a marital crisis with his wife Margie, who shows up unexpectedly at the hotel room later that evening. Over the course of a long alcohol-fueled night, we learn that Chick is recovering from a gambling addiction, Teenie has fervent but disturbingly vague religious convictions, and the successful physician Doug is cheating on his wife with an intern while writing a popular history of oncology. Margie comes to Las Vegas to get even with Doug for his infidelity by stoking his long-standing rivalry with his old friend.

This is a well-made play; the main problem is that in the climactic moments we never witness the characters acknowledging the weight of having come to some sort of fuller recognition. And we never know exactly what takes place at the end of the night; it all happens in adjoining bedrooms, in a drunken haze, and everyone just sleeps it off. *The Optimists* is a play about outlooks on life, a philosophical play that is careful not to be a philosophical treatise. As such, its success is also its main challenge. It is a sturdy play, structurally speaking, and the characters are drawn with humour and a certain generosity, but the philosophical punchline about optimism, delivered by

Chick the following awkward morning, doesn't quite satisfy.

In the Eyes of Stone Dogs, originally published as *Le Langue-à-Langue des chiens de roche*, earned its author Daniel Danis the 2002 Governor General's Award for Drama in French. The translation into English by Linda Gaboriau evinces a careful attention to tone and mood. Danis' play, set on "an imaginary island in the St. Lawrence River," opens with a silent chorus of two dogs who observe as the audience enters the theatre. The dogs then turn their eyes to the stage to witness the play's sequence of 32 scenes, or "waves" as they are termed, along with the audience. The first words, "Let it begin with a night wind, a warm, moist wind like at the beginning of humanity," are spoken by Djoukie, a 15-year-old student who longs to discover the identity of her father. The play's most striking formal feature is the way in which the characters shift seamlessly between narrative exposition and regular dialogue. Djoukie eventually accepts the love of Niki, an adolescent boy whose father runs a dog kennel on the island, after discovering they have both independently come to believe they are of mixed human-canine parentage. *In the Eyes of Stone Dogs* is a haunting play in which the line between myth and the everyday is rendered powerfully indistinct, in which each generation, each moment, holds within it the opportunity to redefine what it means to be human.

The 2005 Talonbooks edition of Daniel MacIvor's *Cul-de-sac* begins with a foreword by director Daniel Brooks, who details the chaotic and stressful creative process MacIvor went through to produce this work, which included having all of his notes stolen from him just two weeks before the play was due to premiere in the spring of 2002 at Montreal's Usine C. *Cul-de-sac* is a one-man show, written and performed by MacIvor. It tells the story of the murder of Leonard, a gay man who lives on a cul-de-sac and is killed in his house just after 2:00 a.m. one night. In a series of monologues and scenes in which MacIvor plays multiple characters, Leonard and his neighbours share their recollections of each other and of the moment of Leonard's murder, which had been audible throughout the neighbourhood. Although the story is ostensibly about "transformation," as Leonard puts it—"I lived in this neighbourhood for 15 years as a person and I had more impact in my last five minutes as a sound"—it is also about isolation and the failure of community. There are moments when some of the characters come off as a little too "ready-made," too much the result of MacIvor's spontaneous and improvisational creative process, but even this eventually makes sense given the overall context of the work and its portrayal of the preconceptions people have about each other.

Judith Thompson's *Capture Me* focuses on the harrowing experience of Jerry Joy Lee, a junior-kindergarten teacher in Toronto who must confront the reappearance of her ex-husband Dodge Kingston. Dodge had vowed to find his ex-wife and kill her in seven years, and it is now seven years later. The dialogue throughout is rich, often unabashedly poetic, and Thompson walks an impressively fine line with the character of Jerry, who requires an audacious combination of innocence and strength. Throughout the play, Dodge is presented as a master of manipulation, his threatening behaviour to Jerry a very powerful and destructive form of psychological abuse. *Capture Me* is dedicated to "all the women who have been hunted down and killed by their (ex) partners." It is therefore possible that the details of Jerry's fate are not presented explicitly at the end of the play out of respect for those whose lives were ended in similar circumstances. This is a play that wears its heart on its sleeve, and I can understand how some readers, audiences, or reviewers might be reluctant to submit to

its emotional solicitations. While I did not find the play a wholly satisfying experience, I should stress that I admire greatly the courage in Thompson's writing here.

Redefining the Posthuman

Dan Bruiger
Second Nature: The Man-Made World of Idealism, Technology and Power. Left Field $25.95

Sherryl Vint
Bodies of Tomorrow: Technology, Subjectivity, Science Fiction. U of Toronto P $50.00

Reviewed by Paul Tyndall

These two books belong to the growing body of literature devoted to embodiment theory. That this subject has taken on a special urgency in our time is not especially surprising. Developments in science and technology have focused renewed attention on the relationship between identity and the body, leading some theorists to claim that the body has become obsolete. As Arthur Kroker has observed, "In technological society, the body has achieved a purely rhetorical existence." Prominent technophile Hans Moravec has gone so far as to claim that the body and the sense organs, which served a specific purpose during our early evolution, alerting us to "passing opportunities and dangers," will have no practical use once we have succeeded in interfacing computer technology and the human mind. Both Dan Bruiger and Sheryl Vint challenge such views, claiming that any definition of the posthuman subject must take into account the fact we are "inescapably embodied and part of nature."

Bruiger regards the transhumanist ideal of a melding of mind and machine as the product of an "ideology of transcendence" that is as old as Western culture. Developments in science and technology have always been motivated not simply by the desire to improve our lot in life but more importantly by the desire to transcend the natural world and replace it with a "second nature"—a man-made environment that is free from the uncertainties and indignities of the material or corporeal world. This is a characteristically masculine enterprise driven by the male psyche's longing for the creative powers of nature and to play God. In Bruiger's view, the desire to control or conquer nature has contributed to man's destruction of the environment and to the historical subjugation of women. Furthermore, it is inextricably linked to the histories of both capitalism and economic globalization. But the chief targets of his critique are philosophical idealism on the one hand and mechanism on the other.

Although both philosophies would appear to be passé, at least in academic circles, Bruiger claims that they continue to drive society's blind faith in technology and in the idea of progress itself. Artificial intelligence, genetic engineering, in-vitro fertilization and other forms of biotechnology all raise serious questions about the relation of identity and the body and about the wisdom of playing God, but these questions are frequently dismissed by those who see the essence of a person largely in terms of the mind or an immaterial soul. Moreover, mechanistic ideas remain a potent force in politics, economics and popular conceptions of science and technology, leading many to believe that developments in these areas are inevitable and irreversible. As Bruiger notes, "The very concept of economic globalism is mechanism writ large—a sophisticated world engine of profit, to further empower an ever richer world elite, while people everywhere become more impoverished and disenfranchised."

In *Bodies of Tomorrow: Technology, Subjectivity, Science Fiction,* Sherryl Vint develops many of the same themes found in Dan Bruiger's book. Like Bruiger, she is critical of the dualistic heritage of Cartesian philosophy, and of its privileging of mind

over matter. She is likewise critical of the utopian rhetoric of many writers associated with transhumanism. But there are two fundamental differences between her approach to these themes and Bruiger's. To begin with, Vint is much more interested in the implications of the debates surrounding posthumanism for our conceptions of subjectivity, arguing that "we need to pay greater attention to the model of the subject that grounds how we think about using technology to create the new version of the human, the posthuman." In addition, she is more attuned to the contributions that contemporary science-fiction writers have made and continue to make to our understanding of the interplay of science and technology. As Vint notes, as a genre science fiction has long been concerned with exploring the world not simply as it is or was but as it may become. The fictional universes created by science-fiction writers provide laboratories for imagining the consequences of current social and technological practices or arrangements.

Drawing upon Louis Althusser, Judith Butler and other contemporary theorists, she examines a wide range of recent science fiction, including the work of Gwyneth Jones, Octavia Butler, Iain Banks and William Gibson. Her aim is to highlight the ways in which these writers can help us to see what is often ignored by transhumanist philosophers, namely, the embodied nature of subjectivity and the degree to which the body itself is the product not simply of biology or genetics but of culture and ideology as well. She praises Jones' *Aleutian* trilogy, for instance, for providing "a new model of the body, . . . premised on the deconstruction of the boundaries between human and alien" and claims that Jones' fictional universe offers readers a "possible model for a way to begin to rethink human identity as part of the world, connected to the material rather than transcending it." And she singles out Butler's *Xenogenesis* trilogy for the insights it offers into the limitations of genetic essentialism, or the belief that the sum total of human identity resides in our DNA, and the related perspective of genetic welfare, which holds that the solutions to all of society's ills can be found in genetics. For Vint, the value of Butler's work lies in its ability to counter these discourses with a more humane conception of the posthuman rooted not simply in the body but the body politic. As Vint notes, "Butler shows us a space where change could take place, a chance to engage with the possibilities offered by genetic engineering within a context of community and social relationships."

Both Bruiger and Vint regard the current debates over posthuman identity as ethical and political debates that will help shape the way we define what it means to be human. Although they recognize the power of science and technology to transform human nature, they both stress that any conception of the posthuman must take into account the embodied nature of subjectivity. And they both caution us against putting our faith in visions of the future predicated on the use of technology to transcend nature, reminding us, to quote Wallace Stevens, that "the greatest poverty is not to live in the physical world."

À la recherche du poème

Micheline Cambron et Laurent Mailhot, dirs. *André Brochu, écrivain*. Hurtubise HMH 24,95 $

Compte rendu par Stéphane Inkel

André Brochu, faut-il le rappeler, a d'abord marqué, et d'une façon indélébile, la littérature québécoise par sa parole critique. Cofondateur de la revue *Parti pris*, chargé d'enseignement à l'Université de Montréal en 1963 alors qu'il n'a que 21 ans, il est parmi les tout premiers à retourner à cette littérature que l'on appelle toujours « canadienne-française », un temps délaissée après les lectures nationalistes de Camille Roy et

consorts. Ses lectures critiques de Gabrielle Roy et André Langevin, de Gérard Bessette et Yves Thériault, rassemblées en 1973 dans *L'instance critique*, font office de véritables classiques et participent à cette refondation d'une littérature « québécoise » qui rapidement va s'imposer. Or André Brochu, il le soulignera avec force dans le chapitre clef de *La visée critique*, « Autobiocritique », paru en 1988, rêvait « dès l'âge de dix ans » d'être poète. Après deux recueils confidentiels publiés aux cours des années 1960, toute l'œuvre se présente comme une lente réappropriation de cette parole créatrice qui chez Brochu plus qu'ailleurs est décrite comme « empêchée ». La contribution majeure du collectif *André Brochu écrivain* est de nous donner à voir pour ainsi dire en acte cette lente réappropriation.

Car si Brochu s'est souvent prononcé sur le « pis-aller » de sa parole critique avant ce 3 mars 1988 où il renoue avec le poème (« Autobiocritique »), Jacques Brault montre bien comment son dialogue ininterrompu avec cet « infini du sens », présent dans chaque œuvre, constituait bel et bien « une piste qui le mènera tôt ou tard à son écriture d'écrivain ». Brochu en conviendra d'ailleurs dans l'avant-propos de son *Tableau du poème*, recueil de ses chroniques sur la poésie québécoise des années 1980 pour la revue *Voix et images*, ce qui nous vaut ce mot de Gilles Marcotte qui réconcilie définitivement, me semble-t-il, la double modalité de son travail d'écrivain : « La critique, donc, pour se créer un pays poétique, s'y faire une place, pour reconnaître sa propre voix. » Essentiel, à ce titre, est le chapitre de Lucie Robert sur la place d'André Brochu dans l'institution littéraire qui illustre la double reconnaissance dont il est désormais l'objet. Est-ce à dire que les engagements passés du critique de *Parti pris* sont passés sous silence? Il s'agirait après tout d'un signe des temps que de se consacrer en priorité au travail intime du poème. Ce dont s'acquittent avec leur brio habituel Paul Chanel Malenfant et Pierre Nepveu, l'un en soulignant la nécessité de recourir à l'oxymore afin de rendre compte des tensions qui animent cette poésie, l'autre en exacerbant cette tension entre le poète et le « Verbe incarnée », véritable plongée « dans l'épaisseur du corps, dans la densité charnelle, boueuse, excrémentielle du monde » dont la finitude est l'enjeu. On saura gré à Réjean Beaudoin de rappeler que « toute la pensée d'André Brochu reste liée à la problématique qui part du sentiment d'un défaut d'existence de la littérature nationale ou, tout au moins, de l'inachèvement de son projet ». On le voit, les signatures sont prestigieuses—impossibles de les nommer toutes—et témoignent de la dette d'une institution envers l'un de ses plus brillants, quoique iconoclaste, représentants. On regrettera à cet égard l'absence de contributions de la jeune génération qui aurait pu souligner comment la « critique », par opposition à la tendance actuelle de la théorie ou de la « recherche » (soulignée par François Ricard), continue d'œuvrer face à « l'infini du sens » du texte littéraire.

Three New Road Tales

Dave Cameron
Continental Drifter. Signature $18.95

Kevin Chong
Neil Young Nation. Greystone $22.95

Jason Schneider
3,000 Miles. ECW $19.95

Reviewed by J.N. Nodelman

Highway travel involves more than passable roadways, vehicles, signage, maps, restaurants, hotels and attractions (not to mention time, money and security). Roads are only built and subsequently travelled with the support of narrative mythology: travellers, the great promise has it, will go someplace fundamentally different than where they are, find things, have experiences that they couldn't at home. Three

recent road books (all were published in 2004 and 2005) show that the myths drawing some of today's Canadian travellers down the highway are, if not necessarily antisocial, based on a disquieting degree of self-involvement.

The Canadian highway's traditional mythology promised that, in being travelled, the nation's roadways would supposedly link its disparate regions into a coherent whole. "May it serve to bring Canadians closer together," Prime Minister Diefenbaker intoned at the Trans-Canada Highway's opening in 1962; likewise, Edward McCourt, in *The Road across Canada* (1965), wrote that it was "still the hope of all Canadians to whom national unity is a passionately desired end that a Trans-Canada highway should draw closer together all parts of the nation and help us, if not to love, at least to understand one another." Most subsequent Canadian road books have asked whether the nation's highways actually work along these lines: see, among others, William Howarth's *Traveling the Trans-Canada* (1987), Kildare Dobbs' *Ribbon of Highway* (1992), Charles Gordon's *The Canada Trip* (1997) or John Stackhouse's *Timbit Nation* (2003). Admittedly, the notion that Canadian road travel must be about the state of national unity and one's own place in it can be restrictive. On the other hand, roads are public works, and there is something positive in their cultural status as inherently social institutions that lead travellers to meditate on being part of a broader collective.

In our trio of recent road books, however, the goals are not nationalist but idiosyncratic, transnational and unofficial. Cameron rides buses diagonally across the continent from the Yukon to Florida mainly because there is little common migration along this bearing. Chong and his friends depart Vancouver to pick up the path the musician Neil Young travelled in the early 1960s while chasing stardom from Winnipeg through Thunder Bay and Toronto and thenceforth southwest along Route 66 through Albuquerque to Los Angeles. "I had my own tape recorder and was on a quest for something equally lofty and absurd," writes Chong. "I was looking for the meaning of Neil Young." Schneider's fictional characters, amidst the grunge music culture of 1994, drive from Quebec to Seattle and thence to Vancouver to emulate Nirvana frontman Kurt Cobain's suicide. What kind of shared social experiences may people experience on highways animated by such alternative mythologies?

Conflicted ones, evidently. People in these books find new sensations of openness, by turns edifying and disturbing. At one point, Chong writes, "This was what I'd wanted from the trip all along. To meet new people, to get to know them, to step outside my routines and habits." Schneider's characters, though, despite setting out partly to see the standard "corny shit . . . like seeing the sun come up over the Rocky Mountains," find their identities dissolving on the road: "an overwhelming feeling of isolation descends upon me. We aren't a part of anything anymore. Our families and friends are somewhere else . . . After two weeks I'm finally scared. Not just because we were nearly killed—I've lost touch with myself." In other words, cross-continental routes may lead away from exactly the moments of enlightenment and connection they promise.

My only hesitation about *3,000 Miles* is that its last act seems a little rushed (the novel runs only 213 pages). Given the narrative threads Schneider weaves, his abbreviated conclusion doesn't fully capitalize on the resonant differences between the diverse voices that describe his main characters' journeys. Still, for Schneider, becoming isolated from a community is a problem. Contrastingly, Chong and Cameron often simply indulge in their self-absorption out on the road. In doing so, they render invisible the class and gender bases of their own mobility, along

with other civil and cultural supports that make their journeys possible. Chong, for one, happily recounts endless episodes of him and his buddies behaving like horses' asses. Between their heavy drinking, copious marijuana intake and jocular mock-homoeroticism, there's little room left for reflection regarding the cultural, philosophical, historical, or political dimensions of both Young's and Chong's journeys. Tellingly, *Neil Young Nation* concludes, "Slouched deep in the back seat of this car, absolutely wasted, I felt like a child again. I could hardly wait to grow up."

Cameron, moreover, openly rejects any actions that strike him as conformist or prescribed by authority: on *his* chosen route, "there were no demands or expectations, no editor standing by, red pen at the ready." As he sets out "floating" across the continent, a friend who teaches creative writing asks whether he has a narrative arc in mind for the eventual book about his journey. Cameron disavows the idea altogether, wanting his peregrinations instead to coalesce into their own story form. This method would be commendable for its resistance to cliché, were it not to arise mainly out of Cameron's solipsistic image of himself as a long-haired Romantic outsider hero (a rather conventional pose, one notes). At one point, he recounts his defiance in the face of his grandmother's repeated urging to "*Find something to do*": "I didn't ask whether a three-month bus ride qualified as a valid activity. My choices confused her; she couldn't compartmentalize me." Shallow middle-class convention, *en garde!* Cameron does have one moment of kinship with another traveller, but only on the basis of their both having "a taste for grand and unpredictable trails." Only in reading the small-print acknowledgements on the copyright page do we discover that both the Canada Council and Greyhound Bus Lines supported his trip. Road travel will always occur at the intersection of mythological and material realms—in departing from the highway as path to national unity, contemporary writers succeed most in exploring how alternative mythologies lead to new understandings of interconnection. The pitfall here lies in imagining highway travellers as autonomous free agents whose journeys require no public support yet somehow, for others, should be worth reading about.

Three New Canadian Plays

Normand Chaurette
The Concise Köchel. Talonbooks $15.95

François Archambault; Bobby Theodore, trans.
The Leisure Society. Talonbooks $15.95

Andrew Moodie
The Real McCoy. Playwrights Canada $17.95

Reviewed by Monica Prendergast

After moving to the Left Coast in 1998, my contact with the playwriting of Ontario and Quebec, aside for a few visits back east, has been minimal. The big hits might make it into the seasons of the Vancouver or Victoria regional theatres, but other than that … So it is a real pleasure to have the opportunity to read these three new plays, two from Quebec and one from Toronto.

Chaurette is a very well-known playwright in Quebec, probably best known in English-speaking Canada for his play *The Queens* (1993). This play, written in 2000 and published in translation (by the ever-popular Linda Gaboriau) in 2005, offers "[m]etaphysical playwriting of a literary richness which has yet to find its equal in Quebec Drama," according to *Le Devoir*. *The Concise Köchel* tells the story, or one iteration of the never-ending story, of the pianist Motherwell sisters, their musicologist patrons the Brunswick sisters and their unseen son who lives (and perhaps dies) in the basement. One cannot approach this play hoping for straightforward narrative as we are presented with a world of self-

conscious falsity, where the characters seem aware of their own artifice, and sometimes even forget their own lines. What emerges, in fragmented fashion, is the almost surreal story of two sisters who have devoted their lives to Mozart at the expense of a son who makes outrageous demands as compensation, including murder and cannibalism. The Brunswick sisters seem just as unrooted in reality, although we do see one of the two, Anne, expressing a real desire for escape into a free and new life. The dialogue moves amongst these characters in ways that are mostly unpredictable and occasionally nonsensical:

> CECILE: Perhaps we should answer the door? Maybe it's some other musicians from the Concertgebouw who want to be devoured?
> IRENE: You're adding lines! You have no right. You're giving yourself lines that don't exist. You are improvising!

Eventually, we are given to understand that we are in some kind of limbo or hell where these characters are fated to endlessly repeat the dialogue and situation played for us. A difficult play to read, but potentially very effective on stage, with the physicalization of absurdity, repetition and hopelessness.

Archambault's play is much more accessible in the living-room satirical comedy it presents about the empty lives of a supposedly happily married middle-class couple, Mary and Peter. While their baby screams almost endlessly into a monitor, this couple attempts to end their friendship with Mark over a pleasant dinner. But Mark brings along one of his latest post-divorce young lovers, Paula, and the unfulfilled desire for a threesome becomes a distinct possibility as the evening, and the heavy drinking, continues. The play has been described as "vicious" and "cynical," and it is both of these things. When we hear these characters casually confess to physically abusing their children by hitting and shaking them in uncontrolled anger, we are shocked. These are *middle class* people, for goodness sake; they aren't supposed to behave in these ways. When we see how coldly and callously they treat each other, we are reminded of our own alienation from each other, even from the people sitting around us in the theatre, and the role of theatre as human laboratory is (thankfully) returned to us. When Peter promises to kill himself on the morning following the night's revels, we and his wife know that he doesn't have it in him … and neither do we. A wonderfully written cold shower for all of us who are locked so comfortably into our "successful" suburban lives.

Andrew Moodie's *The Real McCoy* offers a historical biography of Elijah McCoy (1843-1929), African Canadian inventor and source of the phrase "the real McCoy" in reference to his revolutionary contribution to steam-locomotive engineering. Played on a bare stage with minimal props and costumes by seven actors who play multiple roles, this is a powerful piece. Moodie writes in his Playwright's Notes that "[A] note of importance is pace. There are perhaps two or three pauses in the whole play. That's it. There are no blackouts. The end of one scene is the beginning of the next. Each line follows the other." Companies producing this play would do well to follow this advice, along with the detailed stage directions in the text (originally directed by Moodie himself). The story of McCoy's life is grippingly told. We are swept along by the intelligence and ambitious energy of a young black man who manages, somehow, to find a way to fulfill his potential in a world still burdened with slavery and deep societal racism (the latter which sadly burdens us still). McCoy went to the University of Edinburgh to study engineering and then emigrated to the US where he went on to patent dozens of inventions, including the lubricator for steam engines, the portable ironing board and the lawn sprinkler. He loves and loses two wives along the way, and

is haunted by his own invisibility, in spite of his achievements. Moodie wisely avoids politicizing his story in favour of simple theatrical storytelling that honours the memory of a long-neglected Canadian in whom we can all feel justifiable pride.

Being Governor General

Adrienne Clarkson
Heart Matters: A Memoir. Viking $38.00

Reviewed by Susanna Egan

Adrienne Clarkson's "heart matters" begins with her "tricky heart," which required a pacemaker. However, her title develops the moral that "the important thing in life is . . . deciding how best to live the time in between those heartbeats." For this remarkable woman, best living has involved several strenuous careers that have kept her in the public eye, extensive and purposeful travel, extensive scholarship, too, and responsibilities for the Canadian government and people among the principal actors in global politics. Sheaves of glossy photographs bear witness to all of these commitments. However, a good third of Clarkson's memoir concentrates, in fact, on her role as Canada's Governor General between 1999 and 2005. So how does she pace out her life? What matters to her heart?

Clearly important to Clarkson's understanding of her public role and of her private self is her family's escape from Japanese occupation of Hong Kong when she was a child. She remembers particular adventures of that journey and repeatedly refers to herself as a child of war. She attributes success in Canada to her migrant's sense of assimilation, but also in no small part to her parents' ability to make a new life and to be proud citizens of the country that had welcomed them. A chapter devoted to each of her parents suggests in particular her debt to her father. However, her treatment of her personal and family life is reserved. She merely alludes to her parents' difficulties, the problems of her own first marriage, her illness, the death of her premature baby, the end of this marriage and her subsequent estrangement from her daughters. They appear in one of the photographs, but we learn nothing at all about them or about whatever reconciliation has brought them together again. This memoir is certainly not a private life revealed.

Heart matters, then, are public. Clarkson is a passionate Canadian and has served her country at every stage of her multiple careers. She loves the north. She loves Quebec (and is, of course, a fluent francophone). She has patronized the arts and has turned Rideau Hall, both house and garden, into an emphatically Canadian home, the heart of government, beyond the reach of party politics. She has served the armed forces with passion and loyalty, ensuring that she was always on the ground for them when they needed support and encouragement. In short, Clarkson's "heart matters" are both Canada and the very particular ways in which she was able to serve Canada as Governor General. Her dedication to this high office, which she understands and explains with intense respect, produces a serious history lesson. It also induces in the less reverent a temptation to levity, a reminder of Gilbert and Sullivan's man in high office:

> I am the very model of a modern Major-General,
> I've information vegetable, animal, and mineral,
> I know the kings of England, and I quote the fights historical
> From Marathon to Waterloo, in order categorical

For, in truth, Clarkson has more on her agenda than a desire that her readers understand this office or learn from the inside some of her adventures during her tenure of it.

More intensely felt than meetings with the Shah of Iran or Vladimir Putin or the

Queen are Clarkson's observations about specific Canadian political events and politicians. She expresses respect for Bill Davis of Ontario and for Jean Chrétien (she could hear classical music in the background when he phoned her at lunchtime) but she lambastes Paul Martin and his "henchmen." Ducking from the sponsorship scandal, they failed to take appropriate responsibility when her circumpolar trip came under fire as "a frivolous junket." She refused their request to be sworn in on Parliament Hill instead of at Rideau Hall as entirely inappropriate. She was, again, outraged, when some of Martin's advisers came to the ceremony at Rideau Hall wearing running shoes and T-shirts. For all Clarkson's love of Canada, and her desire and ability to educate Canadians about the character and governance of our country, I am left with the feeling that her "heart matters" have been prompted to a significant degree by righteous indignation. Such measured but public castigation makes sense in terms of what Clarkson values, but also places her heart quite emphatically on her sleeve.

Two Books from Quebec

Gil Courtemanche; Wayne Grady, trans.
A Good Death. Douglas & McIntyre $22.95

Claude Lalumière, ed.
Short Stuff: New English Stories from Quebec. Véhicule $16.95

Reviewed by Peter R. Babiak

Gil Courtemanche's novel *A Good Death* dramatizes, in a contemplative manner blending philosophical reflection with an intractable suburban ethos, that archetypal adult child who returns to the "family home" only to find himself wondering "[w]hy do parents have to die in order for their children to feel grown up?" The answer unfolds over the course of a story as simple as a suburban lawn. André Lévesque, an actor nearing 60 who is himself a grandfather, together with most of his siblings and their offspring, has come to his parents' suburban Montreal home for the compulsory Christmas Eve dinner. Through the course of the evening, André's internal narration fixates on his 86-year-old father, Anatole, the patriarch whom he has never quite loved—he compares his father to Stalin and accuses him of more than one act of infamy involving a fish—but who is now struck with Parkinson's disease. Though largely contained in the internal monologue, reflections and memories punctuate André's narration so often, and with more wine-induced persistence, that this Christmas Eve spans some 150 pages. At this point, in the early hours of the morning by the ping-pong table in the basement of his parents' house, the narrator and his teenaged nephew Sam agree that Anatole must die a "good death," ostensibly a compassionate gesture but also, for André at least, a mild form of retaliation against a seemingly eternal *patria potestas*. The last quarter of the novel, in conflating story time and text time, moves quickly from Boxing Day to early spring, and it is here that the unlikely co-conspirators, with the approval of the intended victim and his kind-hearted wife, undertake what André calls the "gastronomical murder" of his father. Contrary to doctor's orders, they ply him with wine, camembert, garlic sausage and Cassoulet de Castelnaudary, thereby satisfying their desire to see his life end and his own need to die with a lust for life. "I'm hungry," Anatole manages to utter despite his misfiring neurons, "and I want a good death."

What is significant about Courtemanche's novel, apart from the obvious moral question underpinning the Dionysian right-to-die ritual, is that André's narrative does not degenerate into the kind of overheated sentimentality one might expect in a novel about family. Streamlined and precise, even dispassionately analytical at times, it is not without passion and emotion, nor is it

morbid. André's narrative is a self-diagnosis, a frank examination of the incongruous feelings and lack of feeling that accompany the imminent death of a parent. André is "splashing around in the wine of [his] own contradictions," which often happens to children in the company of their parents, regardless of whether they have been drinking; this honest attitude explains the breathtaking ease with which he moves from thinking "we have to kill my father. I've known it all along. Ever since I was a child" to confessing "I owe him everything." This is a narrator who is trying to straighten the lines of his thinking but who knows that, as a son, his thinking about his parents may be permanently bent.

As in a *conte philosophique*, the world of *A Good Death* is an intellectual representation, not a series of actual experiences. But when one speculates on the passing of time and the passing of people, as Courtemanche does here, one is faced with uncertain thoughts to which only narrative can respond with any degree of conviction. Which is not to say that the novel is grave and without humour. On the contrary, it is festooned with laughable suburban Canadian clichés—Anatole's favourite show is *Canadian Idol*, the living room "may as well not have been there" since it was reserved only for company—but at its core *A Good Death* is a bold meditation on mortality refashioned as a hearty sacrament in a family living out its life in an uninteresting Franco-Anglo-Italian suburb north of Montreal.

It is this comprehensive sensibility—the inconclusive made conclusive in narrative form—that tends to be absent from genres like the short story, and it is virtually absent in most of the 38 stories in the slim volume *Short Stuff*, a collection of the winning entries and finalists in the CBC-Quebec Writers' Federation Short Story Competition from 2002 to 2005. With varying degrees of success, most of the stories engage the conventional parameters of the genre—single event, simple characterization, clear-cut epiphanies—and a few of these have promising, or at least interesting, plots. A case in point is Pierre W. Plante's "Weathering the Storm," where the proprietress of a maternity shop meets a dancer from the strip bar above her store. Their conversation, interrupted by the rhythms thumping through the ceiling, is both awkward and familiar; this is delicately captured in self-conscious dialogue and a series of "evaporated" thoughts. Another is Connie Barnes Rose's "What About Us?", a surprising story about marital infidelities unsettling a close circle of middle-aged friends. The narrator, speaking as the conscience for the group, at one point asks, "a marriage is fragile and sometimes needs a little help from a friend. Right?", but then instead of becoming wrecks, the immediately affected families "seem to tingle with an energy none of us have felt in years."

Although all of the stories collected in the volume are good, insofar as they have been judged so by a worthy panel, a few seem somehow out of place. A case in point is Barry Webster's "Circles," a fascinating but far-too-lyrical story that reads like a surrealist prose poem about friends playing "magnificently ridiculous" games on Friday evenings. Or Carolena Gordon's story about a salesman at a mall shoe store who, amid amusing observations about the Italian airs put on by his colleagues—they fake accents and stuff socks down their pants—is, in a kind of rough-draft moment of being, drawn to a mysterious woman outside the store, a "beautiful and perfect 7AA" who just walks away at the end of the story and leaves the narrator stirred, though with no explanation or commentary. Far better in terms of escaping the confines of story dressed up as serious first person meditation is F. Colin Browne's narrative about a 13-year-old boy hit in the nose with a baseball: here, at least, the excess of subjectivity

is redeemed by a series of absurdist events involving a dead cricket nest, a plate of eggs and a birth.

Difficult in Translation

Monique Durand; Sheila Fischman, trans.
The Painter's Wife. Talonbooks $18.95

Pascale Quiviger; Sheila Fischman, trans.
The Perfect Circle. Cormorant $22.95

Reviewed by Sina Queyras

The Painter's Wife is a novel inspired by the story of Montreal artists Evelyn Rowat and René Marcil, who meet while working as illustrators at Eaton's. Through Marcil, a troubled painter from Saint Henri, Rowat breaks out of an oppressive family in the Town of Mount Royal and a bad first marriage. In a few strokes we get the Montreal of the 1940s—which here seems only a place to escape—before the two enter into a flourishing New York life of art galleries, Central Park and the first blushes of a creative love affair. The couple quickly runs into trouble as painter Marcil's genius expresses itself in self-sabotaging ways: most importantly in extreme perfectionism and self-doubt, mixed with a sense of grandiosity. He ultimately has his first New York show taken down shortly after it is hung.

Yet even with backdrops such as New York, Paris, London and ultimately Toronto, these dramatic, artistic individuals remain elusive. The novel moves forward in a fairly chronological way, but despite this the strands never come together to create a compelling portrait. Neither does the author fragment the narrative enough for the reader to engage in a collaborative reading. The language, which has been described as poetic, is stilted, often opaque and sentimental. For example: "On her seat, Evelyn arched her back. She begged the god of the highway to hold her in his feverish wings." Marcil's letters—his constant attempts to catch the wind—have moments of beauty, and there are moments when the reader feels empathy for the characters. It's difficult to say whether the problem is in the translation or the original. What is clear is that all of this serves to distance the reader. And finally, this reader found it difficult to understand why Rowat would continue to be a faithful partner (with polite exception) and patron to Marcil over the years, which they mostly spent apart. No doubt there was good reason (Marcil's paintings exhibit erotic genius), but this reader wasn't convinced.

More successful is *The Perfect Circle,* which won a Governor General's Award for French-language fiction in 2004, and in translation, was a finalist for the Giller in 2006. Pascale Quiviger's novel tells the story of Marianne, a Francophone who falls in love with Marco, a Tuscan, and who finds herself drawn to creating a life with him, despite its impossibility from the outset. The scope of the novel is small, and as the title suggests, claustrophobic. The writing is lean, often luscious. However, the decision to alternate the narrative with an italicized voice that comments on the relationship in the past offers neither a fresh perspective, nor relief from an already slowly paced, meditative text.

The novel's strengths lie in what makes the narrator most anxious: the lover, his town and his mother. Marco's world rings absolutely true, and when his mother appears, the story is energetic, despite (or perhaps because of) her hostility toward Marianne. It's an arresting portrait:

> There is sand in her voice and a certain harshness which shows that she's not just a mother, she's a field marshal, with weapons that smell good at mealtimes and a regiment of pots and pans under her command.

Quiviger captures Italy the way E.M. Forster captured it, not in *Room With A View*, but in *Where Angels Fear to Tread*, exposing the airtight world, and the family resisting all things modern and foreign. Heartbreaking

scenes ensue in which Marianne attempts to gain some freedom through an abusive, but nonetheless, embracing job, and these scenes make for an enjoyable read.

What is less compelling, and frustrating, is the character of Marianne, whom we never really get to know. Why is she drawn to a man who will never love her? To a land that will never claim her? Why does she dislike her home country so? Why is she so passive, so silent, so lost, so unable to effect any change in her life? In a heartbreaking scene involving a wounded dog by the side of the road, we are offered some hope that either Marianne or Marco will break out of their stupor long enough to effect some change. Marianne does offer some challenge here, but ultimately the dog, near death, is not put out of his misery, but rather "left to die free" as Marianne's thoughts are left to go around. When at the end of the novel Marianne is also free in her circle of happiness, it's hard to feel anything at all.

Sheila Fischman has translated over 100 Quebec novels, many of them canonical and integral to an Anglophone's understanding of Québécois literature. For this significant contribution, Fischman has won many awards. Difficult love stories can define a nation. It remains to be seen whether these two stories will have lasting impact.

How to Globalize a Canadian

Wayne Ellwood
The No-Nonsense Guide to Globalization.
Between the Lines $16.00

Patrick Imbert, ed.
Converging Disensus, Cultural Transformations and Corporate Cultures: Canada and the Americas. U of Ottawa P. n.p.

Irvin Studin, ed.
What is a Canadian? Forty-Three Thought-Provoking Responses. Douglas Gibson $34.99

Reviewed by Justin Sully

Wayne Ellwood's *The No-Nonsense Guide to Globalization* presents a cogent, accessible overview of the critical history of economic globalization. Unabashed in its critique of the neo-liberal valorization of a free-market model of globalization, Ellwood offers a concise exposition of the history and structure of our current economic system, assessing the merits and failures of the existing model and its potential alternatives. A reader familiar with existing critical historiography of globalization and the long centuries of the capitalist world system will find the usual suspects here: the conquest of the Americas and the global premonitions of classical economics, the formation and abandonment of the Bretton Woods system, the post-war development of supranational regulatory bodies (IMF, GATT, World Bank) and the transformations of trade and debt through the economic traumas and structural adjustments of the post-gold era.

While the economic takes centre stage in Ellwood's account, the exigencies of the globalization of culture and politics are explored, if only tangentially. A chapter on "Poverty, the Environment and the Market" offers the most sustained departure from economic history, giving a focused account of the environmental impact of treaties and policies of neo-liberal globalization in the developing world. The final section

diverges from the generally critical tone of the text to provide a collection of thoughtful, concrete prescriptions for "redesigning the global economy." Contributions to this section include proposals for retooling the IMF, implementing the "Tobin Tax" on financial speculation and founding a UN-mandated Global Environmental Organization. The format of this brief volume follows previous editions in the "No-Nonsense" series: chapters are short and concise, relying on a careful balance of narrative and empirical data, and punctuated with graphic and editorial sidebars. Ellwood has succeeded in condensing a historical analysis of economic globalization in a refreshingly pragmatic form that eschews the shrill, moralizing histrionics that are too common in similarly brief, critical treatments of globalization from the left. This is a text well-suited to supplement courses in the globalization of culture and world literature with a much needed and accessible political-economic perspective.

Converging Disensus, Cultural Transformations and Corporate Cultures: Canada and the Americas collects three essays that each address the manner in which a corporate culture of the Americas might be understood and, in turn, how this problem models a rethinking of the politics of difference across increasingly porous national boundaries. The perplexity induced by the questionable spelling in the title of the book ("Disensus") was, unfortunately, only aggravated by the, at best, lacklustre essays collected in the volume. Patrick Imbert, the editor of the volume, contributes the first essay: an effort that aims to address the politics of national-cultural difference across the Americas through an analysis of the "valorization or rejection of change and risk taking in corporate, media and literary discourses in Argentina, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Mexico, and the United States." In his attempt to articulate these impossibly diffuse subjects, Imbert alternates between sloppy readings of canonical cultural theory—Gayatri Spivak, for instance, is characterized as a kind of vulgar relativist and, most embarrassingly, as a man—and a ponderous distinction between discourses of a "zero-sum-game" and a "win-win-game" in existing approaches to political economy and international relations. Roque Callage Neto's essay, "America's Differential Congregational Citizenship," presents a generally incomprehensible excursus through idiosyncratic readings of continental philosophy and confusing political-economic histories to recommend an ill-defined notion of "differentiated congregational citizenship"; Neto's argument, such that it is, appears to boil down to an application of a naive, liberal "multiculturalism" as a model for increasing corporate productivity across national boundaries. While Imbert's writing seems in need of rigorous editing, each of Neto's sentences trumps the last in its utter incoherence. Gilles Paquet's essay distinguishes itself from the other contributions in its relative clarity of expression. Paquet offers an "x-ray of corporate culture" in the Americas, proposing a series of "psychoanalytic" models to measure the degree to which corporate cultures promote relative degrees of efficiency and productivity. Paquet's essay is by far the most interesting in its demonstration of the manner in which the language of cultural theory offers tools that can be swiftly (if awkwardly!) turned toward optimizing corporate productivity and expansion. Overall, however, the most remarkable thing about this book is that it made it to print.

Irvin Studin's collection, *What is a Canadian? Forty-Three Thought-Provoking Responses*, delivers more or less what its title claims. This collection gathers together an impressive roster of Canadian academics, jurists, authors, journalists and politicians with the aim of refreshing this well-worn Canadian question at "the dawn

of the [twenty-first] century." The twenty-first-century Canadian is, it would seem, thankfully conscious of how tired the question of Canadian identity has become for a general readership. As a whole, the contributors do a fine job of reflecting the editor's aim of beginning from the position that the matter at hand is either tediously obvious ("*the Canadian* is, in the only meaningful sense, a citizen of Canada") or constitutively irresolvable. Squeezed between these two poles, these essays produce a kind of radically multivocal state of the nation.

Reflections on the political and juridical constitution of a Canadian figure prominently, with Denis Stairs' reflection on the distinction of Canadian political culture and Mark Kingwell's theses on the philosophical problem of pluralism standing out among many other illuminating pieces. Polemic is not in short supply here, however. Indeed, indignation at the self-satisfaction and hypocrisy of Canadians represents one of the more sustained occupations of the respondents. Whether with respect to our national claim on "multiculturalism" (George Elliott Clarke, Joy Kogawa), our responsiveness to the world's need and conflict (Paul Heinbecker, Thomas Homer-Dixon) or our federalist embrace of "distinct societies" and First Peoples (Christian Dufour, Rosemarie Kuptana), the great majority of contributors here seem to agree in some way with Jake Macdonald's assessment that "Canadians have been slapped on the back enough." While a tendency to indulge a very Canadian delight in his/her own idiosyncrasies occasionally grows tedious and while there are about three too many jokes about making love in a canoe, what finally recommends this book is the warm current of humour and personal recollection that runs through the collection.

50 Years Preparing

John English

Citizen of the World: The Life of Pierre Elliott Trudeau, Volume One: 1919-1968. Knopf $39.95

Reviewed by R. Kenneth Carty

This rich account of Trudeau's first half-century ends with its hero breaking into a smile as he climbs onto the platform of the Liberal's 1968 convention to accept the prize of party leadership. This comes on page 479 in what for many will seem a long preface to the story most are waiting for—his years in office as one of Canada's longest-serving and most dramatic prime ministers. But this story provides the context and narrative necessary to understand this remarkable man and the stamp he put on an unsuspecting country.

Whatever views or prejudices readers bring to the subject, and given the lively way his name still animates public debate, Trudeau now belongs to the historians. Almost 60% of the population has come of age since he left office and so will have little personal memory of those years. Few remain who have any direct experience of the life of pre-Quiet Revolution Quebec in which Trudeau came to maturity and against which he later rebelled. English's success is that he is able to provide his readers with an appreciation of the personal and institutional pressures of that world and how they shaped the young Trudeau. And he makes it clear that it was the family's financial independence, as well as his own inclinations and mother's support, that later allowed Trudeau to spend years abroad—at Harvard, in Paris and then the London School of Economics—years that were important to his transformation from a parochial nationalist to a "citizen of the world."

Here are the many faces of Trudeau: the loner apt to plunge into cultures on the other side of the world at a moment's notice, the man who never let lifetime male friends get too close while revealing his most

private anxieties and ambitions to a succession of beautiful women to whom he couldn't commit, the deeply religious Catholic unable to finish a graduate thesis on Christianity and Communism, the socialist who decided that the politically smart thing to do was join the Liberal party. English gracefully weaves these pieces together, providing a portrait of a man coming to grips with his community, its place in the wider network of societies, and his own willingness to shift from detached observer to engaged participant.

Trudeau chose the Liberal party as much as the party chose him, first as a candidate and then as leader. This curious relationship would mark the politics of the country for the next two decades, but English's book ends just as we are discovering what sort of man the Liberals had taken in. One hopes volume two of this sweeping biography tells us something of Trudeau's impact on the Liberals who spent most of the twentieth century as Canada's "natural governing party." Few are as well placed as English, himself a one-time Liberal MP, to do it. If this first volume is any guide, none are likely to do it better.

Poésie et pauvreté

Jocelyne Felx
L'Échelle et l'olivier. Noroît 17,95 $

Fernand Durepos
Les Abattoirs de la grâce. L'Hexagone 14,95 $

François Hébert
Comment serrer la main de ce mort-là.
L'Hexagone 14,95 $

Compte rendu par Antoine Boisclair

Comme en témoignent les premiers vers du recueil, l'ombre de Rilke plane sur plusieurs poèmes de *L'Échelle et l'olivier* : « Quand les anges voient un corps / sur un lit d'hôpital comme une moisson mûre / ils viennent dans leur robe de lin pur / avec leur faucille reprendre le souffle de vie ». Mais si la présence des anges et le thème de la maladie suggèrent l'influence exercée par le poète allemand, cette écriture participe aussi de ce que le romancier et essayiste Yvon Rivard nomme « l'héritage de la pauvreté » à propos de la littérature québécoise. Cette pauvreté, chez Jocelyne Felx, se rapporte tout d'abord au corps; elle atteint par la suite des dimensions ontologique et mystique auxquelles se rattache une certaine forme d'humilité par rapport au pouvoir des mots : « Aucun chant ne peut se former de mon langage // Incapable de donner à ma pensée / l'état du ravissement / chose simple et légère / que nul obstacle n'arrête ». Ou ailleurs : « Je ressens le manque de ma grandeur impossible ». Les thèmes de *L'Échelle et l'olivier* ne prétendent pas renouveler l'histoire de la poésie; la force du recueil repose plutôt sur la simplicité des images lourdes de symboles et sur la capacité de l'auteure à ancrer les envolées mystiques dans un contexte quotidien.

Chez Fernand Durepos, le thème de la pauvreté est incarné par les figures du mendiant, du clochard ou du squatteur. Dans la première section des *Abattoirs de la grâce*, le poète s'adresse ainsi à un « tu » anonyme qui semble faire écho à une rupture amoureuse : « combien de moi encore / laisseras-tu mendier aux portes / des râles qui leur viennent en gorge? » « Qu'on ne retienne de moi / que cette peau de clochard / dont je m'étais sorti », répond-il dans un autre poème. Des métaphores guerrières agrémentées de jeux de mots (« braquer / sur l'immonde / le barillet de sa beauté / rester en elle / ne reculer devant rien / tout réapprendre / du maniement des larmes ») donnent par la suite à ce recueil un accent de révolte qui rappelle à certains égards l'esprit d'un adolescent : « laisse-moi / d'une seule gorgée / faire cul sec / te boire d'un trait / rends-moi ivre / de tout ce qui m'aspire en toi / à même le goulot d'azur parfait / que tu gonfles ». Un excès de métaphores construites à l'aide de compléments

du nom accentue l'impression de facilité qui se dégage de l'ensemble du recueil.

Cette impression de facilité peut être ressentie également à la lecture du livre de François Hébert, particulièrement lorsque les assonances et les allitérations masquent le sens du poème. C'est le cas d'une pièce écrite à la mémoire de Jean-Paul Riopelle : « des fois je loup je poule / j'Ézéchiel augurant je barbe / je rue je roue je Rosa j'arrose / j'eau vive assoiffe ». Peintres et écrivains disparus sont souvent convoqués dans *Comment serrer la main de ce mort-là*, si bien que le recueil peut être lu comme une suite de tombeaux ou d'hommages à différentes figures artistiques. Le poème éponyme invoque ainsi Gaston Miron : « si tu nous touches / Miron l'anéanti en vérité / avec ta main d'abîme / le fond que tu rejoins c'est nous / les doigts rompus ». C'est lorsque cette poésie se confronte au néant et à la mort—lorsqu'elle se prend au sérieux, serait-on tenté de dire—qu'elle s'avère la plus intéressante. Trop souvent, malheureusement, le ton familier édulcore la conscience tragique du monde : « composer un poème pourquoi pas / ça met de la mort dans la vie / sauf qu'il y a les effets secondaires / le pathétique inhérent à l'affaire ». Ce ton familier, ajouté aux références à la culture populaire (« comme on dégrise ou ben décrisse pour l'amour / qu'à te disait / Desbiens / Patrice / dans un alexandrin gagné au Super 7 »), contraste avec le langage plus soigné des meilleurs poèmes, parmi lesquels figure un hommage à Nelligan : « j'entends vos doigts qui craquent / devant mon feu l'automne / les soirs de vent // quand l'horizon par la fenêtre du manoir / devient un vieux rideau / qui claque ».

Listening to Strangers

Keath Fraser
13 Ways of Listening to a Stranger: The Best Stories of Keath Fraser. Thomas Allen $26.95

Stephen Guppy
The Work of Mercy. Thomas Allen $24.95

Reviewed by Colin Hill

Two new and highly original collections—Keath Fraser's *13 Ways of Listening to a Stranger* and Stephen Guppy's *The Work of Mercy*—are reminders that Canada has no scarcity of experienced short-story writers who deserve to be read and discussed more widely. Although Fraser has been publishing for more than 25 years, his work is not often anthologized. He is author of several volumes of short fiction, a controversial biographical work—*As For Me and My Body: A Memoir of Sinclair Ross*—and he has edited a popular anthology of travel narratives called *Bad Trips*. His new anthology brings together 18 of his eclectic and compelling stories. Few single-author collections that I have read cover nearly as much ground and treat such varied and unexpected subjects and situations. Fewer still manage such breadth as convincingly as *13 Ways*. In "Bones," a Canadian chiropractor reluctantly investigates a mass grave in Southeast Asia. "Libretto" channels the weary voice of a Vancouver comedian as she reflects on her unusual life, tinkers with her stage routine and ponders a move to Los Angeles. "Le mal de l'air" is a psychologically astute story in which a couple's marital breakdown reaches a sad climax during a trip abroad. A vain and self-reflexive TV gardener with an acute sense of smell negotiates a strange love triangle in "The Emerald City." The heart-wrenching "Telling My Love Lies" presents an opera singer who visits his parents and discovers that his mother is falsifying her marital history as she recounts it to her amnesiac husband. Perhaps the finest story

in the collection, "Foreign Affairs," features a protagonist who will not give up his philandering ways despite being confined to a wheelchair in the latter stages of multiple sclerosis. Remarkably, given their disparate subjects, these stories are psychologically astute and utterly convincing.

The title of Fraser's book obviously invites comparison with Wallace Stevens' modernist enigma, "13 Ways of Looking at a Blackbird." This poem is refracted in Fraser's stories which, on one level at least, are about perception, the boundaries of the self and the varied ways that individuals tend to define themselves in relation to a paradoxically familiar and unknowable other. I find these concerns to be especially prominent and interesting in "Waiting," "The Anniversary" and "There Are More Dark Women in the World Than Light." The recurrent ideas and themes of the collection all have to do with self-definition but lead in other directions as well: the elusiveness of language, the intangibility and mutability of personal and communal histories, the indefinable nature of human relationships and the possibilities and problems that face writers of fiction. The effectiveness of Fraser's treatment of these subjects is heightened because he tends to write about unexpected and usual situations in a manner that magnifies—rather than transcends—mundane reality and "everyday life." His prose is visceral and crisp. His pages abound with pithy and memorable insights: "Language curled around premonitions like slow water. Afterwards he couldn't be sure he was remembering what she has said to him, he to her, they to themselves." At times, however, such insights might make his stories seem self-consciously literary. The stories are nearly always emplotted upon interior, psychological developments in the minds of their central characters. This means that some readers will find the stories uncommonly intelligent and cerebral. They may also find the longer stories full of ideas and lacking in dramatic incident. As a group, the stories seem at once too linked to be the "greatest hits" compilation that the title promises, and too disparate to seem truly interwoven and unified. But these are small complaints about an excellent book.

Stephen Guppy's *The Work of Mercy* also collects the work of a writer with an impressive and under-appreciated oeuvre. Guppy has written books of poetry (*Ghost Catcher*, *Blind Date with the Angel: The Diane Arbus Poems*, *Understanding Heaven*) short fiction (*Another Sad Day at the Edge of the Empire*) and a novel (*The Fire Thief*). His new collection brings together nine stories of remarkable intensity that have been previously published in journals and collections. Like Diane Arbus' photography, which influenced some of Guppy's finest poems, these stories demonstrate a keen eye for the freakish and *outré* that always lurk at the not-so-distant margins of the everyday world. "The Origin of Country Music" treats a dysfunctional and emotionally immature family addicted to gambling. In "Motels of the Northwest: A Guide Book," two siblings torment their mentally handicapped brother whom they blame for their unusual and unsettled childhood. In "Fishing Veronica Lake," Guppy captures the awkwardness of a relationship between a boy and his stepfather who works at a nuclear waste facility. A boy abandoned by his mother in "All My Love" moves in with his father and his girlfriend who makes strange dolls that remind him of older boys that bully him. In "Moonwalk," a man stalks his ex-wife and breaks into her motel room where he discovers a TV set playing a video of Michael Jackson doing the dance move that gives the story its name. The finest story in the collection, "Downwind," treats a mother and daughter caught in a cloud of radioactive dust as they drive to Las Vegas and the aftermath of their vivid and unfortunate journey.

The subjects of these stories make them often uncomfortable to read. This is compounded because the stories paradoxically stretch this reader's credulity to its limits yet remain convincing and almost entirely uncontrived. Guppy's characters are always vivid, familiar and surprisingly unpredictable. If the powerful scenes and charged situations he imagines mean that the collection occasionally becomes melodramatic (the ending to "All My Love," for example, makes an otherwise masterful story incredible), the stories are all nevertheless uncommonly memorable. Few collections of short fiction assembled from previously published sources have as much unity as *The Work of Mercy*. Most of the key themes Guppy treats are present to some extent in all of his stories: the threat of ecological disaster, bad parenting, recollection and memory, travel, movement and displacement. Most interestingly, the stories seem to suggest in various ways that moments of transience are those when one encounters the self most honestly and personal identity is both least tangible and clearest. Like Fraser, Guppy writes convincingly about people near the margins of ordinary existence who seem uncomfortably familiar.

Anatomy of Imagination

Northrop Frye; Germaine Warkentin, ed. *The Educated Imagination and Other Writings on Critical Theory 1933-1963*. U of Toronto P $125.00

Northrop Frye; Robert D. Denham, ed. *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays.* U of Toronto P $100.00

Reviewed by Graham Nicol Forst

It's difficult to imagine the tradition of western literary criticism without Northrop Frye's now 50-year-old masterpiece *Anatomy of Criticism* or its briefer popularization, *The Educated Imagination*. Harold Bloom said rightly that the *Anatomy*, at the time of its publication, established Frye as "the foremost living student of Western literature." How many thousands of teachers (this reviewer included) learned, from *Anatomy*, to teach literature from a systematic, organized, "scientific" perspective instead of being influenced by fads, or acting like a vanguardist of political or religious doctrines. Herbert Marcuse's brilliant late revision of Marx's aesthetics made the same social claim as does Frye's critical theory: we do not submerge, but release the means of social change and true enlightenment when we use art to educate the imagination rather than indoctrinate the brain.

The Educated Imagination was the name Frye gave to his quickly written, mass-market version of the *Anatomy* that was presented as the *Massey Lectures* on the CBC in the winter of 1962. It is republished here as volume 21 of the *Collected Works* along with various other reviews, essays, articles, lectures and even books (the "cloggedly earnest" *Well-Tempered Critic* [1961] is included) on critical theory which Frye wrote from his early student days until his fiftieth birthday. And however anachronistic it sounds now to hear talk about the need for "co-ordinating principles" and "central hypotheses," for a belief in a "big interlocking family" of literature, or some fanciful "order of words"; and however dated seem such tacit assumptions of "the greatest classics" and "humanity's sacred scriptures" and so forth, it's still refreshing to read that literature can "refine our sensibilities" and render us "less likely . . . to find an unthinking pleasure in cruel or evil things." Somewhere inside themselves, all teachers of literature must feel something like this.

Volume 22 of the *Collected Works of Northrop Frye* offers the second recent reincarnation of the *Anatomy of Criticism* (Princeton UP's reprint appeared in 2000 [see review *CL*, Autumn 2003]). The major advantage of the present *Collected Works*

version over the Princeton one is the thorough, thoughtful and lovingly detailed Introduction and notes (together taking up almost 200 pages) by Robert D. Denham.

Denham is clearly the best scholar on Frye around today. A co-editor of the massive Frye *Collected Works*, he took over, for unannounced reasons, the editorship of this seminal volume from the *éminence grise* of Frye studies, A.C. Hamilton, raising the question why it is that the foremost work of literary criticism ever written by a Canadian must, in both recent reincarnations, be introduced by a foreign critic neither prepared nor inclined to deal with the *Anatomy* as a Canadian book. For it is, after all, worth asking: could *Anatomy of Criticism* have been written anywhere other than in Canada? Is it not too *subversive* to have been written in the US (recall Frye's sympathy with Marxism and his lifetime attachment to the CCF/NDP); is it not too dryly *witty* to have been written by an American, or too Low Church for any Englishman (other than Blake)? Too *detached* and *ironically distanced* to have been written by a direct heir of any strong literary tradition? And how much of Frye's thinking and sense of freedom to speak and his growing confidence and fame were encouraged and warranted by his close connections with our national radio, by the extraordinary fertility of the scholarly environment at the University of Toronto, and by his lionization by the hero-starved Canadian public? No less an authority than Margaret Atwood thought that Frye's cartographical strategies were uniquely Canadian—this compulsive mapping out of unknown territory so it could be occupied intelligently and systematically, with an eye to social justice.

Nonetheless, Denham's Introduction and notes are extraordinary and will prove valuable to all Frye scholars present and future, especially the very honest and thoughtful discussion of the relationship between Frye and the poststructuralists—Derrida, Jameson, Kristeva and others. He does, however, make the odd claim, possibly designed to make Frye respectable to postmodernist readers, that Frye's procedures are those of a "*bricoleur*" and *Anatomy of Criticism* a work of "*bricolage*"—an odd claim to say the least for this most logocentric and deductive of critics. (Denham does, however, pull back from this claim later in his Introduction, when he calls Frye "our greatest literary taxonomist.") And when, in answer to observations about Frye's declining reputation, Denham cites statistics that show Frye was among the "250 most-cited authors in the *Arts & Humanities Citation Index,* 1976-1983," one wonders about the relevance of that observation 25 years later.

The long-term critical value of the *Anatomy of Criticism* and *The Educated Imagination* cannot be regarded as given—time changes things too much ever to make such a claim. But certainly, these books stand as irrefutable testimonies to the ability of clear thinking, articulate feeling and precise wittiness to confirm the power of art, and the necessity for and ability of the arts to construct humanity out of reality, as god did Adam out of red clay. That this was said to modern audiences more clearly in Canada than anywhere else, and by a Canadian, ought to make all Canadians proud.

Both of these volumes are meticulously edited (although Virgil's and Samuel Clemens' pseudonyms are, as in previous volumes in this series, misspelled as "Marro" and "Longhorne"). The Introductions are generous, the notes very detailed and helpful—and it is a particular pleasure to see in *The Educated Imagination* some photographs of Frye and those who influenced him during his long life.

A final point: purchasers of these two volumes will be puzzled, if not upset, at the degree of repetition they contain, raising the whole question of the

obsessive-compulsive nature of these sorts of Collected Works projects. Was it really necessary, for example, to publish the original version of the first essay in the *Well-Tempered Critic*, published only a year before the whole book, which is reprinted here; or to publish each and all of the separate essays which later will turn up, almost verbatim, as every chapter of the *Anatomy of Criticism* (especially since Frye's *Notebooks* for the *Anatomy of Criticism* is due to be published next as volume 23)? As Frye himself said in one of his Notebooks, "the great secret is something you can't reach unless you shut up."

Removing Masks

Bill Gaston
Gargoyles. Anansi $29.95

Dennis Bock
The Communist's Daughter. Harper $34.00

Reviewed by Lisa Grekul

According to its jacket blurb, Bill Gaston's latest collection of short fiction was crafted around the "idea of the 'gargoyle'"—specifically, the gargoyle as a "concrete representation of extremes of human emotions." Before sitting down to write each story, Gaston (who has several novels and short story collections under his belt, including *Mount Appetite*, a finalist for the 2002 Giller Prize) apparently "sketched out a distinct gargoyle to look down over it"; in the writing itself, then, he successfully peels away the surface "masks" of its characters to uncover their "disfigurements and contortions" (inner gargoyles, one might say). "Un-masking" similarly serves as the motivation behind—and the central theme of—Dennis Bock's recent novel (his first, *The Ash Garden*, 2001, won the Japan-Canada Literary Award and garnered a number of international award nominations), a fictionalized first person account of Norman Bethune's life. Readers who are familiar with Bethune's medical/humanitarian achievements will find Bock's Bethune surprisingly complex—more multi-dimensional than legend would have us believe and, at times, decidedly gargoyle-esque (to borrow Gaston's idea).

A nominee for the 2006 Governor General's Award for Fiction and a collection virtually without weakness (too short is my only complaint), *Gargoyles* showcases an author at the peak of his career, masterfully in control of the most difficult of genres. The book comprises 12 stories, all neatly and aptly slotted into three thematic groupings ("Wrathful," "Beneficent," "Mercurial"), each memorable for its concisely constructed characters and deft insights into their psychological states. Collectively, and in keeping with Gaston's idea of the gargoyle, the stories explore—and elicit—a wide range of emotion: confusion, for example, and heartbreak (as in "Freedom," about a French immigrant in Des Moines for whom cultural misunderstandings translate into violent, untimely death); visceral disgust (the father in "Honouring Honey," after putting down the family dog, decides to eat its heart); and, occasionally, lighthearted delight ("The Beast Waters His Garden of a Summer's Eve," given to us as a transcript of a conversation between two brothers, one of whom reveals himself to be decidedly neurotic, is, in a word, hilarious).

To be sure, many of Gaston's stories, beginning with "The Night Window" (focused on a 16-year-old boy's realization that life is, "[l]ike in the animal world," a "big jungle-mix of hunger and wits and power"), will leave readers feeling unsettled, if not downright queasy. Take, for instance, "The Green House," which (not unlike "Freedom") explores the tensions between different cultural communities, teasing out the sickening extremes to which individuals will go in their distrust of "other" groups. Or take the story that shares its title with the book, focused on an eccentric,

79-year-old, retired architect who decides to remove all of the doors from his home, so convinced is he that these openings (he calls them "gargoyles") will ward off evil. The promise of goodness triumphing over evil is shattered when the old man's house is broken into. And innocence is lost again in "The Kite Trick," arguably the most disturbing story in the collection, when 12-year-old Phillip and his two younger siblings, on a family holiday by the sea, bury their gin-soaked, ageing, rocker-uncle in sand (all but his head is covered) only to watch him slip into hypothermic sleep (read: death) while the tide rolls in. *Gargoyles* is not, however, unremittingly dark. "A Work-in-Progress" sets Anthony Ott (author) against Theo (academic) in a duel as thought-provoking as it is raucously funny. As Ott gives a (literally) endless reading (he reads through an entire night and well into the next day)—improvising as he goes, and clearly determined to outlast his audience ("God," thinks Theo, "the maniac was rhyming now"; he was "definitely no longer reading")—Theo contemplates the creative process, wondering "[w]hy the hell" he had "given up on writing." The two wind up in a fist fight with Ott refusing to stop reading until his adversary/audience-of-one accepts the author's challenge: "It's your turn," he says. "Tell me a story."

The story that Bock tells in *The Communist's Daughter*, while focused on a "real life" figure whose achievements have been much lauded in public discourse on Canadian history, provides refreshing—albeit disconcerting—insight into the (possible) inner workings of a man whose relentless commitment to saving lives in savage, wartorn contexts leads him, near the end of his life, to grapple with the personal sacrifices he has made (and forced others to make) for the sake of his political ideals and professional ambitions. Divided into seven parts, the novel takes the form of a letter written by Bethune in the final year of his life to the daughter he has never known ("I give you my word absolutely that I will recount my life as faithfully as I recall it, nothing added, nothing lost"); that the letter never reaches her (it is found, instead, in seven envelopes, by officials of the Chinese Communist Party after Bethune's death) becomes the first of many anguished elements in the narrative. As he writes from various field hospitals in northern China, in the midst of the Communist Revolution (he set up these hospitals, performed countless operations and introduced blood transfusion), Bethune allows his memory to wander back to his childhood in Ontario, his medical training in Toronto and his failed marriage. Central, however, to the narrative he constructs is the time he spent in civil wartorn Spain, during which he met and impregnated Kajsa, and ultimately abandoned her and his daughter. Regret over never having known his daughter in many ways defines Bethune's perspective on the life he has led and the choices he has made: "[t]he reality," he writes, near the beginning of his letter, "is that you have missed every word of the story I will tell, and I cannot change that fact. When such a small miracle as you awaited, I chose to look elsewhere for purpose. I chose to leave you behind, and that is the sadness in my life." But Kajsa's fate—and Bethune's struggle to come to terms with his complicity in, and guilt over, it—is equally pivotal to his "unmasking" throughout the narrative. Indeed, given that readers know Bethune's fate from the start, the mystery surrounding Kajsa's demise (including Bethune's role in it) is what most forcefully propels the plot.

Not surprisingly, short story aficionados will be drawn to *Gargoyles*, and fans of historical fiction are more likely to appreciate *The Communist's Daughter*. What readers of both books may find surprising, however, is that while Bock's novel delves thoughtfully and at length (book-length) into the dark recesses of a tortured mind,

Gaston's stories—short though they may be—provide greater depth of insight into a wider and more compelling range of human emotion. Straightforward fiction, in the end—unfettered by history and legend—may well be the genre better suited to unmasking the gargoyles within.

Writing Northern Ontario

John Geddes
The Sundog Season. Turnstone $19.95

Charlie Smith
Tag Alder Tales. Your Scrivener $18.00

Laurence Steven, ed.
Outcrops: Northeastern Ontario Short Stories. Your Scrivener $22.00

Reviewed by Robert Gray

Northrop Frye asked his famous question "Where is here?" over 30 years ago, but for three recent works of fiction connected to northern Ontario, this preoccupation still has a healthier life as a question than it does as a viable answer.

Ottawa writer and journalist John Geddes' first novel, *The Sundog Season*, is written like a memoir, as an adult narrator remembers a childhood in northern Ontario, piecing together the experiences, trying to understand his role in an adult narrative he could not fathom as a child. For the narrator, memory is complicated, resistant, confounding at times, yet alluring all the same. Though it is a coming-of-age novel, to some extent it resists such narrative causality. The first half of the novel, in particular, reads more like a series of short stories. This does not seem entirely at odds with this kind of remembering of childhood. In contrast, the developments of the second half of the novel seem both too dramatic and too imaginary, both perhaps suited to a child's version of a very adult event. Throughout the prose is sparse and compelling: "When I was five years old I wished for the death of another boy, prayed for it, and it happened." The narrative thankfully resists lapsing into too wise a framed narrative, resists trying to make too clear a sense of the past and the events, the present reality for the boy is kept intact. Geddes' storytelling resists the common pitfalls of the genre and produces a strong first novel.

While *The Sundog Season* is filtered through a slight haze of nostalgia for the North, Charlie Smith's collection of short stories *Tag Alder Tales* lacks any filters whatsoever. Charlie Smith, as the publisher suggests, is "the Bard of the North Shore" of Lake Superior, having previously written two collections of poems. *Tag Alder Tales* is his first collection of short stories. Smith's true talent as a storyteller shines through in stories like "The Bull," a tale of a young man, a bear and a bull, taut with tension and barely enough room to breathe. Most of the stories here display a fierce and keen eye for human behaviour. In "Terry," for example, the narrator presents a detailed social history of the story's namesake, all to explain one particular night. This is, in style, small-town folklore, both honest and probably rife with confabulation, but everything in service of telling the truth of the story. Where story is people.

Some stories here, such as "Calf," lean too heavily toward conservative judgment. The narrator claims the father "ruined [Calf] because he never hit him, when maybe a cuff alongside the head might have woken that kid up. . . . He should have made a man out of him." This intolerance is built around a fearful masculinity, and, in the end, is difficult to read for anyone not from that precise place.

Where *Tag Alder Tales* runs the risk of excluding readers, *Outcrops* is a well-chosen anthology of stories that is inclusive as it explores the rich cultural and social differences in northern Ontario communities. There are recognizable names in the collection: Lola Lemire Tostevin, Tomson

Highway, F.G. Paci and Mansel Robinson, to name a few. These are not, however, necessarily the main attractions. Three of the more enjoyable reads here are from developing writers: Rick Cooper's "The Pagoda" which tells the story of Mr. Su's retirement, the community's perhaps misplaced though earnest "project" to reunite him with his wife from China whom he has not seen in four decades; Margo Little's "The Watcher" gives us rare insight into the lives of codgers in a café; and Eric Moore's "Seelim's Flowers" tells a powerful tale of the inexplicable violence of young boys in the presence of a gentle man's garden.

Steven does, however, pursue the connections between the stories a little too fiercely, sometimes making them too literal for the reader. For example, the first two stories, "Currency Exchange" and "The Pagoda," are both fine in their own right, but placed together they become a statement, their common theme of immigrant experience suddenly ringing too loudly, rather than letting the reader make these connections over the entire experience of reading the collection.

Both *Outcrops* and *Tag Alder Tales* suffer from poor design. In an unfortunate turn, the designer for *Outcrops* splits the word and most of the titles of the individual stories within, so that "outcrops" becomes two words: "Out crops." Either the designer is trying to do away with farming or make it come out of the closet. In either event, the typography, the layout, and the poor use of colour photographs all undermine the work found within.

Questions around what defines a region and its literary character may only be answered with time, with an accumulation of voices and with gentle reading. These new works of fiction are building this community one finely told story after the other.

Zola en 2007 ou La fin de l'Histoire

Hans-Jürgen Greif et Guy Boivin
La bonbonnière. L'instant même 25,00 $

Compte rendu par François Ouellet

Auteur de nombreux essais et fictions, notamment d'*Orfeo*, un roman qui avait connu un certain succès en 2003, Hans-Jürgen Greif s'est associé cette fois-ci au généalogiste Guy Boivin pour rédiger *La bonbonnière*. Auteur d'ouvrages sur des familles québécoises, Guy Boivin a en effet mis une partie de ses archives au service de son collègue romancier. Elles ne pouvaient être déposées entre de meilleures mains, car Greif nous offre un *véritable bonbon*, pour reprendre une expression que lui-même affectionne pour parler des livres qu'il aime.

Le roman commence en octobre 1867, alors que Marien Boiteau, le troisième fils de Christien et Laurentia, prophétise la disparition des Boiteau—du nom du père—dans six générations. Ce sont ces générations et ses plusieurs dizaines de personnages qui font l'objet du roman. Greif ajustant son récit au respect de la chronologie et passant minutieusement en revue, tour à tour, chacun des membres des nombreuses familles engendrées depuis la deuxième génération. D'où la très juste dénomination générique « Roman en portraits » pour caractériser l'ouvrage, où la plupart des personnages ont droit à rarement plus de dix pages chacun. On connaissait déjà les dons remarquables de conteur et de portraitiste de Greif, des dons comme il ne s'en trouve guère dans la littérature québécoise actuelle, sinon peut-être chez Daniel Poliquin; mais ils ont trouvé ici, par le biais novateur du récit généalogiste, une forme d'efficacité à peu près absolue pour se déployer. Dans ce cadre, et pour le plus grand bonheur du lecteur, Greif s'en donne à cœur joie, sa verve extraordinaire tirant brillamment profit tout à la fois du

portrait, de la caricature, de la langue populaire et de l'économie d'intrigue. L'auteur sait identifier malicieusement l'événement qui un jour fait basculer la vie des personnages; ces personnages, par ailleurs, qu'il aime individualiser par leurs travers, par le biais d'un humour souvent grivois ou par la représentation de petits faits inusités traités avec irrévérence (l'énorme corps d'Alma Boiteau défonçant, au-dessus de la fosse, le cercueil dans lequel il a été couché; l'œil de porcelaine de Ludovic Boiteau éclatant dans le froid de l'hiver; Alfreda Labarre qui, ayant rendu l'âme en vacances au Mexique, est attachée sur le toit de la Volks afin d'être rapatriée, avant d'être volée, etc.). On le voit, tout cela, avec ses tranches de vie du monde ordinaire propulsé à l'avant-scène par le « détail » impertinent, par la saveur de la langue parlée, par le rire, et sans compter les liens d'hérédité qui sont régulièrement noués entre les personnages, porte magnifiquement l'empreinte de Zola (du reste un des auteurs de prédilection du professeur de l'Université Laval maintenant à la retraite). Un Zola qui reviendrait, cent ans plus tard, donner ses meilleurs fruits au Québec. La généalogie, elle aussi, est littéraire.

Mais trêve de généalogies, ce roman fin de siècle, qui est ainsi construit qu'il cherche à mettre à l'épreuve la prophétie marienne, est aussi un « roman fin de l'Histoire » : celle des Pères de la filiation, en d'autres mots celle d'une civilisation (le patriarcat), Greif et Guy Boivin venant faire explicitement écho, par la fiction, à ce que les transmutations de la société depuis Mai 68 nous enseignent. Le dogme paternel est chose du passé. Dans un sens, il ne serait pas faux de dire que *La bonbonnière* est l'ultime roman de la terre. Un roman de la terre où cette fois on rit, parce que tout est bel et bien fini.

D'un extrême à l'autre

Annette Hayward
La querelle du régionalisme au Québec (1904-1931). Vers l'autonomisation de la littérature québécoise. Nordir 49,95 $

Compte rendu par Robert Vigneault

À bien des lecteurs cette admirable thèse fournira l'occasion d'un retour nostalgique, teinté d'humour, vers des auteurs québécois qu'on aurait cru oubliés : Adjutor Rivard, Pamphile Le May, René Chopin, Marcel Dugas, Albert Dreux, Paul Morin et bien d'autres qu'on lisait au collège quand le *Manuel d'histoire de la littérature* de Camille Roy faisait encore autorité. Avec Albert Lozeau on devenait « âme solitaire » (mais non, c'était là une posture dangereuse, « romantique » ou « moderne », nous avertissaient les censeurs; mieux valait respirer les âcres parfums de la « vieille grange ») … Au fait, pourquoi fallait-il que tout fût « vieux » : *Vieilles choses, vieilles gens* (Georges Bouchard), le vieux curé, le vieux pont, les vieux bancs, l'ancienne laiterie, *L'Adieu de la Grise* (Lionel Groulx), à moins que *vieux* ne fût ici synonyme de *bien* …

Attention, toutefois : rien de *vieillot* dans cette recherche sur la querelle du régionalisme au Québec : au contraire, c'est une époque significative de notre histoire littéraire, ce conflit de plus en plus passionné, parfois haut en couleur, entre les tenants de l'affirmation régionaliste et leurs adversaires déclarés, les « exotiques », qu'Annette Hayward fait revivre ici en s'appuyant sur une documentation qu'on croirait, ma foi, exhaustive : elle a non seulement scruté les écrits de ces nombreux écrivains mais elle a procédé à un dépouillement systématique de tous les périodiques qui ont fait écho à cette mémorable controverse.

Le courant régionaliste, le plus apprécié du grand public, comptait de puissants défenseurs : l'abbé Camille Roy, dans le sillage de son illustre prédécesseur, l'abbé Henri-Raymond Casgrain, avait tracé la

voie dans sa célèbre conférence de 1904 sur la « nationalisation » de la littérature dite « canadienne », soutenant même en véritable idéologue qu'il fallait « nationaliser nos esprits ». Sans le dire, il s'inspirait de l'excellente étude de Louis Dantin sur Nelligan, un auteur à ne pas imiter, précisait l'ecclésiastique : Dantin, si avisé d'ordinaire, n'avait-il pas malencontreusement reproché au jeune poète (mais il s'en repentira) de ne pas avoir donné à son œuvre un « cachet canadien »! Devant les névroses « malsaines » de Nelligan et les amours languissantes d'Albert Dreux, le bon abbé regrette la poésie virile d'autrefois : « où sont les jours de Crémazie, de Fréchette, de Le May? » D'autres partisans du régionalisme prendront la parole : le linguiste Adjutor Rivard et ses tableaux rustiques *Chez nous* qui, avec *Les Rapaillages* de Lionel Groulx, connaîtront un vif succès de librairie. Damase Potvin, âme dirigeante de la revue *Le Terroir*, assénera sa thèse agriculturiste à l'idéologie on ne peut plus explicite dans son roman *Restons chez nous*. *Maria Chapdelaine* viendra consacrer le triomphe du régionalisme, sauf que, aux yeux du Français Louis Hémon, ironisera Marcel Dugas, « c'était tout simplement composer un roman exotique » … Le plus équilibré de tous, Léo-Paul Desrosiers, influencé par Lionel Groulx, prônera un « nationalisme littéraire » élargi, inspiré par la méditation de l'histoire et par le souci de l'âme contemporaine aussi bien que de l'âme ancienne du Canada français. D'autres reprendront le flambeau, mais aux antipodes du « réalisme idéalisé » de Camille Roy, comme dans *La Scouine* d'Albert Laberge et *Un homme et son péché* de Claude-Henri Grignon.

Adeptes quelque peu hautains de l'Art universel et d'une forme exquise, les « exotiques » inscriront leur dissidence. Jules Fournier, pétillant d'intelligence et de saillies ironiques, ne fera qu'une bouchée du zèle moralisateur et du manque de goût littéraire de certains apôtres du terroir, pendant qu'Olivar Asselin dénoncera leur « indigénisme ». Marcel Dugas, lui, épanchera son indignation dans sa prose échevelée et alambiquée. Des poètes prendront le contre-pied du lyrisme campagnard : Paul Morin, avec *Le Paon d'émail*, Guy Delahaye avec *Les Phases*. Dans *Le Cœur en exil,* René Chopin affichera ses affinités avec les symbolistes et autres « décadents ». Robert de Roquebrune deviendra directeur littéraire du *Nigog*, importante mais éphémère revue où il s'en prend à « ce nationalisme [qui] nous agaçait ». Optant pour le juste milieu, Dantin jugera sainement qu'« [i]l n'est pas nécessaire qu'une littérature nationale soit nationaliste ». Autres ténors de l'universalité de la littérature, le bouillant « Turc » (Victor Barbeau) fustigera « les pontifes de l'heure des vaches » et « la danse autour de l'érable », tandis que Jean-Charles Harvey soutiendra contre Damase Potvin que point n'est besoin d'une langue distincte pour traiter un sujet canadien.

À mon avis, sur le plan littéraire du moins, cette querelle entre régionalisme et exotisme était artificielle : pourquoi opposer ainsi le proche et le lointain, l'exotisme ou l'exploration de l'ailleurs n'étant au fond qu'une voie vers la connaissance de soi? Les « exotiques » étaient à leur manière des artistes attachés à leur nation, des puristes francophiles, comme Fournier et Asselin, qui ne voulaient pas s'embourber dans le terroir. D'ailleurs, à la lumière de sa lecture minutieuse et pondérée de l'énorme documentation qu'elle a réunie sur ce sujet, Annette Hayward a réussi à mettre au jour l'évolution des principaux protagonistes de la querelle, lesquels ont fini par nuancer substantiellement leur pensée, parfois même par se rétracter. Vers 1930, la controverse s'éteint, la liberté littéraire semble exister désormais au Canada français, à preuve *Trente arpents*, roman du terroir publié en 1938 par Ringuet (Philippe Panneton), un ancien « exotiste ».

Belonging to History

Steven Heighton
Afterlands. Knopf Canada $32.95

Reviewed by Andrew Bartlett

Afterlands is a historical novel that feels more densely researched, more studiously considered than most. It makes us think about the interplay of Aboriginal and European people as they exchanged, embraced, clashed in the nineteenth-century making of North America. Heighton uses his sources—primarily George Tyson's *Arctic Experiences* (1874)—neither to exoticize nor to mythologize, temptations to which historical fiction can fall prey. Instead, he creates that sense of a debt to the dead that marks the difference between history and fiction. *Afterlands* is imbued with a desire to respect the people who were "here" before us.

Roland Kruger is a sailor of German birth, Lieutenant George Tyson his Yankee commander, Tukulito an "Esquimaux" woman. These three, along with a formidable cast of minor figures, make up a human party that drifts on ice floes for 1800 miles, starving, getting lucky with a hunt, feasting, starving again, freezing, fighting and at last surviving. When the novel opens, Tyson has published a narrative of the ordeal, damaging the reputation of Kruger and others while inflating his own, then going on lecture tours. Heighton takes us back to imagine the party on the ice. Tension follows from enmity between Kruger and Tyson. Tension between Kruger and Tukulito follows from their not being free to appear to care for each other. At first, Tyson seems the villain, Kruger the hero, Tukulito the heroine stuck between men; but Heighton complicates each main figure into an exquisitely nuanced human portrait. The novel's last third finds Kruger in Mexico. He gets involved with a village of Sina people—despite his self-endangering pacifism—when they clash with troops of soldiers representing the militant young Mexican state. To give nothing away, suffice it to say that the love interest between Kruger and Tukulito, amazingly uncontaminated by cliché, endures to the end. Likewise, the enmity of Kruger and Tyson simmers until the immensely moving closing scenes. The surprises, none cheap, are so well-wrought that they stop one again even on a second reading.

The vanity of quests for moral purity that require one's not belonging to any "people" is one thematic preoccupation (Kruger's story). The delusion engendered by too-easy resentment of "authority" is another (Tyson turns out a dignified victim in his own way). Heighton handles with tact the impossible situation of North American Aboriginal peoples, the Esquimaux and Sina. The enigma of Tukulito's being at once Esquimaux and anglophone Victorian (having been taken overseas to meet the Queen) preoccupies him. She figures both as a reservoir of contained spirit and a surface of carnal beauty.

A formal fissure in the text arises with a certain duplication effect, a flagging of the analogous, in those echoes sounded during the "Afterlands" (Mexico) section that recall bits of the "Versions of Loyalty" section. Kruger's women awkwardly overlap: when Jacinta, his Sina lover, complains about being lumped with others, I hear the text ironically confessing to some strain in the prolongation of its primary figure's self-signifying. But could we have stopped at the end of "Versions of Loyalty"? No, because as a novel *Afterlands* is partly about mourning and living with impossibilities. It is even about the wisdom of forgiving one's enemies, but without triteness, because it is also about the virtue of *having* one's enemy (Kruger finds that virtue in a splendid apex of violence). Steven Heighton has thought long about the mysteries of resentment and love, the tension between

our desire for belonging, and its perversion in group resentment (racist, ethnic, "nationalist"). The one thing that may be under-thought is a tendency toward the demonizing of national as opposed to other forms of human belonging (couple, family, village, "people"). To have a "culture" seems innocent, to have a nation—a "political" allegiance—corrupt. Must we think so? Humans are not political animals? Why is it that the politics of "culture," but not the nation, seems innocent now? Anyway, one would be an invidious fool to make from such questions an excuse not to dive in here and share Heighton's journey. *Afterlands* is a work so intelligent, so engaging, I really can't recommend it enough.

Salt Sprayed Memories

David Helwig
Saltsea: A Novel. Biblioasis $28.95

Reviewed by Greg Doran

Saltsea is a "beach-novel" for English majors. Helwig has crafted an engaging novel that captures the long shadows and soft breezes of summer. The novel is set at the Saltsea Inn on PEI, and it focuses on the various guests at the Inn, their stories and the past. The Inn is not only the central setting but also the narrative focal point for the novel. Every place has many tales to tell, and Helwig allows Saltsea to tell its stories, both past and present.

The novel has a cinematic quality both in its descriptive passages and its narrative structure. Helwig foregrounds this quality through Robin, one of the waitresses in the Inn's dining room, who uses cinematographic language to describe the events at the Inn. Through detailed descriptive passages, Helwig embeds the reader in the environment of the Inn, where there is "a line of weeds and shells at the previous high water mark, and in the middle distance, waves falling in an endless foaming reiteration on a small sandbar." Helwig's writing is both poetic and panoramic, and it defines the setting in such concrete detail that it conjures smells and sounds to accompany the images.

Along with its descriptive passages, the novel's cinematic quality is expressed in its narrative structure. Helwig uses a shifting limited-omniscient narrator, similar to a point-of-view camera shot. Each narrative section is focused on the perspective of one of the many characters who inhabit the novel. The narrative focus is often "handed off," like a baton, between characters. This style of transition creates a multi-layered narrative structure designed not to follow a single plotline but to convey a larger sense of place, and the people who inhabit it. Before leaving the Inn, the professor goes to give a gift to Lizzie McKellan, another guest. The professor is the narrative focus until he gives her the gift. At that point, the focus shifts to Lizzie. The resulting shift highlights an engaging narrative structure that creates a larger perspective, while still maintaining the intimacy associated with a first person narrative. This narrative structure is similar to the one employed in Kurosawa's *Rashomon*, where the same event is described by several characters. As a result, *Saltsea* forces its readers to construct the "truth" from these fragments.

The fragmentary nature of the narrative extends into the past, which is an underlying theme in the novel. Furthermore, it is the one theme that ties several of the storylines together. For example, the history of the Inn is explained through the character Barbara. It used to be a summer residence, owned by her American industrialist father, where she came as a child. Later, it was a hippie commune for Barbara as a young adult. Currently, Barbara has returned to the Inn "to find the past." Barbara is not the only character with a link to the Inn and its past, but she has the most prominent connection. The excavation of the past is

present in many of the plots that intertwine in the novel.

Helwig has created a wonderful novel that captures the experience of summer travel. It is the perfect book for quiet summer days. The final narrative perspective is given to the young Eleanor, who is newly arrived at the Inn with her parents and siblings, as she plays on the beach. This section is the only one focused on Eleanor, and it suggests that the stories at Saltsea will continue, even though the novel does not.

Troubling Survival

Coral Ann Howells, ed.
The Cambridge Companion to Margaret Atwood. Cambridge UP $28.95

Margaret Atwood
Moral Disorder. McClelland & Stewart $32.99

Reviewed by Laura M. Robinson

The Cambridge Companion to Margaret Atwood boasts an impressive array of essays by international Atwood scholars. The sense of Atwood that emerges through this collection is of a writer who enacts Canadianness in an increasingly global world and who is committed to questioning the use and abuse of power on a variety of levels, from the intimately personal to the grandly political.

Beginning with the personal, David Staines' article "Margaret Atwood in her Canadian Context" traces Atwood's development as a writer within a Canada that begins to recognize its writers just as Atwood comes of age. "In discovering herself," Staines writes, "Atwood has also discovered Canada's cultural traditions." Lorraine York's essay "Biography/Autobiography" is a fascinating and theoretically sophisticated interrogation of Atwood's persona as a literary celebrity. Through an exploration of Atwood's fiction and non-fiction, York underlines the agency that celebrities have to intervene in or counter representations of themselves.

From the personal to an interrogation of Atwood's political engagement with her world, Pilar Somacarrera's "Power Politics: Power and Identity" compares Atwood's understanding of power to Foucault's and determines that Atwood's work underscores how "our identity is always determined by a net of relations of power." Shannon Hengen's "Margaret Atwood and Environmentalism" explores Atwood's message that we must always remember that we are connected to the larger environment. Similarly, Coomi S. Vevaina examines Atwood's extensive use of history in her fictions in "Margaret Atwood and History," arguing that "Atwood seeks to make her readers aware of our present state and lead us into the future with the hope that we will learn to act responsibly in ways which will make our own rapidly shrinking and increasingly threatened world a better place for ourselves and for the generations to come." Eleanora Rao's article "Home and Nation in Margaret Atwood's Later Fiction" explores the twin tropes of home and homelessness in *The Robber Bride*, *The Blind Assassin* and *Oryx and Crake*. Looking at how the representation of home is an extension of nationalist discourse, Rao argues that Atwood's "recent novels put into question narratives of national attachment by refusing to adhere to the limitations of the nation-state and its related discourses of territory and identity." Marta Dvorak's "Margaret Atwood's Humor" details the many devices Atwood employs for humor, suggesting that Atwood does so in order to subvert abuses of power.

Another group of essays examines particular genres in the Atwood oeuvre. In "Margaret Atwood's Poetry and Poetics," Branko Gorjup assesses Atwood's poetic slipperiness with an assessment that could sum up the volume: "And if our own metamorphosis, as individuals and in society, is to be positive, the critical issue for Atwood is that we must learn to reject domination:

the devastation of our natural world, the oppression of women, and political tyranny." Reingard M. Nischik lauds Atwood's short fictions in "Margaret Atwood's Short Stories and Shorter Fictions." Nischik appropriately points out that Atwood is a "chronicler of our times" and that she "challeng[es] us to question conventions." However, Nischik's language teeters on the edge of fandom to Atwood's literary celebrity: Nischik concisely praises Atwood's work as "remarkable" and comments on her "tremendous intellectual astuteness" and her short stories' "outstanding quality and significance." In a publication that targets students, I would hope for a more balanced perspective as a model for the student reader. Coral Ann Howells' "Margaret Atwood's Dystopian Visions: *The Handmaid's Tale* and *Oryx and Crake*" explores Atwood's use of narrative voice. However, Howells identifies Jimmy/Snowman as the narrator of Atwood's *Oryx and Crake*, a troubling identification made by Vevaina and Rao as well. Howells explains how Atwood altered an earlier version of the novel from first person narration where Jimmy/Snowman tells his own story to the omniscient third person narration of the final published novel. That Atwood opted for this type of narration is significant, given her penchant for first person narrators. Howells does not reconcile the contradictions inherent in her analysis then; Jimmy/Snowman is the focalizer (a word she does use), but decidedly not the narrator. He is not, in fact, telling his story as Offred does in *The Handmaid's Tale*. The final essay in the volume is Sharon R. Wilson's "Blindness and Survival in Margaret Atwood's Major Novels." Wilson examines the two dominant motifs that run throughout all of Atwood's work, arguing that the narrators of Atwood's novels need to come to some kind of enlightenment in order to survive.

Perhaps the largest problem with a volume like the *Cambridge Companion* on a living author is that it can quickly become out of date, at least with as prolific and experimental an author as Atwood. In the same year that the *Companion* was published, Atwood produced a short story collection, *Moral Disorder*. This volume of interrelated stories shows how Atwood breaks from her own traditions to tackle yet a new genre. *Moral Disorder* is very much a story about how the past continues to write the present and the future. But there is a sadness in this narrative that I do not recognize in other Atwood works, even those that interrogate the depths of rage and grief. The volume begins with the story, "The Bad News," in which an aged Nell confusedly considers her daily life with her partner Tig. Nell's mind wanders, and through her wanderings, Atwood reveals the inevitable end to all our stories: certain and inescapable death.

In "The Art of Cooking and Serving," Nell relates how, at age eleven, she learns to become a caretaker of her mother and baby sister. She grows ever more burdened in the face of her mother's illnesses and depression, until she finally reaches the bursting point. She snaps at her mother and her mother responds with a slap that wounds and liberates Nell. And, perhaps it leaves her with a lasting guilt that this story does not indicate, but which the following one surely reflects. Entitled "The Headless Horseman," this first person story picks up shortly after the previous one, but Nell relates it from adulthood as she is driving to visit her sick mother. After an unsuccessful attempt to be the headless horseman for Halloween the year she was 14, Nell uses the head to frighten her two-year-old sister, known already for her anxiety. Later, she discovers that the sister has resurrected the head from storage and is caring for it with her dolls. Like the people who did not understand the horseman costume in the first place, the sister says to Nell: "I couldn't figure out who you were supposed to *be*"(original italics). Indeed, this volume

of short stories is an attempt to locate and dislocate a coherent identity for Nell.

"My Last Duchess" is set in Nell's high school years and focuses on Nell's attempts to help her boyfriend learn the Browning poem of the same title. This story exposes the "potential disaster" that underwrites a high school girl's life—over exams, English classes, boys, growing up—a potential disaster made more ominous by the constant allusion to Browning's ill-fated duchess. In "The Other Place," a rather plotless story, Nell narrates her life as a young adult moving nomadically from place to place and job to job. "The other place" of the title is in a dream, and Nell has a dread of it, speculating that it does not represent her unconscious revisiting of her past. It may represent, instead, her future.

The next few stories shift from first to third person. "Monopoly" recounts how Nell and Tig begin their relationship and set up life together on a farm. They must negotiate Tig's wife, Oona, who obviously has monopoly over everyone. "Moral Disorder" conveys the darkly sinister tone of the rest of the collection; in the opening scene, an owl teaches her young to hunt Nell and Tig's 12 ducklings. Nell learns the brutal reality of farm life when she must lead a lamb to slaughter. The final paragraph is written in the conditional, showing that it is not the past or the present that is promising and frightening, but the future. Similar to "Moral Disorder," "White Horse" also parallels the story of the horse's rescue and death with Nell's mentally ill sister's vague rescue. "The Entities" focuses on Lillie, the older real estate agent, who slips into dementia after Oona's tragic death. At the end of this story, Nell thinks to herself: "All that anxiety and anger, those dubious good intentions, those tangled lives, that blood. I can tell about it or I can bury it. In the end, we'll all become stories. Or else we'll become entities. Maybe it's the same."

The last two stories switch back to first person, but the focus is not on Nell but her dying parents. In "The Labrador Fiasco," Nell reads a story to her father of an ill-fated exploration to Labrador, a story which parallels her father's unease as he slowly wends his way to his death. Similarly, in "The Boys at the Lab," Nell tells her ill and increasingly-blind mother stories from her mother's life. In this story, Nell is supremely aware of her own function as story teller and creator of reality. And this is where the collection ends: with the encouragement to turn to the first and start again with Nell's descent into similar dementia and certain death.

Like Atwood's *Cat's Eye*, these stories feel intimately personal, almost autobiographical, hence the deep sadness that infiltrates them. Atwood has turned yet another corner on her literary journey, one that could not be anticipated in the *Cambridge Companion*. She experiments with narration, breaks with form in yet another manner and probes the existential angst of a character facing the knowledge of an impending and inescapable death. Rather than the grand political or social statements which emerge from earlier works, Atwood's message here resonates with a simple and very personal anguish: the struggle of a creature to avoid slipping into darkness and death.

History Is All Around Us

Guy Gavriel Kay
Ysabel. Viking Canada $34.00

Reviewed by Gernot R. Wieland

For years now, Guy Gavriel Kay has delighted his readers with his hybrid novels which meld history and fantasy. His newest novel, *Ysabel*, follows in the footsteps of his earlier works such as *A Song for Arbonne* (1992), *The Lions of Al-Rassan* (1995), *The Sarantine Mosaic* (consisting of *Sailing to Sarantium* [1998] and *Lord of Emperors* [2000]) and *The Last Light*

of the Sun (2004) but with a difference: whereas the earlier novels all were set in thinly disguised fictional countries such as Sarantium (= Byzantium) or Al-Rassan (=Spain), *Ysabel* does not attempt to veil the geographic location. The second line of the first chapter takes us right into the gloom of Aix-en-Provence's Saint-Sauveur Cathedral, and we remain firmly rooted in Provence throughout the novel. The soil of Provence, however, is saturated with history, and it is not long before this history beckons, captivates, at times imperils and overwhelms the protagonist of the story, the 15-year-old Ned. Ned accompanies his father, a famous photographer, on his travels through Provence as he takes pictures for what is to become a coffee-table book. In order to pass the time, Ned wanders into the cathedral, more intent on the tunes of his iPod than on the building surrounding him, and stumbles into a menacing history that by far predates the cathedral.

An ancient historical cycle is played out in *Ysabel*, that of the native struggling with the newcomer who will eventually settle in the land. The winner in this struggle takes the land and Ysabel—a pattern Kay may have consciously or unconsciously taken over from Virgil's *Aeneid*, where Aeneas receives both the Roman heartland and Lavinia after he has defeated Turnus. In *Ysabel*, the story unfolds around the feast of Beltaine—the last day of April, when ghosts rule the night. Ned gets drawn into the ancient struggle when Melanie, his father's able assistant, transforms into Ysabel, and he is the only one who can bring her back from her new identity. There is no time travel here. Kay works on the principle that "history is all around us," and some people have more, and some less sensitivity to it. Despite being a thoroughly twenty-first-century 15-year-old who enjoys all the technological gadgets the twenty-first century has to offer, Ned has this sensitivity, and has it in spades. He cannot cross a field on which a battle took place more than 2000 years ago without being sickened by the blood that seeped into its soil; he sees ancient Celtic rites performed, and is drawn into the vortex of the conflict between the native and the newcomer. And when history releases him from its fierce grip, he googles, sends text messages and listens to the tunes stored on his iPod—just like any teenager.

Kay captures the cadences of teenagers perfectly. While not everyone may agree with their approach to the language, nonetheless Kay deserves to be complimented on his keen observation. It cannot have been easy for Kay to provide the necessary historical information and to do so in a language not his own. Let me give an example: "They [=the Cimbri and Teutones] came back again and decided what they really wanted was land around Rome, and they decided they were going to kick ass there." Or: "So, like, if he [=Marius] hadn't beat them, they'd have taken Rome?" "Kick ass," "beat" instead of "beaten," and the intrusive "like": not an academic's favourite expressions, but well-reproduced from the living teenage language.

Kay also deserves to be complimented on a gripping story. While any reader of his previous books will have little doubt that Ned will escape the conflict between native and newcomer relatively unscathed and definitely wiser, Kay does keep us in suspense about Melanie/Ysabel. Her fate hangs in the balance, especially since Ysabel is so much more than Melanie could ever hope to be. Will Ned get to her in time to break the vicious historical circle? And if he does, will she consent to go with him or will she prefer the power and the beauty she experiences as Ysabel? The answers to these questions are anything but certain, and they definitely are not answers this reviewer can provide without giving too much of the plot away.

One slight lapse should be noted: the officials of Aix-en-Provence give Ned's father

two uninterrupted hours in the morning "to capture the facade of their cathedral." Very few photographers would be particularly pleased with this since cathedral facades in general, and Saint-Sauveur's in particular, face west and would therefore glow in red-golden hues in the evening and not in the morning when the backlight from the eastern sun would frustrate any photographer's endeavour to capture much detail on the facade.

This one slight lapse aside, Kay's *Ysabel* is a wonderful read for lovers of historical novels, and has all the qualities necessary to turn teenagers on to historical novels, and to history. Kay has prefaced *Ysabel* with the following quotation from Robert Graves:

> There is one story and one story only
> That will prove worth your telling,
> Whether as learned bard or gifted child;
> To it all lines or lesser gauds belong
> That startle with their shining
> Such common stories as they stray into.

The "one story" is that of the newcomer and the native fighting each other for possession of the soil and the woman symbolizing it. Kay set this particular story in the Old World, but as a Canadian he is surely aware that this is also a story that can be told about the New. But maybe that will be his next novel …

Tragique émorationnalité

Simon Laflamme
Suites sociologiques. Prise de parole 18,00 $

Stéphanie Nutting et François Paré, dirs.
Jean Marc Dalpé : Ouvrier d'un dire.
Prise de parole 30,00 $

Compte rendu par Stéphane Girard

Dans son plus récent ouvrage publié chez Prise de parole, Simon Laflamme, professeur de sociologie et directeur du programme de doctorat en sciences humaines de l'Université Laurentienne de Sudbury (Ontario), retrace les grandes lignes d'un parcours professionnel et intellectuel marqué par ce constat : « L'humain, dans sa quotidienneté, vit sur le mode de *l'émorationnalité*, c'est-à-dire à la fois de façon rationnelle et émotive, non pas dans l'alternance, mais dans la simultanéité. » Par l'intermédiaire de ce néologisme, Laflamme propose une révision radicale des grands thèmes de la sociologie du 20ième siècle, principalement celui de la « nature de l'action sociale » et de son caractère strictement rationnel. Du coup, il impose une vision du social où cette même action humaine relève d'un sujet qui *agit*, certes, mais qui, tout à la fois, *est agi* : « Tout ce qui est humain n'est pas intentionnel. Les relations sont déterminantes de ce que font et disent les humains au moins autant que la subjectivité elle-même. La part du non-intentionnel, chez l'humain, est au moins aussi importante que celle de l'intentionnel. » En ce sens, Laflamme insiste sur la primauté—l'« immanence », dit-il—du collectif sur l'individuel, évidence propre à la (une?) sociologie.

Publié au même moment chez Prise de parole (et faisant suite à un colloque organisé en 2004 à l'Université de Guelph), le recueil *Jean Marc Dalpé : ouvrier d'un dire*, quant à lui, interroge l'écriture dramatique, poétique, romanesque et télévisuelle de Jean Marc Dalpé, important écrivain franco-ontarien (triple récipiendaire, faut-il le rappeler, du prix du Gouverneur général du Canada) s'attardant, dans ses œuvres, à raconter l'agir humain dans ce qu'il a, justement, de moins intentionnel. En effet, chez Dalpé, « le faire des personnages est à l'avant-plan de chacun des tableaux et des 'histoires.' Ce sont des personnages portés à agir. Cependant, il est rare que leurs actions soient salutaires, infléchies comme elles le sont par une fatalité d'autant plus terrible qu'elle est intime. » Aussi n'est-il pas innocent que plusieurs des collaborateurs de ce recueil se penchent sur la dimension éminemment *tragique* des ouvrages de l'écrivain

franco-ontarien, « le tragique [étant] une manière d'agir plutôt qu'une manière d'être ». Hantés par l'alcoolisme, l'inceste, la pauvreté du langage, le déchirement identitaire et autres violences, les personnages de Dalpé apparaissent dépossédés de leur statut de sujet agissant, voire parlant : « Aux moments les plus tragiques, ils ne sont plus eux-mêmes, leur discours même ne parvenant pas à se constituer. » L'originalité de la poétique de Dalpé serait donc, à la lumière des essais ici réunis, de chercher, envers et contre tous, à mettre en scène l'élaboration d'un discours autrement—et dramatiquement—*indicible*.

Voilà pourquoi ces deux ouvrages, pourtant totalement distincts en termes de disciplines, d'intentions, d'objets et de méthodes, peuvent se faire, étrangement, écho, ne serait-ce que par l'intermédiaire de cette interrogation de la raison instrumentale et de la subjectivité intentionnelle qu'ils sollicitent. Par le fait même, ils révèlent qu'au cœur des sciences humaines—dont font également partie, en bout de ligne, les études littéraires—se terre la hantise du tragique de l'existence même et de son interprétation : cet agir émorationnel que la sociologie de Laflamme cherche, l'espace d'une carrière universitaire, à décrire et systématiser, l'écriture de Dalpé, quant à elle, « mue par cette intimation à agir » et « répét[ant] à qui veut l'entendre, jusqu'à la vocifération, la nécessité absolue de la voix, source de toute affirmation et de toute dignité », cherche (en vain?) à la dénoncer ou, du moins, à l'énoncer.

La justice des lettres

André Lamontagne
Le tribunal parallèle. David 17,00 $

Marc Vaillancourt
La cour des contes. Triptyque 17,00 $

Compte rendu par Catherine Khordoc

Coïncidence sans aucun doute, mais tout de même un intéressant parallèle s'impose entre les titres de ces deux ouvrages qui évoquent la sphère judiciaire même si les nouvelles recueillies dans ces deux livres, à quelques exceptions près, ne traitent pas particulièrement de la justice. Nous ne sommes pas dans une atmosphère à la sauce « CSI » (« Les Experts ») ou « Law and Order » qui fascinent tant de téléspectateurs chaque soir. Et pourtant, ces deux recueils rendent justice à la création littéraire, voire revendiquent le droit de créer des œuvres littéraires érudites, exigentes et remarquables, chacun à sa façon.

Il s'agit d'un premier ouvrage de fiction pour André Lamontagne, qui est professeur de littérature québécoise à l'Université de Colombie-Britannique. Dans ce recueil de neuf nouvelles, on reconnaît la voix du critique littéraire qui s'est longtemps penché sur le phénomène de l'intertextualité dans la littérature québécoise. On ne peut négliger de remarquer que toutes les nouvelles font figurer au moins un personnage écrivain (amateur ou professionnel, fictif ou réel), un chercheur-enseignant, un lecteur, un éditeur, en voyage de recherche, en congé sabbatique, participant à des conférences, préparant des cours, lisant des lettres ou des manuscrits. L'auteur met en œuvre son intérêt pour l'intertextualité par les nombreux clins d'œil, allusions, renvois à des auteurs de tous genres, toutes époques, qui amusent et stimulent, sans prétention et sans chercher à faire broncher le lecteur mais plutôt en fêtant des retrouvailles avec ses amis littéraires : Canetti, Cortazar, Deleuze, Foucault, Grandbois,

Miron, Nelligan, Pynchon, Rabelais et Simenon—pour n'en nommer que quelques-uns. Malgré les références érudites, le ton de ces nouvelles n'est pas pour autant « universitaire ». En effet, si le monde universitaire y est représenté, on constate que c'est parfois avec ironie, remettant en question ces hauts-lieux de savoir. Ainsi, dans « À la recherche de Thomas Pynchon », une jeune fille « punk » qui distribue des tracts révolutionnaires étonne le protagoniste par sa présence inattendue dans des cours universitaires. Bref, ces nouvelles se lisent avec plaisir, suspense, parfois avec émoi et toujours avec intelligence.

Dès son titre polysémique, le second recueil recensé fait aussi appel à l'intellect du lecteur. Les quatre nouvelles de *La cour des contes* sont plurilingues, de par l'inscription de fragments en grec et en latin (la dernière partie de la dernière nouvelle étant écrite entièrement en latin d'ailleurs). Le vocabulaire n'est certes pas populaire ou quotidien; il serait effectivement fort utile d'avoir un dictionnaire auprès de soi en lisant cet ouvrage. La citation en exergue de Baudelaire, dans une lettre à Hugo, m'a disposée à apprécier d'emblée ce recueil : « En un temps où le monde s'éloigne de l'art avec une telle horreur, où les hommes se laissent abrutir par l'idée exclusive d'utilité, je crois qu'il n'y a pas grand mal à exagérer un peu dans le sens contraire. » La remarque s'applique encore à notre époque, où l'on doit trop souvent défendre la littérature et les études littéraires. Dès les premières pages de la première nouvelle, le lecteur est comblé par de très belles phrases, dont voici un exemple : « Petit désespoir dorloté des nuits qui se laissent tomber comme un rideau usé, cœurs avides des grandes orgues que torture une mandoline, abandon de l'obscurité où les gens se livrent, dans un rayon de lune, à la bêtise, à la veulerie des serments. » Or, la lecture devient quelque peu déroutante, car les fils narratifs plutôt hétéroclites et le langage, un peu trop précieux, créent un écart avec le lecteur. Si ce recueil de nouvelles se veut une défense, un plaidoyer pour une *bonne*, voire une grande littérature, ce qui est certes louable, il énonce également une critique acerbe visant pratiquement tous les écrivains québécois. L'auteur s'éloigne sans doute un peu trop de la citation en exergue, qui veut que l'on exagère *un peu*, en exagérant un peu trop. Il finit par aliéner son lecteur qui, après tout, est lui aussi essentiel à la création littéraire.

Être ou Paraître

Myriam Legault
À grandes gorgées de poussière.
Prise de parole 17,00 $

Diane Jacob
Le vertige de David. Triptyque 19,00 $

Aude
Chrysalide. XYZ 22,00 $

Compte rendu par Lyne Girard

Les trois romans en question, *À grandes gorgées de poussière* de Myriam Legault, *Le vertige de David* de Diane Jacob et *Chrysalide* de Aude, racontent tous à leur manière le difficile passage dans le monde des adultes. Les trois héroïnes devront mettre en question l'image de soi qu'elles s'étaient construite jusque-là (et peut-être malgré elles) pour entreprendre une quête d'individualité.

Dans son second roman, intitulé *À grandes gorgées de poussière*, Myriam Legault invite le lecteur à replonger dans la période trouble de l'adolescence aux côtés de Martine, dont la vie sera bouleversée par l'arrivée d'une étrangère. Nadine, avec ses boucles noires et ses yeux parcourus d'éclairs couleur caramel, pénètre dans l'existence de la narratrice comme des grains de sable dans tous les replis de notre peau. Martine est immédiatement séduite par la citadine, personnage paradoxal puisqu'il représente à la fois la réalité de

Martine (l'adolescence, l'amitié dans le village) et ses rêves (l'aventure à Montréal). Sa présence exacerbe ce besoin d'évasion de Martine … mais lui ouvre également les yeux sur ce qui pourrait la retenir : sa relation avec Antoine, son meilleur ami. Or cette relation est mise à l'épreuve par la présence de l'étrangère. Antoine aussi s'est laissé séduire par la fraîcheur de Nadine et il aura suffi de quelques jours pour fragiliser l'amitié sincère qui s'était édifiée entre Martine et lui. L'héroïne devra faire le choix le plus difficile de son existence : préserver ce qu'elle a en demeurant auprès d'Antoine dans le village qui l'abîme; ou laisser le champ libre à Nadine pour chercher à être en vivant son rêve. Le roman est de lecture agréable et rend bien le jeu complexe des relations amoureuses et amicales à l'adolescence : jalousie et rivalité, amour et désir, besoin d'appartenance et recherche de son individualité.

Deux jours par semaine, Karine travaille à l'hôpital Louis-Hyppolite, au département de psychiatrie et entre dans le Vertige de David Lebeau, ancien enseignant à l'UQÀM et écrivain à ses heures. Certains jours, ce patient est confus et s'isole, d'autres, il parvient à séduire Karine par son assurance, son éloquence et son écriture. Tel le roi de Perse devant Schéhérazade, Karine se nourrit des récits de David, des récits d'un autre temps, qui lui permettent de mesurer la grandeur de ce personnage intimidant de par son savoir littéraire et artistique. Elle revient semaine après semaine écouter le récit de sa vie, attendant avec impatience le prochain épisode de la vie trépidante de David. Les chapitres se succèdent comme les mots dans des télégrammes— … *Hubert … Ezra … Medjé* … —, ces télégrammes qui nous permettent « *d'entretenir des liens privilégiés avec les moments forts de l'existence, la naissance, la mort, en passant par les mariages, les accidents* »; chacun des mots, des titres choisis par l'auteur donnant effectivement accès à des épisodes importants de l'histoire de David. Et Karine se laisse prendre au jeu, comme tous ceux qui ont traversé l'existence du vieil homme, par leurs écrits ou par leur écoute, elle devient un personnage de son récit, *Rachel*, et trouvera une place parmi les *objets mémoriels* qui permettent à David de s'accrocher à sa réalité. Cette rencontre bouleverse l'existence de Karine, la poésie de David la lançant sur les traces de Abraham Moses Klein, grand écrivain montréalais, et la poussant à réviser ses choix de carrière et de vie (sa relation amoureuse avec Alexandre). L'écriture de Diane Jacob rappelle au lecteur de renouer avec la lecture ludique en se laissant séduire par les mots. Elle le convie à ne pas emprunter la voie de la poursuite du vrai proposée par Alexandre, mais plutôt, comme Karine, à endosser le personnage de Rachel et à lire le texte pour lui-même.

Le jour de son quatorzième anniversaire, Catherine répond impulsivement à la voix intérieure qui lui crie de rompre avec l'image d'elle-même qu'elle s'est construite en réponse aux attentes de ses parents, de ses amies, de la société. Toujours en représentation dans un monde d'apparence, elle avait réussi à être comme les autres, sans savoir qui elle était vraiment. Elle tente de se suicider et bouleverse son univers, et celui des gens qui l'entourent. À son réveil, elle constate que certains souffrent de devoir remettre en question leur existence superficielle, et que les autres la fuient et feignent d'ignorer son avertissement. Au cours des huit années qui suivent, Catherine fait table rase en essayant de rejeter en bloc sa vie d'avant. Elle expérimente la vie dans la rue, la vie de groupe, la vie de couple, contrainte à chaque fois d'adopter les nouvelles règles qu'autrui lui impose. À 22 ans, elle ne sait toujours pas qui elle est et *replonge* en prenant la plume pour extérioriser sa souffrance. Concrètement, la chrysalide du titre, c'est le choix des mots de Catherine, les lignes qui s'ajoutent les

unes aux autres pour construire son passé et entamer son passage vers son individualité. Avec *Chrysalide,* l'auteure, dont la réputation n'est plus à faire, fait montre d'un immense talent. Son écriture sensible parvient à faire ressentir au lecteur le déchirement identitaire qui habite son personnage. Au surplus, le lecteur ne peut que remettre en question ses propres repères. Une œuvre à lire encore et encore.

Narrating a Movement

Xiaoping Li
Voices Rising: Asian Canadian Cultural Activism.
UBC Press $29.95

Reviewed by Christopher Lee

Voices Rising is the most comprehensive study of Asian Canadian cultural activism published to date. Rigorously documented and theorized, Xiaoping Li's research focuses on cultural production that has consciously claimed the term "Asian Canadian" in order to intervene in the racialized terrain of Canadian culture by building alternative communities dedicated to working for social change.

Li's study is divided into two parts. The first quarter of the book consists of six short chapters that introduce key theoretical issues such as the meaning of cultural politics, the historical roots of Asian Canadian cultural activism, the meaning of "Asian Canadian" as an identity, diversity among Asian Canadians, the role of memory and issues of gender. The rest of the book consists of transcribed interviews with key Asian Canadian artists and cultural workers. Conducted between 1997 and 2004, the interviews cover a range of artistic genres including literature, film, theatre, dance and music, and are organized into three chronological sections. The first, entitled "Emergence" features cultural workers who pioneered Asian Canadian arts during the 1970s and 1980s. All experienced tremendous racism in their childhoods and some were directly affected by the internment and dispersal of Japanese Canadians during and after World War II. This section focuses on early articulations of Asian Canadian identity especially in relation to the Asian American movement flourishing south of the border. Together, these interviews constitute a rich oral history archive of an understudied but critical moment in Canadian cultural history.

The second section, "Crossing the Threshold," focuses on artists whose work emerged during the 1990s at a time when identity politics and minority struggles were being articulated throughout the Western world. Influenced by earlier social movements, these cultural workers also achieved a measure of institutional legitimacy during this period by establishing venues such as Asian Heritage Month, now a major component in the annual cultural life of many Canadian cities. The third section profiles several emerging artists and is entitled "Moving Ahead." These interviews explore the meaning of cultural politics at a time when older models of identity politics seem to be exhausted. Most of the interviewees have rather ambivalent attitudes toward the benefits of multiculturalism even as they inhabit the gap between official state-sponsored discourses of diversity and grassroots attempts to appropriate discursive spaces for social critique. In addition, there is a marked awareness of allied movements such as transnational feminism. A brief epilogue returns to the theme of Canada-US relations by considering the late emergence of Asian Canadian Studies as an academic discipline in comparison to Asian American Studies.

While *Voices Rising* reiterates some of the pressing theoretical problems of Asian Canadian Studies it does not always fully explore their critical implications.This study is heavily invested in a developmental narrative that culminates in the

formation of a politically vibrant Asian Canadian identity through intensely personal journeys. Through the recovery of often-forgotten histories of anti-Asian racism, these quests for identity often lead to the institutionalization of Asian Canadian cultural communities that soon come under pressure due to their internal diversity. This narrative depends on tropes such as birth, emergence and forward movement, and privileges the actualization of identities as moments of empowerment. As powerful and celebratory as this narrative is, it tends to elide more uneven aspects of identity formation by depending on a linear temporality that always holds out the promise of a future state of liberation. In doing so, it does not engage the intense critical reflection on the part of Asian Canadian critics on the dangers of identity politics and overly simplistic models of empowerment. In the chapter on Asian Canadian feminism, for example, the author's desire to construct a parallel narrative of womens' liberation ends up sounding prematurely celebratory and oddly unnuanced.

The other issue I want to bring up is the frequent comparisons between Asian Canadian and Asian American movements. While cross-border influences have been historically critical in the development of both, these interactions tend to be cast only as a matter of lateness and catching up on the part of Canadians. Although it is not surprising that many of the interviewees describe their own activist histories in such terms, *Voices Rising* does not generally subject these claims to critical elaboration. One consequence of this is the obscuring of other activist alliances within Canada that cross racial boundaries, a history that often predates the emergence of "Asian Canadian identity" (the study makes a brief reference to relations with First Nations, for example, but does not elaborate). In this sense, I find the epilogue's treatment of Asian American Studies and Asian Canadian Studies suggestive but ultimately unsatisfying because it simplifies the intellectual history of Asian American Studies while offering an incomplete survey of the critical debates within Asian Canadian Studies on its relationship with other academic formations.

These observations do not, however, detract from the importance and accomplishment of *Voices Rising*. Indeed, I wish that Li had written *two* books instead of one; as she admits in the introduction, she was not able to include all of her interviews due to space limitations and one can only hope that they will be edited and published in the future. At the same time, the compactness of her critical chapters makes this book ideal for classes on Asian Canadian history and culture and it is as a pedagogical text that *Voices Rising* will undoubtedly make a marked impact on the unfolding of Asian Canadian Studies.

Ways of Seeing

Tim Lilburn; Alison Calder, ed.
Desire Never Leaves: The Poetry of Tim Lilburn. Wilfrid Laurier UP $14.95

Kamau Brathwaite
Born to Slow Horses. Wesleyan UP US $22.95

Reviewed by Darlene Shatford

Desire Never Leaves: The Poetry of Tim Lilburn, a new volume in the Laurier Poetry Series, presents 17 poems that express a desire to look at and attend to details of place as a way to know, understand and connect with the world and the divine forces within it. The volume, with an introduction by poet and writer Alison Calder and an afterword by Lilburn himself, is a compilation of poems taken from Lilburn's five previous collections. According to Alison Calder, the place Lilburn focuses on is specific to the prairies, Lilburn's birthplace and home; but unlike what has become known as traditional "prairie poetry," Lilburn's works use "different

conventions" to describe the significance of place and require a "different kind of readerly approach."

Calder offers up two instructions to readers. First, she suggests we have courage because Lilburn's poetry can appear "daunting" in its form and content since he "follows a well-established tradition of Christian mysticism" that uses "erotic language" to express a somewhat complicated yearning "to get at the essence of the world, its soul." Indeed, Lilburn's unidentified speakers acknowledge their human blindness to the work of the divine in nature but keep looking anyway and long to experience the sightedness inherent in the natural world, a way of knowing that promises to answer life's biggest questions. For example, in "How to be Here?" Lilburn writes,

> You want to walk in the dark garden of
> the eye of the deer looking at you.
> Want a male goldfinch to gallop you into
> the heart
> of the distance which is the oddness of
> other things.
> All would be well.
> Desire never leaves.

Evident in his lyrics is Lilburn's reverence for the world around him, what it has to teach. Lilburn's speakers desire not only a communion with the natural world and its order but also a way of being that could bring them closer to the divine. In the poem "Restoration," the desire is to *be* knowledge and, again, the way to this knowledge is through seeing:

> I want to be the knowledge that is one
> sleep in the sunward shoulder
> muscle of the two-year-old doe coming
> out of hills and
> down to Moon Lake.
> I will get there by seeing.

Lilburn's poems are riddled with metaphors that speak to the desire for sight, seeing, looking. For example, in "Theophany And Argument," a poem that calls the reader to worship and share the speaker's awe of animals, fire, earth and other things non-human with a series of "blessed be" phrases, Lilburn writes, "Blessed be the eye. / Blessed be the sacred act of all looking." His speaker goes on to affirm the sacredness of what many of us consider inanimate within our world:

> And blessed be the cataracted stones,
> who do not look, never. Blessed be
> the stones, sightless, inward, monasteried in pasture corner piles, elders,
> ancient ones, celibate, blue, dreaming of
> good gold, who chant
> one magical Om

Here Lilburn suggests the "sightless" stones have other qualities that garner praise and simply goes on to celebrate *being* itself: "Blessed be being, big-bellied being."

Calder's second instruction to readers is to relax because, simply put, Lilburn's poems are "beautiful words on a page." Indeed, the beauty that lies in Lilburn's poems has to do with the musicality and physicality of the language he chooses. For example, Lilburn's ode to one of the largest offspring of the garden entitled "Pumpkins" reads like a mouthful of the yellow fruit. The poem resonates with playful energy rooted in the "Oompah Oompah" sounds of the first line. He writes, "O belly laughs / quaking the matted patch, O my blimpish Prussian / generals, O garden sausages, golden zeppelins. How do? How do? How do?" Again, as in his other poems, Lilburn's speaker in this poem looks to nature to instruct him, to help him comprehend, this time, the meaning of colour: "Come, phenomena, gourds of light, teach / your joy esperanto, your intense Archimedean aha / of yellow to me."

Readers are bound to appreciate Lilburn's collection, not to mention the welcome inclusion of his afterword which reads like a biography, an essay and a meditation on the quiet power of poetry.

Far from quiet, Kamau Brathwaite's latest volume of poetry, *Born to Slow Horses*,

International winner of the Griffin Poetry Prize in 2006, challenges readers in both form and content. Renowned for their inventive typography and spelling (sycorax), Brathwaite's poems are a complex read, both visually and intellectually. The varying stanza forms, layouts, typefaces and dialects in this volume force readers to read slowly and carefully in order to more fully grasp Brathwaite's innovative work.

Many sections of the book require reading aloud. In some cases, vocalization of the vernacular is necessary for comprehension. Brathwaite clearly wants to unsettle his readers, cause us to see, hear and, therefore, understand language in a decolonized way. Why? Not unlike the literary works of other Caribbean-born writers Derek Walcott and Jamaica Kincaid, Brathwaite's poetry explores a black Caribbean viewpoint, a way of seeing that is critical to postcolonial inquiries of history, culture, identity, and, especially, language.

For example, "Days and Nights" begins with the following lines: "Um was a likkle black dog / bow leg waggle tail whippersnapper / wid nuff plenty snuff colour fleas." Clearly, the playful lines in this poem are meant to be vocalized, intensifying the orality of the narrative. Although a much more serious poem about grief and loss, "21 Days" is also meant to be read aloud, not only to hear the vernacular but also, perhaps, to empathize with the speaker, a mother grieving for her missing, possibly murdered, son:

> my breath give birt to good like god
> my sun dis gold is all my riches that
> cannot be replace
> an suddenly me cannot fine him in dis
> place before dis good god face to face

Born to Slow Horses is an eclectic collection of powerful images, musical phrases and unusual wordplay, one that has to be experienced, not simply read. The subjects of the poems—exile, murder, ritual, grief—and the unique presentations—bolded letters, scripted fonts, scholarly footnotes—work together to effectively illustrate this seasoned poet's particular insight and experience.

East-West Imagination

Zhang Longxi
Unexpected Affinities: Reading across Cultures. U of Toronto P $29.95

Reviewed by Roseanna Dufault

Longxi's slim but remarkable volume contains the printed version of four lectures on East-West cultural and literary comparisons delivered at the University of Toronto in 2005. Well-constructed arguments reveal Longxi's extensive knowledge of Chinese and Western European traditions; plentiful, cogent examples support his thesis that unique and valuable critical insights can emerge through "a truly global vision of human creativity."

Zhang Longxi's invitation to participate in the Alexander Lectureship is in itself significant. Founded in 1928, the series has begun in the past decade to reflect greater diversity by inviting more women speakers and by diverging from topics strictly related to English literature. As Professor of Comparative Literature and Translation at City University of Hong Kong, Longxi is the first to address East-West themes.

The first lecture/chapter establishes the validity of East-West cross-cultural studies by refuting outmoded notions of cultural incommensurability, according to which Asian and European literary traditions are considered too diametrically opposed to be compared usefully. Of course, Longxi acknowledges significant divergences, such as the relative lack of religious sentiment in classical Chinese works as compared with medieval Western texts, but he maintains that these are simply variations in degree rather than fundamental differences in kind. Evoking images employed

by Northrop Frye (stepping back from a painting) and Ludwig Wittgenstein (climbing a ladder), Longxi emphasizes the value of establishing a perspective distance to achieve a better understanding of specific literary and artistic works.

In subsequent chapters, Longxi draws on a number of Chinese texts, ranging from the seventh to the sixteenth centuries, and compares them to Western works by Plato, Dante and Shakespeare, among others, as well as various nineteenth-century European and American poets. His research highlights some common metaphors: a pearl representing a tear as well as a poet's craft; a journey symbolizing life's twists and turns; the dialectic of opposites, such as medicine and poison, life and death, sin and redemption. Along these lines, Longxi demonstrates that the notion of balance between antithetical qualities, *yin* and *yang*, emerges in numerous writings throughout centuries of Chinese tradition. Taking these Eastern texts into account permits a fresh reading of a familiar Western work, Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*. Specifically, Friar Lawrence's initial soliloquy, in which he reflects on oppositions inherent in medicinal herbs and human nature, is often glossed over by readers and critics. However, background knowledge of Chinese thought leads to a deeper understanding of this passage as essential in articulating a central theme of Shakespeare's play, that is, the protagonists' paradoxically tragic and redemptive love.

Concentrating further on notions of return and reversal, Longxi remarks that the Western parable of the prodigal son exists in Buddhism as well. He moves on to examine cross-cultural representations of the imaginary movement of the mind as a spiritual quest in the shape of a circle or sphere. Beginning and ending this section with lines from Emily Dickinson, Longxi cites multiple examples from Plato, Dante and Milton, to Buddhist teachings on the Wheel of Dharma and Laozi's Taoist philosophy to emphasize the apparently universal human impulse to reconcile opposites. As Longxi demonstrates, literature, as well as religion and philosophy, teaches us to recognize the pervasive presence of dialectical reversal in our experience of life. Thus, he concludes with an encouragement to pursue knowledge, East-West studies in particular, to edify, enrich and renew the self.

Of particular interest to university-level teacher/scholars are Longzi's frequent appeals to the intellectual pleasure of discovering new insights and surprising coincidences, plus the satisfaction of guiding students to make cross-cultural connections of their own. Although *Unexpected Affinities* is necessarily limited by the lecture-series format, it nonetheless introduces Chinese authors and texts that may not be familiar to those more accustomed to English and European canons, and it suggests strategies for enhancing courses in comparative literature and philosophy. Longxi's work provides a useful introduction as well as an incentive to read across cultures and seek out deep connections between and among themes and ideas.

Women, War and Amnesia

Andrea MacPherson
Beyond the Blue. Random House $29.95

Reviewed by Marlene Briggs

In *Back to the Front* (1996), an engaging account of his battlefield pilgrimage to Belgium and France, Stephen O'Shea remarks, "The grandfathers of the Great War have come back to haunt contemporary writing." Canadian authors ranging from Joseph Boyden to R.H. Thomson confirm this striking observation in their tributes to male ancestors who fought between 1914-1918. Notably, O'Shea omits the grandmothers of the Great War from his selective model of cultural and familial

haunting. Yet the diverse experiences of women from the era also compel energetic reclamation and thoughtful reappraisal by subsequent generations.

Andrea MacPherson, an established novelist and poet, departs from privileged narratives of trench combat in *Beyond the Blue*. Instead, she prioritizes working women peripheral to official histories in the watershed year, 1918. Celebrated literary predecessors ranging from Margaret Atwood to Jane Urquhart also highlight non-combatants in their retrospective visions of mass mobilization and total war. Significantly, MacPherson dedicates her second novel to her grandmother, May Rowbottom (1927-2006), who captivated the author by reminiscing about her own mother's life in Dundee, Scotland. MacPherson, four generations removed from the tumultuous period she depicts, thus revises O'Shea's intriguing hypothesis in two respects: female ancestors inspire her characters, and the Great War stimulates her imagination beyond the third generation.

Domestic hardships displace international disputes in the dialogues, reflections and reveries of Morag, her daughters, Caroline and Wallis, and her niece, Imogen. Morag and Wallis toil in the jute factory nearby, risking illness, injury and death. The first chapter deftly delineates a fatal industrial accident: the danger and monotony of wage labour undermine categorical distinctions between peace and war. MacPherson resolutely exposes the mundane trials of working-class women's lives, ongoing conflicts frequently overshadowed by exceptional upheavals. In the process, she disrupts conventional war stories. When an abusive husband goes missing in action, for example, his absence mitigates rather than instigates the grief of his widow. However, antagonisms abroad fail to liberate women from material, psychic and social constraints at home: Morag dies of mill fever, a debilitating lung disease, as her daughters pursue precarious dreams of adventure, affluence and love.

Dundee, a so-called *she town* exhibiting the gender asymmetry regulated by national hostilities, features prominently in this historical novel. MacPherson's entitled and impaired male characters pale beside their female counterparts excluded from military service. As newspapers chronicle the carnage of remote battles of attrition, Morag's girls entertain fantasies of flight beyond Scottish borders to India and Ireland. MacPherson also alludes to militant campaigns for women's suffrage, the Easter Rising in Dublin and the influenza pandemic. Notwithstanding her well-researched setting, at times the author struggles to encapsulate the inextricable relationships between public events and private lives that animate the volatile milieu.

In *Beyond the Blue*, the desperate straits of working-class women often culminate in accidental death, breakdown and suicide. Morag's mother drowns in the spectacular rail mishap, the Tay Bridge Disaster (1879); Imogen's mother Brigid, abandoned by her husband, hangs herself; a local girl, Alice Kavanagh, pregnant out of wedlock, plunges to oblivion. Imogen's faltering attempts to assimilate the traumatic loss of her mother are central to the book. MacPherson identifies premature, violent death as a paradigmatic plot for women: historical and cultural precedents include Mary, Queen of Scots and William Shakespeare's Ophelia. Distressed damsels, historical cataclysms and grim routines coalesce in this lyrical study of a humble Scottish matriarch and her descendants. Despite the qualified optimism of its conclusion, the novel fosters a melancholy outlook on the perils and prospects of women's lives.

MacPherson's subheadings "After," "Disasters" and "Shipwrecks" exemplify her fascination with memory and trauma. A penchant for eventful excess unsettles a fidelity to prosaic distress in her representation of history. In this accomplished albeit

uneven work, hyperbole tends to diminish delicate moods and poignant tropes. Not surprisingly, given her predilection for ghosts, MacPherson favours the indeterminacy of twilight; photographs, too, obsess her brooding characters, who seem to anticipate post-Holocaust preoccupations with the fading image. In this manner, perhaps MacPherson, born 20 years after O'Shea, meditates on her own oblique investments in the past despite her generational and geographical displacement from both world wars.

Missing Persons

Shani Mootoo
He Drown She in the Sea. Emblem $21.00

Anne Stone
Delible. Insomniac $21.95

Reviewed by Dorothy F. Lane

Even the titles of these two books underscore erasure: the former suggests agency, while the latter emphasizes a state of impermanence. In both books, the recurring theme of "no body" and "no resolution" elicits anxiety, suspense and frustration. Both are punctuated by melancholy. There are appreciable differences in plots, characters, settings; but remarkable overlap in motifs. Anne Stone focuses on the mysterious vanishing of a teenaged girl; Shani Mootoo focuses on non-Resident Indians (NRIs) on an imaginary Caribbean island and in Canada. With some exceptions, both books treat male characters with little sympathy, presuming "he" as agent of the "drowning."

Anne Stone co-edited a special issue of the journal *West Coast Line* on representations of murdered and missing women. *Delible* is her third novel, and reviewers have noted that while the disappearance serving as premise for her book is set outside Toronto, the subject is reminiscent of Vancouver. The story is told by three female characters, but primarily by 15-year-old Melora (Lora), the younger sister of Melissa (Mel), the disappeared teenager. Sections are narrated by Lora's mother (Karin) and grandmother (Celia Stokes) who also seek meaning two years after the disappearance. The mirroring of female characters is suggested even in the almost-matching names of the sisters. After Mel disappears, Lora puts on her sister's glasses so that she can see through her eyes; photographs of Mel could be mistaken for Lora. Such confusion underscores interdependence and the presence of absence.

The fixation on vanishing resonates throughout the book. Such resonances keep the reader engaged, and ultimately thwarted in the attempt to gain answers. Most promising is the social commentary on how teenaged girls—especially those who "go missing"—are written, photographed and made present. People such as Lora and her mother are inconvenient reminders of unresolved melancholy. Young women like Mel are simultaneously "written off" and "written up." Early in the book, Melissa's grandmother notices a photograph of Mel and comments that "[i]t wouldn't be until you looked, really looked, that you'd see it's not a photograph at all, but a document. Not something taken, but *made*." The commentary on the "pre-abandoned" and "so-called runaways" whose stories and pictures appear at bus and train stations is haunting. Lora becomes an emblem of melancholy—of loss without resolution or closure. As a forensic anthropologist, Claire, declares: "Absence has its own grammar." It is this grammar that Stone struggles to articulate. While characters such as Claire appear prescribed—consider the near-twinning of the sisters, and disappearances of father and uncle, the mysterious Woodsman—Stone captures uncertainty and longing in the face of vanishing.

Disappearance also resonates throughout Shani Mootoo's *He Drown She in the Sea*,

set partly in a fictionalized Caribbean space next to an actual Canadian one, Vancouver, which contributes to the idea of home as absence—particularly among NRIs. Both spaces are dominated by images of shoreline: after the main character's father drowns, the narrator declares that "no bodies were recovered"; and a later chapter is titled "No Body."

The novel's main character is Harry St. George, and the novel partly focuses on his love for Rose; the book also explores class, gender and race on Guanagaspar. Harry's love for Rose is puzzling, partly because her character and motivations appear elusive. Harry spends his early childhood in her home as the son of Mrs. Sangha's servant; then loses contact with Rose during school years; hearing of her mother's death, his obsession with the daughter intensifies: "Every minute since was a poker that stoked old embers." But what repeatedly draws Harry to Rose? The clearest explanation emerges through the tidal metaphor used throughout—the incomprehensible "pull of a Bihar" drawing him from life in Canada when he learns that Rose is missing.

The depiction of class and racial boundaries in the Caribbean and Canada is one of the most fascinating elements of the novel, even if it struggles too hard to establish types: in the Caribbean, class boundaries are drawn in the generation of the mid-twentieth century, although all Indians were initially indentured workers; in Canada, there appears to be more mobility. On the island, Harry's mother challenges the boundary between her family and the Sanghas: "All of we cross Black Water, sometimes six and sometimes seven months side by side in the same stinking boat, to come here . . . . How, child, how out of those beginnings some end up higher than others and some end up lower?" Resonating throughout the narrative are his mother's words: "*All of we, one and all. Same tide. Better than me, my foot!*" In Canada, NRIs flouting class conventions form a quirky wine-tasting club for former taxi drivers.

The image of "tide" thus becomes significant throughout the book, suggesting both vanishing and recurrence. However, the book could focus more effectively on one or two of the multiple stories it offers. The temptation to explore alternating perspectives and elude meaning emerges in both novels, but each finally approaches questions arising from disappearance in a thoughtful and thought-provoking manner.

Writing Family History

Alice Munro
The View from Castle Rock.
McClelland & Stewart $34.99

Reviewed by Coral Ann Howells

This new collection reveals Alice Munro's storytelling at its most characteristic and its most daring as she confronts the challenge of writing her heritage narrative, crossing the borders between history, personal memoir and fiction. Munro redefines the genre of life writing as "a curious re-creation of lives," where autobiography combines with family history and social history filtered through the storyteller's interpretive lens so that the "outline of a true narrative" is transformed through fictive artifice, destabilizing the difference between fact and imagination. As she explains in her Foreword, "These are *stories*," some of which have been published before and are now gathered together in this innovative form of life writing.

Characteristic of Munro are the overarching patterns and shifting perspectives across wide stretches of time and also those moments of strangeness which disrupt ordinary everydayness. The collection is structured in two parts ("No Advantages" and "Home") plus an Epilogue. Opening with tales of her Scottish ancestors, the

Laidlaws in the Ettrick Valley who emigrated to Canada in 1818, and moving into stories of wilderness and pioneer settlement typical of nineteenth-century English Canadian colonial history, Munro's family history moves closer into the spaces of personal memory in the second section, only to open out toward the end into the local history and prehistory of her home territory in southwestern Ontario, while the Epilogue shifts briefly to Illinois then back to memories of vanished Ontario farm kitchens. What is so compelling is that Munro herself is always present, searching around in churchyards and cemeteries from Selkirk to Halton County and Blyth as far as Joliet in Illinois, an unsentimental witness to family connections across the centuries.

Munro has always had a historicizing consciousness, evident in stories published since the 1970s: "Heirs of the Living Body," "Chaddeleys and Flemings," "Connection," "The Stone in the Field," "Meneseteung" and "A Wilderness Station," though the stories she tells are ones that lie hidden or forgotten within official histories. Similarly here: working from the available records on tombstones, in letters, journals, memoirs published in newspapers, up to her father's historical novel *The McGregors* (1979), Munro has to supplement these with family legends and personal memories. Even then there are gaps which are filled with guesswork, for like her distinguished ancestor James Hogg, the Ettrick Shepherd and author of *Confessions of a Justified Sinner*, she is one of those liars her great-great-great-grandfather condemns in the title story: "Except for Walter's journal, and the letters, the story is full of my invention." Munro's approach to history is a very postmodern one, though there is no mention of the theoretical debates around historiography initiated by Hayden White et al.; instead she draws attention to the subjective quality of historical narratives, emphasizing personal perspectives and verbal fabrication, telling history "in a given setting that was as truthful as our notion of the past can ever be."

Clearly there is no single truth to be told about the past, either of one's family or of one's self, as the confessional stories about her childhood and adolescence in the 1930s and 1940s illustrate, though the duplicitously titled "Lying under the Apple Tree," "Hired Girl," and "The Ticket" provide suggestive parallels for earlier fictions like "Baptizing" and "The Beggar Maid." Munro's self-representations appear to be searingly honest and these stories of a clever teenaged girl's social awkwardness, her hypersensitivity and "shaky arrogance," her fierce class resentments and her thoughtless cruelties, come perilously close to self-exposure as she reveals the influences that shaped the person she would become. However, these stories are so filled with secrets and deceptions that once again it is impossible to draw a firm line between the autobiographical and the fictional. These first person narratives retain her characteristic elusiveness and complexity.

The wonderful story "What Do You Want to Know For?" is emblematic of this collection, with its widening of scope to include the collective history of a locality as frame for a very personal narrative. This is a densely layered story about buried secrets which brings together the mystery of a grass-covered crypt in a country cemetery just over the border from Munro's Huron County and an "unnatural lump" in the narrator's breast, and the narrative shifts continuously between landscape and bodyscape, from Chapman and Putnam's *The Physiography of Southern Ontario*, to old local maps and mammograms. In the end there are only partial explanations; crypts and bodies remain sealed, for some secrets are destined to remain secret. There is a double awareness of the significance of individual lives together with a wider apprehension of endless processes of historical change which leads directly into

the Epilogue. Here change and continuity, past and present, the living and the dead are joined together, as we find Munro in the summer of 2004 searching fruitlessly for traces of her great-great grandfather William Laidlaw's grave in an overgrown cemetery in Joliet, only to return to the family tombstones in Blyth where she makes a vital connection between the names of the dead and her own childhood memories. Munro ends her very special version of a heritage narrative with the memory of holding a giant seashell to her ear where she could hear "the tremendous pounding of my own blood, and of the sea," bringing together those Scottish immigrants and herself through ties of blood and imagination: "However they behaved they are all dead. I carry something of them around in me" ("The Stone in the Field").

New Canadian Anthologies

Elsie Neufeld, ed.
Half in the Sun: Anthology of Mennonite Writing. Ronsdale $21.95

Paul Hoover and Maxine Chernoff, eds.
New American Writing 23. OINK! $12.00

Steven Galloway, Zsuzsi Gartner and Annabel Lyon, eds.
The Journey Prize Stories 18. McClelland & Stewart $17.99

Reviewed by Alexis Kienlen

These three anthologies showcase some of the breadth and diversity of Canada's writers. *Half in the Sun*, edited by Elsie Neufeld, features writing by Canadian Mennonites, many of whom grew up on the prairies and later moved to BC. The combination of the stolid prairie upbringing influenced by the West Coast environment lends a particular flavour to many of the works. The anthology is divided into three sections—fiction, poetry and non-fiction—and contains works by both emerging and established writers. The anthology includes poetry by established writers such as Carla Funk and Barbara Nickel, and fiction by Andreas Schroeder and Joe Wiebe. The collection of established and emerging writers blends together nicely, and most of the pieces are strong. The fiction section blends traditional stories and settings with more modern elements. Mennonite themes and references are subtle and only show up in some of the pieces. The blend of modern and traditional elements in the stories creates a full and thorough portrait of a people. The poetry and fiction sections are the strongest parts of this book, and the non-fiction section seems out of place, as if it was hastily tacked on at the end of the collection. This collection highlights the true diversity of the Mennonite people and Mennonite writers. *Half in the Sun* includes works which will capture the attention of people already familiar with Mennonite culture, or those who would like to learn more about a rich cultural tradition.

New American Writing 23 consists of poetry collected by Paul Hoover and Maxine Chernoff. While this publication generally focuses on work by Americans, or works in translation, this particular volume contains a section of work by Canadian writers. This section, entitled New Canadian poetry, is edited by Todd Swift, who once edited the Canadian anthology *Poetry Nation*. Swift introduces his selections with an acknowledgement of the diversity and strength of Canadian poetry and Canadian poetry-friendly organizations, such as the League of Canadian Poets and the Canada Council. He also acknowledges that Canadian poetry has suffered from a lack of recognition on the international stage. He notes the lack of a definitive publication to showcase the work of Canada's hot young poets. His goal in selecting poems for *New American Writing* was to include a variety of poets who would represent the Canadian poetry landscape in 2005. The poets included in this project

were mostly English-language writers in their thirties and forties. The experimental, spoken word and traditional schools are all represented in this collection, which includes poems by Christian Bök, Louise Bak, Stephanie Bolster, Jon Paul Fiorentino and Tammy Armstrong. The selection offers a fine primer for anyone who is interested in getting a taste of modern Canadian poetry. Since this collection is mostly intended for an American audience, it includes only a few Canadian poets. Hopefully the anthology will act as an incentive to entice curious readers to seek out more work by Canadians.

The Journey Prize anthology is an annual collection of stories. Each year, a jury is selected to read through stories submitted from literary journals published in Canada. This year's jury, Steven Galloway, Annabel Lyon and Zsuszi Gartner, chose 13 stories. The stories selected have been evaluated by both the editors of the literary journals and then the Journey prize jury, which ensures that the material selected is of high literary calibre. Of the stories included in the anthology, one is selected to win the Journey Prize, worth $10,000. Former Journey Prize winners include Yann Martel (author of *Life of Pi*), Elyse Gasco (*Can You Wave Bye Bye, Baby?*) and Alissa York (*Mercy*). Encompassing various subjects and Canadian environments, these well-crafted stories range widely in theme, style and form. Lee Henderson's story "Conjugation," about a journalist who goes back to elementary school, is a bizarre but touching examination of human interaction and relationships. Melanie Little's "Wrestling" takes a look into the world of a hotel housemaid and her relationships to her grandmothers. In Nadia Bozak's "Heavy Metal housekeeping," a teen mother launders her son's heavy metal T-shirts and explores her own longings and sexuality. As a special added bonus, the writers discuss their inspirations for the stories they have created and these musings are included in an appendix at the end of the anthology along with the writers' bios. *The Journey Prize* anthology can be enjoyed for what it is: a selection of some of the year's best published stories by some of Canada's finest writers.

The Show Must Go

John Orrell

Fallen Empires: Lost Theatres of Edmonton, 1881-1914. NeWest $24.95

Reviewed by Neil Querengesser

Fallen Empires is a new edition, introduced by Diane Bessai, of John Orrell's meticulously researched 1981 tribute to the vibrant life of Edmonton's first theatres. Although Orrell, a renowned authority on English Renaissance theatre, is perhaps better known for his instrumental role in the 1996 reconstruction of the original Globe Theatre in London, his passion for the lost theatres of Edmonton, the subject of his first historical investigation, is equally great. Drawing mainly upon materials from the Provincial Archives of Alberta, the City of Edmonton Archives, insurance records and numerous theatrical reviews, especially in *The Edmonton Bulletin*, Orrell constructed a detailed history of the buildings that once housed the many live performances of everything from novelty acts to vaudeville to operatic excerpts to Ibsen, Shaw and Shakespeare in Edmonton's energetic early years.

In 1881, when Frank Oliver began publication of *The Bulletin*, Edmonton had a population of 263. In 1904, when it was incorporated as a city, it had 8350 residents. Ten years later, on the eve of the First World War, owing largely to a frenetic three-year real estate boom, the population had mushroomed to 72,516. From the beginning, Edmontonians sought live entertainment, mainly for diversion, but often and increasingly for intellectual and cultural gratification in the "golden years"

before live performances were superseded by the movies.

Orrell devotes considerable attention to the physical qualities of the early buildings that made such performances possible, including their structural materials, their dimensions and their furnishings; his ubiquitous architectural terminology, coupled with a few archival photographs and his own sketches, invites the willing and patient reader to envision some vividly detailed images of these structures, even though only two remain today as designated historical sites.

Although Edmonton boasted few local performers, the recently completed railway enabled many itinerant acts to entertain the populace at the many and various live theatres of the period, which included The Orpheum, The Grand, The Lyceum, The Pantages, The Princess, The Empress and The Empire, in its several manifestations. Not all of these were equally successful but all played an important role in the development of early live theatre in the city, as did their various owners and managers, including Alexander Cameron, W.B. Sherman and Charles L. Gill. From the beginning these acts received ample press, and the numerous *Bulletin* reviews Orrell cites function almost as a loyal chorus, growing along with the theatres in wit and sophistication from the nineteenth century to the pre-war years.

Famous travelling companies (for which some of the theatres were named) included The Lyceum, the Orpheum and the Pantages. And the list of famous performers who visited Edmonton was impressive, including such names as Sir Francis Robert Benson, Robert B. Mantell, Lawrence Brough, Lewis Waller, Maude Adams, Margaret Anglin, Sir John Martin Harvey, Sir Johnstone Forbes-Robertson, both The Marks Brothers *and* The Four Marx Brothers, Buster Keaton, Eddy Foy, Will Rogers, Stan Laurel, Sophie Tucker, Jimmie Durante, Dame Nellie Melba, Dame Emma Albani, Marie Lloyd and Sarah Bernhardt. The last of these, arguably the most famous actress of her time, won the hearts of Edmonton audiences and rave critical reviews, although her performances were limited to one evening and a matinee.

Although *Fallen Empires* includes an impressive cast of actors, musicians, impresarios, managers, reviewers and patrons, its real stars are the lost buildings themselves. Orrell's style is carefully objective throughout, although one can sense just beneath the surface the sheer pleasure and enthusiasm that must have motivated him in his literary excavations of these long-gone buildings in this all but forgotten era of Edmonton's history.

Antiphonal Milton

Balachandra Rajan; Elizabeth Sauer, ed. *Milton and the Climates of Reading: Essays by Balachandra Rajan*. U of Toronto P $45.00

Reviewed by Elizabeth Hodgson

This attractively bound *festschrift* in honour of Balachandra Rajan's illustrious career as a Miltonist at the University of Western Ontario picks up on the felicitous trend in such volumes of honouring a scholar by allowing that scholar's voice to be heard. In this case, nine essays by Rajan, written from 1979 to 2004, make up the bulk of the book, providing a rich sense not only of Rajan's own work but also of the life and times of Milton criticism in these decades. *Milton and the Climates of Reading* is therefore, though in some ways more univocal than many *festschriften* are, surprisingly diverse and complex, surprisingly antiphonal.

Adding to this flavour, the volume includes an introduction by Elizabeth Sauer, the editor of the volume and Rajan's frequent collaborator, as well as an afterword by Joseph Wittreich. Sauer provides a headnote for each essay as well as an

overview of his place in Milton criticism; Wittreich provides a similar echo at the end of the volume. With Sauer and Wittreich providing their reflections on Rajan's work as we read it, *Milton and the Climates of Reading* has an attractively responsive choral effect.

It's Rajan's work which most suggests voices responding to one another, though. As Sauer and Wittreich point out, Rajan's work frequently folds back upon and reinvestigates its own history, reconsidering how univocal Milton himself was, reassessing the self-possession in *Paradise Lost*, reexamining Milton's imperialism or orthodoxy. Terms like "Defamiliarizing," "Reinventing," "Surprised" and "Wayfaring" mark the titles of his nine pieces, five or so on *Paradise Lost*, three on Milton's imperialism, four on Milton's prose works and two on Milton criticism itself. The overlaps are symptomatic of Rajan's work. Perhaps it is not surprising that his move to reevaluate *Paradise Lost* in "Surprised by a Strange Language" leads him to the conclusion that "the poem's propositional nucleus is potentially dialogic and . . . its central engagement . . . is also subject to dialogic stresses"; "we are looking at a work that is much more open, much more the chronicle of its own self-making than previous readings of it tend to suggest." "Milton Encompassed" is actually a response-essay for an MLA Conference panel, while "Banyen Trees," "The Imperial Temptation" and "Milton and Camões" echo one another's investigations into Milton's Europeanism. This habit of examining a literary artefact under a new light, of re-performing a text, is clearly one of Rajan's strengths.

Perhaps the most distinctive feature of Rajan's writing, though, is its lyrical density, and its stylistic overlappings make it as aurally antiphonal as it is intellectually so. Rajan frequently provides meditative re-statements of Miltonic passages, and here his prose implies that "metaphor may be a betrayal; it is also the thin screen of a necessary safeguarding." His translations are echoes with added meaning, "the movement of self-making" which points back to an "assisting response." These delicate probings of the Miltonic work, seeking as it were a response in return, are really what make Rajan's work, so amply anthologized here, a kind of antiphonal Milton.

Narrative and Identity

Valerie Raoul, Connie Canam, Angela D. Henderson and Carla Paterson, eds.
Unfitting Stories: Narrative Approaches to Disease, Disability, and Trauma. Wilfrid Laurier UP $85.00

Reviewed by Patty A. Kelly

This interdisciplinary collection, which follows from a research project at the University of British Columbia, brings together narrative analysis of literary and non-literary texts from researchers in the humanities, social sciences and health sciences in order to better understand patients' experiences of disease, disability and trauma. The editors identify aesthetic, therapeutic and polemical functions in narratives of ill health, where "narrative" operates as both "object and means of inquiry," and they account for the construction and representation of individual narratives within the "frame" of cultural metanarratives. "Introduction: Narrative Frames" and "Narrative Conclusions: An Example of Cross-Disciplinary Analysis" bookend the text's three divisions. In addition to the editors' opening remarks, Judy Z. Segal's "Interdisciplinarity and Postdisciplinarity in Health Research in Canada" articulates the difficulties facing postdisciplinary researchers and the necessities of interdisciplinary research in effecting changes in health care and health care policy in this country. Authors apply

an array of terms to the "outlaw genres" they critique: autobiography, autobiographical novel, autofictive, autobiocriticism and pathography. These genre-bending terms expose some of the complex ethical questions about claims of documentary factuality and experiential truth when narratives of private loss and suffering go public and when the therapeutic meets the testimonial.

The first section, "Public Framing of Personal Narratives," looks at the representation of stories whose self-conscious aesthetic considerations shape their narratives and determine public reception and audience appeal. In "Authorizing the Memoir Form: Lauren Slater's Three Memoirs of Mental Illness," Helen Buss points out how fact and fiction, history and memory, self and other, in psychologist Slater's account of her own mental illness whose title *Lying: A Metaphorical Memoir* attests to these controversies, oscillate in an often satirical climate of ambivalence and mythmaking. In "Paper Thin: Agency and Anorexia in Geneviève Brisac's *Petite*," Barbara Havercroft comments on the "lean syntax" and "non-fat" vocabulary in an anorectic's autobiographical account, while Ulrich Teucher, in "The Incomprehensible Density of Being: Aestheticizing Cancer," notes the "density" of experience that living with a cancer diagnosis entails.

The second section, "Representing the Subject," demonstrates how ethical considerations and confidentiality constraints in the qualitative research interview affect the narration and reception of personal stories and oral histories not intended for public consumption. In "Writing About Illness: Therapy or Testimony?" issues of reception, motivation and exigency lead Anne Hunsaker Hawkins to interrogate the differences between the therapeutic impulse to tell one's story to resolve a wound or injury and the testimonial (forensic) model which enlists witnesses and the judiciary to right a social injustice. Janet MacArthur acts as witness to her own abjection and the "othering effects" of chronic illness. Finding the reliance upon battle metaphors in illness narratives unsatisfactory, she draws on Susan Sontag's spatial configuration of wellness and illness as dual kingdoms. MacArthur figures her own experience as a remapping of the body's terrain, "a rerouting of self and its itineraries," where the well-self observes and accommodates the ill-self, perhaps grudgingly, rather than doing battle. Finally, in "Men, Sport, and Spinal Chord Injury: Identity Dilemmas, Embodied Time, and the Construction of Coherence," Brett Smith and Andrew C. Sparkes investigate narratives of masculinity and sport and the social (re)construction of "body-selves" in men with spinal cord injury.

The third section, "The Larger Picture," illuminates how cultural metanarratives determine, in part, the performance, reception and transmission of the types of texts represented in Part I and Part II. James Overboe's thought-provoking concluding essay, "Ableist Limits on Self-Narration: The Concept of Post-personhood," explores restrictive notions of personhood that connect normalcy to productivity and to dominant patterns of language use and relegate the diseased, disabled and traumatized to post-personhood.

Disappointingly, papers from panel discussants Arthur Frank and Catherine Kohler Riessman, whose research informs many of these essays, are absent (Riessman's paper is published elsewhere). However, the extensive and welcome "References" section includes Frank and Riessman and provides essential reading for students, teachers and researchers interested in narrative methods and theory.

Often, as this volume attests, narratives of disease, disability and trauma destabilize normative categories, create chaos in the spaces between the personal, the professional

and the political and expose the social, political and ideological limits of authority and autonomy. As these authors remind us, we are all TAB (temporarily able-bodied). And, when the transitory and shape-shifting "self-in-health" finally meets the "self-in-illness" who forces us to take up dual citizenship, as Sontag says, "at least for a spell," our own "unfitting stories," our own experiences of pain, loss and suffering become our passport to that other kingdom.

Nature, Wild and Tamed

Raquel Rivera; Jirina Marton, illus.
Arctic Adventures: Tales from the Lives of Inuit Artists. Groundwood $18.95

Lynn Manuel; Kasia Charko, illus.
The Summer of the Marco Polo. Orca $19.95

Margriet Ruurs; Ron Broda, illus.
In My Backyard. Tundra $21.99

Reviewed by Hilary Turner

The respect and wonder that most Canadians profess for the natural world are invoked by all three of these picture books—two from a historical standpoint, the third set in the present day. Read sequentially, they give something like a high-speed chronology of the relationship between people and landscapes that has been the major theme of our history—from the rhythms of the hunter-gatherer cultures, through the commercial harnessing of natural resources, to the comfortable coexistence with some of nature's less threatening creatures that is possible in an urban backyard. Readers whose experience with the great outdoors is confined to the latter will enjoy being reminded that nature in this country has not always been as benign and manageable as it might seem.

In *Arctic Adventures*, Raquel Rivera and illustrator Jirina Marton have acted on the bright idea of reproducing in stories and pictures the reminiscences of four prominent Inuit artists. The stories are told in the third person with the artist (usually in his or her childhood) featured as a major character. Each story is illustrated in subdued but powerful water colours, and is followed by a biography of the artist, a photograph and a sample drawing or sculpture. Considerable research has gone into this project, and Rivera is scrupulous in her acknowledgement of the many sources, both living and print, that made it possible. An author's note fondly recalls her visit to Baffin Island where she interviewed Lazarusie Ishulutak, one of the four artists, and made contact with the friends and descendants of the others.

The four stories have a common preoccupation with survival—which is variously threatened by weather, bears and the absence of food. In the first, inspired by the memories of Pudlo Pudlat, the young Pudlo and his nephew Kapik go seal hunting by dogsled and are separated by the breaking-up of ice floes. As the younger boy drifts out to sea, Pudlo remains on shore watching anxiously. Then as the tide miraculously turns, and Kapik returns with iglu, dogs and dogsled all intact, "sharp fierce joy made Pudlo feel like they could live forever." The point that survival is contingent upon the mercies of nature is made again in the second story, "Kenojuak and the Goddess of the Sea," where a fleeting vision of Talelayu, ruler of seals, walruses and whales, is enough to send a hunting party of children back to camp: they have been well taught not to tempt fate. The third story portrays Jessie Oonark's narrow escape from starvation at a time when game was scarce and pelt values were low, and the fourth depicts Lazarusie Ishulutak's suspenseful encounter with a polar bear. Altogether, the stories emphasize the importance of peaceful coexistence rather than the attempt to dominate nature.

The price that humans can pay for that attempt is one of the themes of *The Summer of the Marco Polo*, where a shipwreck off the coast of Cavendish, PEI,

galvanizes the town and subtly changes the life of the recently orphaned Lucy Maud Montgomery. Based on the recollections of the adult author, and told in the first person, the book recounts the storm that stranded the clipper ship *Marco Polo* on a sandbar in the summer of 1883, and the efforts of the townsfolk to rescue its crew and salvage its cargo of timber. The unexpected intrusion of the vicissitudes of trans-Atlantic trade into the lives of farmers and small business people, including Lucy's grandparents, is nicely depicted. But Lynn Manuel and illustrator Kasia Charko have other themes in mind as well. Young Lucy's friendship with the Norwegian captain is founded on their mutual sense of loss—of her parents, and his ship. Both, too, are exiles of a sort, and a hint is dropped that out of this awareness of strangeness comes the urge to create stability through writing. Charko's pencil and watercolour illustrations beautifully capture the fury of the wind and sea as they demolish the ship, as well as the tranquility and sunshine of the village with its well-ordered gardens and lanes. A small fragment of Canadian history has been admirably preserved here.

In My Backyard, a collaboration between Margriet Ruurs and illustrator Ron Broda portrays nature as benign, but not as precious or cute. As a microcosm of the yearly cycle of nature, the backyard is home to wrens, ducks, toads, snails, spiders, squirrels, hummingbirds, snakes, wasps, swallows, butterflies, bats, opossums and mice. Broda's colourful paper sculptures create a three-dimensional effect, with both close-up and panoramic views of the creatures in their habitat. His eye for detail is extraordinary. This is a cheerful but unsentimental book that encourages younger readers to observe and understand the ways in which birds and animals quietly arrange their lives around human structures: the compost bin, for instance, is shown as a source of life rather than a repository for garbage. The backyard tour is supplemented by a sturdy glossary with information about each of the small creatures. *In My Backyard* is an excellent primer for prospective naturalists and lays solid groundwork for a more sophisticated analysis of the ties that bind humans to nature.

Communautés

Paul Savoie
Acte de création. Interligne 24,95 $

Guy Cloutier
Le goût de l'autre. Noroît 25,95 $

Compte rendu par Vincent Charles Lambert

L'idée d'un livre d'entretiens avec des auteurs francophones vivant à l'extérieur du Québec laissait entrevoir certains recoupements inattendus d'un parcours à l'autre, d'une pensée à l'autre, suivant lesquels on aurait pu cerner de plus près une sorte de communauté de l'exiguïté culturelle. Paul Savoie, l'interlocuteur privilégié, affirmait d'ailleurs dans son introduction :

> Je me suis rendu compte que j'avais de bien meilleures questions à poser aux personnes qui habitaient le même milieu que moi, ce que je suis arrivé tout simplement à identifier comme le milieu canadien-français (le milieu québécois est maintenant devenu à mes yeux le milieu hors-canadien-français!), sans doute parce que c'est là où je me sens véritablement chez moi et où je pouvais établir les meilleurs dialogues.

J'ignore si cela tient au médium (ces entretiens furent réalisés par courriels interposés) ou aux questions mêmes de Paul Savoie, assez convenues pour la plupart et surtout lorsque vient le temps d'aborder le sujet, mais la partie la moins intéressante de ces entretiens touche précisément à l'influence de ce milieu sur la vie intellectuelle de ces écrivains, parmi lesquels se trouvent pourtant d'assez grosses pointures : Jean-

Marc Dalpé, France Daigle, Marguerite Andersen, Herménégilde Chiasson, Robert Dickson, Gérald Leblanc . . . Chacun y va du rappel de son parcours, des lieux habités au fil des ans, des commencements de l'écriture, sans qu'on puisse dire à aucun moment que des ponts soient jetés entre eux qui auraient pu laisser croire que le fait d'être francophone et de vivre à l'extérieur du Québec constitue une expérience fondamentale à laquelle l'écriture serait constamment reconduite, comme si ces écrivains étaient tout compte fait des écrivains comme les autres, ni plus déracinés ontologiquement ni plus solidaires que montréalais ou parisiens. La preuve en est qu'on fait peu mention de centre ou de périphérie, chacun de ces écrivains semblant écrire à partir de son propre centre qu'il aménage ou déplace à sa guise.

Dans le *Le goût de l'autre*, Guy Cloutier en appelle à un autre type de communauté. Cet ouvrage est constitué des nombreuses présentations lues, depuis 1996, au cours des soirées des Poètes de l'Amérique française, une série de récitals dont chacun est consacré à l'œuvre d'un poète (accompagné d'un musicien). « Qui voudrait faire l'effort de se perdre dans une voix ouvertement singulière et lointaine? », demande Guy Cloutier dans le premier des trois essais qui ouvrent le livre, trois essais empreints d'un messianisme à peine voilé (et, ma foi, un peu verbeux) quant à la tâche contemporaine de la poésie—dans sa manifestation la plus archaïque, la plus rudimentaire selon Cloutier, le récital—dans un monde qui n'en a que faire : « Chacun reçoit alors comme une illumination le miracle de la liberté gagnée en pleine solitude avec les autres, dans un dénuement proche de l'ascèse pure, dans ce voyage extraordinaire à la poursuite d'une vérité intérieure, exigeante d'harmonie, que l'auditeur-spectateur capte au plus près du poème. » On ne saurait définir avec plus d'emphase, revendiquer avec plus de ferveur l'humble mystère qui peut s'accomplir pendant la lecture d'un poème à haute voix. Le livre entier est une célébration de cette communauté quasi-mystique qui se crée autour de l'acte poétique, comme si le récital était le dernier repère d'une communion trouvant sa source au fond des âges et que la vie moderne aurait presque achevé d'occulter. On ne s'étonnera pas ensuite si chacune des présentations donne à lire moins l'œuvre d'un poète que l'œuvre *du* poète, « guetteur invisible dont la vigilance nous rassure » écrit-il à propos de Roger Des Roches, « veilleur » à propos de Claude Esteban, « sentinelle bien campée dans ses mots » à propos de Rachel Leclerc : ce qui est dit de l'un pourrait presque aussi bien être dit d'un autre, la singularité de chaque voix se perd dans l'évocation d'une « voix poétique » intouchable, intemporelle.

Not Enough Culture

Garry Sherbert, Annie Gérin and Sheila Petty, eds.
Canadian Cultural Poesis: Essays on Canadian Culture. Wilfrid Laurier UP $38.95

Reviewed by Berkeley Kaite

History is memory in drag. This paraphrase captures the central tropes, whether explicitly stated or not, in many of the very good essays contained in the book, including parody, irony and their corollary, *movement,* in multi-faceted Canadian culture. Indeed, the conception of Canadian culture as a living hybrid is reflected in the frequent occurrence of Judith Butler, Linda Hutcheon, Homi Bhabha and Benedict Anderson in several of these essays. The introduction, "A Poetics of Canadian Culture," by co-editor Garry Sherbert, is an excellent and trenchant discussion of "culture" and as such it tackles the vexed issue of its definition and the tricky question of both its specificity and its uncertainty. "Poesis" means "the making" of culture. In *Canadian Cultural Poesis*, it refers to the "tension between

making and being made by culture."

That tension, however, isn't always brokered in the articles here. The best of the lot offer a series of good and probing questions about, for example, the desire for a separate identity constructed through humour and its ironic reversals in the essay by Beverly Rasporich. In another, Emily West looks at the "memory projects" found in the Historica Foundation's TV "Heritage Minutes" and the CBC's 17-part TV documentary, "Canada: A People's History." She reviews the debates surrounding these two productions and their failed attempts to avoid "rigid definition, exclusivity, and grand narratives." She leaves the reader wanting more in the way of textual evidence, not because she doesn't make her points, but because she does.

There are three essays on film in this volume. Zoë Druick provides a suggestive and dynamic definition of Canada as "a study in the application of communication technologies to questions of difference that present a problem for governance." In her essay, Druick looks at the history of institutional attempts, by the Canadian Government Motion Picture Bureau and the Film Acts of 1939 and 1950, the National Film Board and the Canadian Film Development Corporation, to create and promote Canadian national interest to Canadians. Druick concludes her discussion of the "spaces available for cultural production" with comments on Canadian identity as "bound up in processes of technological modernity that are at once local, national, and international." Susan Lord asks "How does history get into a film?" and concludes there is a regional prairie Canadian gothic—"particular distortions of time and space, self and other, and vision and blindness that produce Gothic terror"—which is a response to political and social violence, the "losses" upon which the nation is founded. Jason Morgan argues there is "perversion chic" in English national cinema and that Canadian cinema is "naturally" queer. His essay (from which "history is memory in drag" is taken) is titled, "Queerly Canadian," and his justification for deploying "queer," with its (admittedly unstable) place within discourses of sexual politics, is that Canada is a nation that perpetually struggles "to contain its own internal differences." So "queer" here denotes "both inclusiveness and transgression," and "denies the need for binary thinking." Why not call this deconstruction instead of "queer"?

Other essays deal with media representations, following Stuart Hall's reminder (quoted in Sherbert's introduction) that "questions of power and the political have to be and always are lodged within representations." Yasmin Jiwani looks at the way "culture," particularly ethnicity, is invoked in the media coverage of murder cases unwittingly to suggest violence has a cultural rather than social basis. Annie Gérin discusses the ways in which public art in Montreal is tied to the "ownership of space and linguistic identity" and collective memory, and "can repress or efface other interpretations of the past." The use of photography to document First Peoples' "place" in Canada is addressed by Carol Payne. Payne also demonstrates how the same photographs are recontextualized, retranslated or reinscribed by contemporary Native artists. Cynthia Sugars essay on the "I am Canadian" Molson beer ad is a superb analysis of an instance of a Canadian "compromised post-colonialism." Sugars provides expert textual and theoretical excavation of the ad to conclude that to be Canadian is to be ambivalent about ourselves.

Too many essays here (around ten) address social institutions rather than culture (stasis rather than movement) and have little about them that is specifically Canadian. Texts or events described, while situated in Canada, often could apply to any

other country. There is a desire to capture some Canadian-ness that may not be there. Would it have been too much to ask for scholarly work on Pierre Trudeau, hockey, Québécois cuisine, Newfoundland humour, the Eaton's catalogue?

Personals

Zaid Shlah
Taqsim. Frontenac $15.95

Allan Brown
Frames of Silence. Seraphim $16.95

Barry Dempster
The Burning Alphabet. Brick $17.00

Reviewed by Chris Jennings

These three books share only superficial aspects of their poetics; each tends toward free verse shot through with awareness of traditional poetic resources. Each buttresses poetic structure with other disciplines: music, prayer, medicine and shooting. In their individual ways, though, these very different books come back to the authority of a life over lyric expression. Zaid Shlah's *Taqsim* engages Arabic traditions in the English language and Western positions on the Arab world in the voice of a Calgary-born Iraqi Canadian. Allan Brown's *Frames of Silence* selects from the last 25 years of Brown's published poems apparently to make a career-defining statement; the photo on the book's cover expresses the author-as-subject by having the white-haired Brown staring out, book in hand. In Barry Dempster's *The Burning Alphabet*, a finalist for the 2005 Governor-General's Award, the threat to life posed by serious illness centres the book and defines its emotional space.

Shlah's *Taqsim*, originally published in the US, has been reprinted by Frontenac House, and several of the poems have been anthologized or broadcast including "Asking Iraq to Comply," on New York's Radio Tahrir. That address to multiple audiences suits the hyphenated perspective of Iraqi Canadian Shlah. "Asking Iraq to Comply" expresses most directly Shlah's investment in his Iraqi heritage. The poem catalogues Iraq's ancient history and central place in the rise of human civilization: "Iraq is Assyrian, is Mede, is Persian, / is Babylonian, is the origins of human / narrative flowing into the Tigris, / flowing out of the Euphrates, / flowing into Eden, into Genesis, into Adam and into Eve, into Ur and its Kings; / Iraq spans the lives of the oldest traditions." Of course, Iraq is also none of these things as an artificial construct forced on a region of multiple traditions following the First World War. This, of course, is one reason the West must "make amends." "Leaving Iraq, Entering Alberta" explores similar territory on a more personal scale: "If my prairies sound semitic, or the color of my / city is olive, whose borders are they?" Shlah frames the cultural content in parallel musical conceits: a *taqsim* ("[i]n Arabic music, free form melodic improvisation") and a fugue; "Taqsim" begins the book in self-awareness—images and impressions bound by a voice looking to create an "Opus." The fugue, "Seasons of the Imperial Imagination," completes a formal circle by answering the *taqsim*, but feels much less essential to the book's engagement with its contemporary moment.

More than any subject, Allan Brown's work revolves around his persistent challenges to grammatical and syntactic coherence. In the seventh section of "Nocturne Sequence," subtitled "(Ars Poetica)," he writes: "[w]e come to our selving / accidentally, it seems; / and here an hour or so / as the decorous jaw line / of the long sky equally / in unexpected stars / thickens another name to be." The neologism "selving" works because it draws on a precedent in transforming a noun to a natal verb—calving. The conceit in the third clause (counting "it seems" as the second) is more difficult to fathom because the grammar

suspends the action until the final line of the first stanza where the verb "thickens" casts back four lines to find its subject: "an hour." Zeugma then links the intermediary lines by supplying the verb necessary to complete their grammar: "jaw line . . . [thickens] in unexpected stars." The image of thickening stars makes sense; you can picture the deepening night revealing a denser concentration of stars. The thickening of the "name to be" perplexes because the conceit offers nothing substantial to picture—so perhaps identities congeal like oatmeal. In the last stanza, selving is compared to "deer moving dusk-wise / out from an evening mist / to follow some further / my forms and symbols, where they lead," and the concern for symbol, for an exchangeable thing rather than grammatical action, seems central to Brown's poetic. Not all poems follow this method—"The Gift of the Earth" for example veers into dramatic monologues and Arthurian subject matter—but the majority resist intuitive syntactic patterns as much as rhyme or rhythm. This persistence isn't always successful, nor is the reason for it generally clear as a personal poetic project.

In *The Burning Alphabet*, Barry Dempster employs a colloquial voice, subtle slips into rhyme pushed off the line endings, and a framing apparatus of literary quotations to explore, most thoroughly and memorably, the very intimate perspective on life and the body conferred by chronic illness. The result is neatly poised in the contradictions of illness' gravity and poetic levity—more lightness than humour. And there is, like most subjects defined by epigraphs, a kind of desire to embrace the subject as an experience. The results, even apart from the 15 ways of looking at illness (kudos to Dempster for eschewing the Stevens), are oddly, pleasantly delicate: "In the morning I'm weak, / nerves whispering that they have / something inconsequential to say." There are three ideas here, and all are important. The speaker's weakness leads to a dissociation from the body recorded as a body/mind split and culminates in the nerves suffering their own self-effacing impulse. This is being diminished at almost a cellular level. The "Sick Days" sequence has a number of such moments, and its vulnerability will cause it to overshadow (as here, I'm afraid) what may be the better sequence: "Bad Habits." Based on tags drawn from www.bullseyepistol.com, the sequence is a crafty elegy shot through with repetitions that link the sections with key images—a phoenix, a secret window—that speak as much to elegy's reviving of an absent subject as to the subject himself. The result offers little in the way of sentimentality while establishing a complex sense of relationship and inheritance in the repetitions, and that subtle intimacy feels more authoritative than either personal politics or personal poetic.

Peeling Back the Skin

Anne Simpson
Quick. McClelland & Stewart $17.99

Emily Schultz
songs for the dancing chicken. ECW $16.95

Tom Wayman
High Speed Through Shoaling Water. Harbour $17.95

Reviewed by Emily Wall

Anne Simpson, Emily Schultz and Tom Wayman are all lyric poets that share a propensity for beautiful image work. All three new collections have a delicious richness in store for readers. And yet all three also suffer from being a bit too tidy, too accomplished, too academic. While the poems in all three books deal with loss, none of them really provides the blood and bone feeling of a painful, personal book.

"Let's say you had three wishes" begins Anne Simpson's poem "Mayfly." Simpson's newest collection, *Quick,* is a balance of

despair and fear with hope and wishing: "we're surrounded by the living. At the hospice, the man dying of esophageal cancer asks to see the ocean once more." These new poems are darker than her early ones. Here, she has collected images of ambulance drivers, suicides, a man in a wheelchair. She turns our attention to the sharp edges of life, and she does it with language that juxtaposes beauty with death, creating internal tension in the poems. Simpson looks at death and loss with an unsentimental eye: "During chemo, she studies lymph nodes in the ceiling tiles."

If there is one thing lacking, it's a distancing of the speaker, of the poet, who says in one of the rare uses of the first person, "I've turned to ice." While Simpson has admirably avoided any melodrama or self-obsession, the reader rather misses the emotional intensity that might accompany such images if the "I" were allowed into the narrative poems. We are given no indication how we should feel about the man in the wheelchair. His image is beautiful but opaque. While we admire the images, we don't feel that old skin touching skin that poetry often provides—a touching of hands across the space of language when a poet reveals him- or herself enough to be vulnerable and remind us of our own humanness. At times we feel as if we're standing in the back of the room, as if at a funeral of someone we don't know.

"*Hell. What else is there*?" says the speaker in the poem "Better Hell" in Emily Schultz's new book of poems, *songs for the dancing chicken.* This question underscores the questions raised in many of these surreal poems. The speakers in the poems both look for connections between things, people, ideas, and reject them at the same time, bowing away from any easy links or moments of simple clarity. *songs for the dancing chicken* is a book of loss, absences and wished-for connections.

Schultz relies on rich images to collage her poems. One might add her to the group of neo-surrealists in the tradition of Dean Young, for the way her poems make surprising leaps and turns. The juxtaposed images create postmodern fragmentation: "The bald man with long fingernails. The dirt. / And vermin." This underscores the book's themes of loss and disconnection we feel from one another and from the world. The collection also suffers from the common surrealist problem of trying to find a way to hold itself together, while providing surprising subconscious links. The balance between surprise and randomness is not quite achieved here: "A thatched-roof boat / rowed out from the dark. / Horses drinking champagne." Rather than feeling the pleasure of a surprising leap, the reader struggles to find the links between the images in many of the poems, and the reading then becomes an academic exercise instead of a physical, emotional journey. While surrealists aim to leap dream-like from image to image, the reader should find some small link, some shade of connection, between the images, which is the pleasure of surreal poems. In many of Schultz's poems, that link is too buried for readers to find, leaving us wandering in a dark alley littered with interesting, but seemingly random images.

Tom Wayman's *High Speed Through Shoaling Water* is a quiet, accomplished book. The poems deal with aging, with the teaching life, and with the writing of poetry itself. The opening of "Poem Lullaby" characterizes the tenor and the persona speaking in this book:

> Sleep, poems
> yet unformed, I
> have other work
> on the world-ridge
> and ask you to lie down
> a while.

Wayman, as an accomplished writer and teacher, knows his craft. He also has some rich moments of ridicule and sarcasm that give the book a sense of humor. For

anyone in the academy reading this book, both "Carrot" and "Postmodern 911" will provide a laugh and a nod of recognition as Wayman pokes fun at the establishment. The language in "Postmodern 911" is a perfect parody of the academy he is ridiculing: "Of course, if you can legitimately define yourself / as colonized, discriminated against, or / identified as Other with respect to—."

While the discussion of the academy might provide a laugh for select audiences, it also limits the book. Many of these poems are of a writing professor: safe, well-constructed, but also "academic" in the very way the poem above critiques. In "Journal," we are told:

> Its poems flow with the relentlessness
> of freeway traffic speeding through farm
> country:
> declarative statement after declarative
> statement.

The poems are about writing poems, about teaching them, and they only lightly touch the real world. Even those that strive to do so—several pieces about blue collar workers—feel strangely removed. Poems like "Employment Application" and "Ballad of the Brotherhood" philosophize about the working world, but with a certain academic distance.

All three collections have luminous moments that make them well worth reading, although the reader could wish for more risk-taking in the work. As Wayman tells us in "Shift": "the tight knot of every plum / loosens a little each day," and we could wish these collections of poems were less tightly knotted, giving us more access to the richness lying just under the skin.

Discursive Adaptations

David Solway
Reaching for Clear: The Poetry of Rhys Savarin. Signal $16.95

Roger Nash
Something Blue and Flying Upwards: New and Selected Poems. Your Scrivener $15.00

Frederick Philip Grove; Klaus Martens, ed.
A Dirge for My Daughter: Poems. Königshausen & Neumann EUR 12.80

Reviewed by Erin Wunker

David Solway has done it again. In *Reaching for Clear*, Dominican poet Rhys Savarin is Solway's most recent heteronym, or alter ego. Savarin's poetry—not to mention his existence—has been less heralded than Solway's *Saracen Island: The Poetry of Andreas Karavin*, but the reader should not take this as any indication that Savarin's poetry is any less worthy, or for that matter, less researched. In his introduction, Solway notes that *Reaching for Clear*, "published by IEPF (Island Express Printing Factory) in Roseau, 2005," is written in a sort of burlesque, where Native languages "interweave with Standard English and Continental French . . . with occasional strands of Cocoy, Carib and Arawak." This "gives a curious mix of registers and tonalities that move from the impeccably formal to the intensely idiomatic, often in the same poem." Savarin, Solway explains, crafts his allusions and metaphors in a similarly complex juxtaposition. In Savarin's poetry, "Dominica is . . . his complex symbol of imaginative potential in an increasingly banal and disenchanted era." Solway admits, "this translation is to some extent an adaptation." Much renewed attention has been paid of late to the virtues and potentialities of adaptation; Solway's text consciously enters into this discourse.

The first poem, "Driving Around," functions much like Solway's introduction, only here the poet, rather than the "translator," counsels the reader: "Patience is the key /

you insert in the ignition. / Never equate mileage with driving time." Solway, quoting Phyllis Shand Allfrey who claims, "love for an island is the sternest passion," insinuates that on an island, love, like time, is always an adaptation. Poems like "The Rum Factory" ("Stay clear of the Machoucheri River, friend,"), "Carib Territory" ("They are expert with bamboo, calabash, fwije,") and "Arrival (2)" ("Back in 1554, Jambe de Bois / built his island heaven here / . . . / In 1942, radar fished / for Hun . . . / Next, Johnny Compton takes his turn / marking 1982 / like a page in a creole primer / ") lay out the territory of the island and its history. Meanwhile, "Celebration" ("Think Boom Boom / . . . / our peoples meet / . . . / *Mwe ni yon place pou tout yo ki vié m we / Moi, j'ai une place pour n'importe qui la desire*"), "Goddess" ("She struts in wacky sensay masks / . . . / O none can resist the spell of her sales pitch / as she touts her wares in bright, clipped English, / cool French and racy Creole") serve to flavour the poet's geography of images.

The volume closes with three epistolary prose poems written to Ralph Casimer, Jean Rhys and a local personage, Lennox Honychurch, to whom the poet writes "it is on your founding that I base my findings, hoping to add yet one more dimension that takes us beyond the insulation of the moment and beyond the encapsulation of the merely given." Indeed, through Savarin, Solway transports the reader to an island struggling to survive and to adapt to the mounting pressures of globalization, while maintaining its own spirit, "which out of adversity has created gardens, and from one island, another."

The epigraph of Roger Nash's latest offering is more than fitting; it reads, "We have 613 commandments. The last one is probably the most important because it includes all the others: *Kitvu lakhem et hashirah hazot*. 'You must write this poetry.'" Taken from Elie Weisel's *Against Silence*, Nash's epigraph serves as an injunction to himself—one he clearly takes seriously.

The first section of *Something Blue* consists of nine new poems; it is unsurprisingly the freshest of the collection. "The three ages of hair" opens the volume and shows Nash at his best. "The three ages of hair" is composed of three short sections, each dedicated to a different stage in a woman's life. Notably, this is the life of a girl whose hair was a "traffic-light / on red." It is almost impossible to detect Nash's homage to Gustav Klimt's painting, "The three ages of women (1905)," which also figures a triumvirate of redheads. This is not the only poem in which we see Nash creating a dialogue across time and disciplines. In "Five signs that you're not the reincarnation of someone famous," Nash is an artful interloper who cites Egyptian slaves ("In heavy rainstorms, when dust turns / into clumps of silvery clay, you feel a need / to . . . make bricks, / and build something large and triangular"), Christ ("Winos in the street walk determinedly / toward you, holding out mugs of water. / They pass you by, and head for a man carrying / a bag of loaves, a box of fishes") and Hamlet ("As you sip warm beer on the stoop, / wondering . . . / whether to be or not to be, / a dog runs up and pees on your foot") in a raucous rumination about the meaning of life. The poet then deftly steers the poem away from fantastic farce stating, "You realize *this* / is an answer . . . / Like the window / that, even though dirty, lets in both light and dark." No wonder Nash can count the late Al Purdy as one of his fans.

As Klaus Martens, editor of Grove's so-called new book attests, "this small book contains a personal selection of poems and versions of poems . . . written on the death of his daughter." Phyllis May Grove died of a ruptured appendix at the age of 12. At the time of her death, she was the Groves' only child. It is of great import, according to

Martens, that Grove's readers know May's death broke something in the poet: "If a *raison d'être* for this collection needs to be given, it rests in the previously unrecognized fact that Grove initially intended an illustrated collection of the poems written on the death of his daughter." The word "initially" gives this reviewer pause.

Martens has, admittedly, done a beautiful job of editing and constructing the text from Grove's archival material: there are Grove's prose introductions-cum-musings as well as photographs and facsimiles of handwritten material. The poetry is classic Grove ("Oh, that my voice were like a battle call / To wake the sleepers from their lethargy"), and in most places it is upstaged by Grove's unencumbered stream-of-consciousness writing ("Why, when there are thousands of children who live in squalor and towards misery, unloved by their parents, had it been this child who was indispensable to us?"). Ultimately, *A Dirge for My Daughter* is, even at its best, a fetish object for the archivist.

(Re)collecting Urban Culture

Birk Sproxton, ed.
The Winnipeg Connection: Writing Lives at Mid-Century. Prairie Fire $29.95

Alana Wilcox, Christina Palassio and Jonny Dovercourt, eds.
The State of the Arts: Living with Culture in Toronto. Coach House $24.95

Reviewed by Maia Joseph

How does a city become a space of vibrant and meaningful cultural production? Two recent Canadian essay collections explore this question, one by looking to the past, the other with an eye on the future. *The Winnipeg Connection: Writing Lives at Mid-Century* examines Winnipeg's literary arts community of the 1940s and 1950s, the "writing lives" of the title capturing both this focus on literary production, as well as the other primary aim of the collection—to present what editor Birk Sproxton describes, in his introduction, as "a partial biography of the city," by bringing various forms of reminiscence together with cultural and historical documents. *The State of the Arts: Living with Culture in Toronto*, for its part, provides a snapshot of Toronto's contemporary arts community through an extensive collection of short essays by local artists, scholars, journalists, editors and administrators. As the follow-up to *uTOpia: Towards a New Toronto*, in which essayists shared their imaginings of and for a "better" Toronto, *The State of the Arts* endeavours to build on the conversation initiated by its predecessor.

In the introduction to their 2005 essay collection *Downtown Canada*, Douglas Ivison and Justin D. Edwards call for greater attention to the significant but often disregarded role of the city in Canadian writing. By exploring and conceptualizing the dynamics that link Margaret Laurence, Adele Wiseman, Jack Ludwig, John Marlyn, Sinclair Ross, and a host of other intellectuals and artists to mid-century Winnipeg, *The Winnipeg Connection* makes an important contribution to this emerging area of Canadian literary criticism and history. Sproxton, in his introduction, outlines a range of metaphors governing conceptualizations of the Winnipeg cityspace in the collection. Winnipeg was and is, he suggests, at once an island (following Desmond Cole's description of Canada as archipelago), sand and sandbox (Sproxton's figure for the relationship between Winnipeg's satellite communities and the central city), a network (here, of course, Sproxton is borrowing from Winnipeg-raised McLuhan), and a seat of composition. The multiple descriptors help explain the expansiveness of a collection that makes room for both Jack Ludwig—who claimed in the introduction to his novel *Confusions* (reprinted in

The Winnipeg Connection) that his complex experience of community in Winnipeg proved integral to the shape taken by his novel—and for Sinclair Ross, who produced much of his most important work while living in Winnipeg but claimed that his writing "drew on Manitoba not at all." (Dennis Cooley proposes, in his contribution to the collection, that despite Ross' focus on isolated characters in a desolate prairie landscape, an obliquely articulated sense of the city as a "rich and involved" space lurks in his writing.)

Notably, the need to make a case for a relationship between writer and city varies among the collection's essayists. In his article on McLuhan, for instance, Jim Scott makes no attempt to identify particular ways in which Winnipeg shaped McLuhan's scholarship, whereas Di Brandt, in a lively essay, posits Winnipeg as "source and inspiration" for James Reaney's conceptualization of literary regionalism, despite the obvious and intrinsic influence of southwestern Ontario on Reaney's work. In effect, *The Winnipeg Connection* seems to engage Edward Soja's notion of the city as habitat, as a space where various forms of intersection and interdependency—not all of them causal or deterministic—proliferate.

Significantly, while big names like Laurence, Ross and McLuhan get their due in *The Winnipeg Connection*, the collection's devotion to both expansiveness and a degree of eclecticism allows a more complex portrait of Winnipeg's mid-century cultural community to emerge. Refreshingly, often overlooked author Patricia Blondal receives a significant amount of attention: an untitled poem from the Blondal papers is included in the collection (eloquently introduced by Laurie Ricou), as are numerous essays on her work. Notable too are reminiscences by United College fellow and University of Winnipeg professor emeritus Walter Swayze, who offers an enlightening window onto the intellectual ferment and genuine excitement about Canadian literature in Winnipeg's academic circles during the period. The collection also makes brief forays into theatre, radio, music, television and film, with essays treating (among others) theatre director John Hirsch, composer Sonia Eckhardt-Gramatté, and musician, radio personality and university professor Chester Duncan. A final highlight is the essay "Crossing Portage and Main," in which the mother and son team of Dawne McCance and Carson McCance combine personal and local history with the work of René Descartes and Walter Benjamin to produce a trans-generational meditation on the "figurative and literal intersections" ("storytelling as well as service-routing") that give shape to a thriving urban centre.

Whereas *The Winnipeg Connection* focuses primarily on Winnipeg's writing community, and only secondarily on cultural production more broadly, *The State of the Arts* explores Toronto's contemporary cultural scene in all its remarkable diversity, and attempts to think critically about the work of fostering the arts in the city. Readers hoping for a comprehensive portrait of the work currently being produced by writers (or musicians, or visual artists) in Toronto will be disappointed. But as editors Alana Wilcox, Christina Palassio and Jonny Dovercourt note in their introduction, the chief aim of *The State of the Arts* is for the collection to serve as "a nexus for disparate communities, encouraging further discussion." The volume generally achieves this goal, covering everything from urban photoblogging to the reinvention of laneways, and addressing topics of concern to a range of stakeholders, such as the concept of the "creative city." Some of the most engaging essays explore the tensions, connections and fragments of common ground between communities: Kate Carraway offers a rather gutsy comparison of corporate culture and

the city's independent arts community (especially its pervasive DIY ethic), Karen Hines crafts an incisive satire of bohemian artist and urban professional lifestyles, and Kevin Temple investigates Toronto's somewhat beleaguered, if also quirky, culture of visual arts patronage.

A small selection of essays in *The State of the Arts* deals specifically with local literature and literary production. Stephen Cain, responding to the lack of attention paid to Toronto poetry in *uTOpia*, explores the possibility of a "poetry of engagement," connecting his reading of bpNichol's *Martyrology* with psychogeographic investigation. Cain makes the intriguing argument that poetry might be used as a guide to the practice of urban *dérive*: "One could move to the space referenced in a poem, but then 'drift' from that location to examine the surrounding area and discover micro-climates of emotion and significance," he proposes. In another essay, Amy Lavender Harris—who is currently engaged in a larger project of mapping Toronto's literary terrain—compiles and reflects on literary representations of the CN Tower. Essays by Stuart Ross on Toronto's small-press community and by Sandra Alland on "fair-trade" policies for fostering local writing, presses and bookstores extend the collection's coverage to publishing and the literary marketplace.

Ultimately, with essays just long enough to outline the scope of particular ideas and issues, and written for the most part with a combination of earnestness and infectious enthusiasm, what *The State of the Arts* does particularly well is inspire. The book's principal achievement is, arguably, that it sustains the sense of unabashed hope which characterized the essays in *uTOpia*, while engaging in the work—always unfinished—of bringing new voices into the conversation about city-making.

Facing the Challenge

H. Nigel Thomas, ed.
Why We Write: Conversations with African Canadian Poets and Novelists. TSAR $24.95

Reviewed by David Chariandy

Why We Write is dedicated to three individuals—Harold Head, Ann Wallace and Lorris Elliot—who usually aren't the first to be invoked when African Canadian writing is discussed today, but who, as editor H. Nigel Thomas aptly observes, were "crucial in establishing a foundation for African Canadian literature." Each of these individuals was active in the 1970s and 1980s, when Black Canadian writing was almost solely a small-press and "community-based" phenomenon, and each would appear to function as the inspiration for some discussion of developments since the early 1990s, when a handful of Black authors began publishing with larger presses and attracting significant attention throughout Canada and, indeed, the world. H. Nigel Thomas is himself a writer of significant accomplishment, and in his introduction entitled "Facing the Challenge," as well as in his interviews, he highlights the uneasy relationship of Black Canadian writing to the broader print-culture market. Thomas interviews Ayanna Black, Austin Clarke, George Elliott Clarke, Wayde Compton, Afua Cooper, Bernadette Dyer, Cecil Foster, Claire Harris, Lawrence Hill, Nalo Hopkinson, Suzette Mayr, Pamela Mordecai, M. NourbeSe Philip, Althea Prince and Robert Sandiford.

What emerges most strikingly is that, despite the genuine accomplishments of some of the mature writers in the book, most of the interviewees are profoundly concerned about the future for Black writing in Canada. The redoubtable Austin Clarke, for instance, speculates that his own relatively early success with larger presses might actually have discouraged certain

publishers from taking on additional Black Canadian writers—"We already have Austin Clarke," as Clarke himself puts it. Cecil Foster observes that the "hefty state subsidy for publishing" of the 1960s has dried up; and George Elliott Clarke agrees, acknowledging that there is "general contraction in the publishing industry in Canada," but noting that, despite the higher visibility of Blacks in Canada, the number of "books [of poetry] by Black authors has certainly not gone up." Afua Cooper notes that today "we have no Black publishers"; and M. NourbeSe Philip describes this apparent situation as a "tragedy." Among the interviewees, only Lawrence Hill suggests (after considerable qualifications) that "[i]t's somewhat easier now [for Black writers] than let's say 20 years ago"; but he also suggests that this is at least partly because publishers have "seen that books exploring the minority experience can sell." However, a bit later in the book, Suzette Mayr appears to suggest that only *particular* forms of "minority experience" are likely to be deemed sellable and/or broadly consumable. Mayr refers to a Western-Canadian student who considered some of her writing difficult to appreciate because, ironically enough, it was about people born here, and *not* about "a first-generation immigrant from somewhere else."

There are moments of optimism, though. Wayde Compton, one of the youngest writers interviewed, joins his elders in voicing concern for the future of Black writing in Canada, but he also describes his profound sympathy for the BC-based Black writers of the 1970s "who self-published" and were overlooked because, in that particular time and place, "there [were] no readerships and reviews." Recently, Compton co-founded *Commodore Books*, a small (if not micro) press dedicated to publishing Black Canadian literature—proving, of course, that there is now at least one active Black-focused press in English Canada. Evidently, things are still happening, and Thomas' interviews do a lot to suggest why.

Uncomplicated Luck

Miriam Toews
Summer of My Amazing Luck. Vintage $19.95

Reviewed by Lisa Grekul

Although *Summer of My Amazing Luck*, Miriam Toews' first novel, garnered some critical acclaim when it was first published in 1996 by Turnstone (it made the shortlists for both the Stephen Leacock Memorial Medal for Humour and the McNally Robinson Book of the Year Award), many readers are likely to come to it via her second novel, *A Complicated Kindness* (Vintage 2004)—which was a finalist for the Giller Prize, the recipient of the 2005 Governor General's Award for Fiction and, it bears mentioning, the winner of CBC Radio's "Canada Reads" in 2006. Indeed, the book design of the latest edition of *Summer of My Amazing Luck* (Vintage 2006), with its unmistakable similarities to the design of *A Complicated Kindness*, suggests that the publisher is capitalizing on the success of Toews' second novel to reanimate interest in her first. This could be interpreted, cynically, as a transparent marketing strategy for bolstering sales of a mediocre, forgettable debut were it not that *Summer of My Amazing Luck* is accomplished and memorable.

Set in Winnipeg, *Summer of My Amazing Luck* explores the hardships—and the hilarities—of day-to-day life for the residents (primarily single mothers "on the dole") who live in a public housing complex called "Have-a-Life" (a.k.a. "Half-a-Life," "Have-a-Laugh" and "Have-a-Light?"). The novel is narrated by 18-year-old Lucy Van Alstyne (mother of nine-month-old Dillinger) and it is, at its core, the story of Lucy coming of age as she tries to accept her mother's

death and her father's response to it (he is an emotionally detached, largely absentee, father). The main plot, however, traces the growing friendship between Lucy and another young, single mother, Lish (mother of four girls by two different fathers). In response to Lish's desperate desire to find the love of her life—the fire-eating juggler who fathered her youngest (twin) daughters—Lucy, pretending to be the juggler, starts writing letters to Lish. The letter-writing leads to the two friends, along with their five children, embarking on a journey to Colorado in search of Lish's lost love, and Lucy being forced to come up with an elaborate scheme to deal with her friend's inevitable disappointment. And while this plot line comprises the main fabric of the text, Toews weaves a number of additional narrative threads into the novel. Half-a-Life is home to a quirky cast of characters, each with a complex past (there is Terrapin, for example, the "organic crusader," who leads a trio of women who "practis[e] witchcraft and trea[t] each other's various infections and rashes with rare herbs and potions"; Sarah, who chose to stop talking after the "traumatic circumstances of her pregnancy," communicates by writing "furiously on little stick-it note pads"; and Teresa, determined to better herself, is "taking French *immersions*"). The ongoing feud, moreover, between Half-a-Life and Serenity Place, the housing complex across the street, becomes a "side story" in the book (according to one of Lucy's friends, the two apartment buildings are "just like Northern Ireland without the bombs").

Summer of My Amazing Luck is not without comic moments, in large part because Lucy and her friends are able to "laugh at the bleak humour of [their] situations" (reflecting on the fact that Lucy slept with eight or nine men at the time Dillinger was conceived, and hence doesn't know who his father is, Lish says, "if you eat a whole can of beans, how do you know which one made you fart?"). But the novel—not surprisingly, given its premise—also addresses a wide variety of serious thematic concerns and political issues. Toews, via Lucy, provides insight into the challenges faced by the residents of Half-a-Life (young mothers escaping abusive relationships, abandoned by deadbeat dads, ill-treated by social services, struggling to make ends meet). The social commentary on how and why these women are marginalized, albeit heavy-handed at times, illustrates the extent to which they are dehumanized. Considering, too, that Lucy and Lish, in particular, come from privileged backgrounds, Toews illustrates that any of one us could take an "unlucky" turn and find ourselves in similarly difficult positions. The motif of luck is pronounced throughout the narrative (when Lucy is a child, her mother always tells her, "Good Luck Lucy, Good Luck," and her father has a "weird talent" for picking out four-leaf clovers), as is the motif of missing fathers ("[a]ll these missing fathers," says Lucy, "were just out there somewhere, like space junk orbiting planets populated with wives and girlfriends and sons and daughters"). But in the process of accepting the "bad luck" of losing her mother, Lucy begins to recognize her good fortune: "it came to me suddenly," she says, "that while I was spending so much time remembering my dead mother, I was forgetting to remember my father, who was alive."

Readers who come to *Summer of My Amazing Luck* via *A Complicated Kindness* and/or *Swing Low: A Life* (2000), a memoir about Toews' father, are bound to notice that the dominant concerns of her first novel (a young woman coming to terms with fraught family dynamics as she comes of age) recur in her subsequent books. These same readers are likely to find the conclusion to *Summer of My Amazing Luck* somewhat contrived and less-than-subtle in its optimism (in the final scenes of the novel, virtually all of the novel's characters,

including Lucy's father, gather at Half-a-Life to witness and then celebrate a home-birth—symbolic of the "new beginnings" that all of the characters will embrace). Yet Toews' uncomplicated take on her narrator's future is satisfying, and, ultimately, there is a universal lesson to be learned from it: "Half-a-Life" becomes a fuller, if not full, life when we begin to see that luck is in the eye of the beholder.

Takes a Team to Publish

Alice Walsh
A Sky Black With Crows. Red Deer $12.95

Martha Brooks
Mistik Lake. Groundwood $14.95

Reviewed by Alison Acheson

What causes a book to transcend ink-on-paper? To emerge from its cover more as a performed song or even dance—an art form that lives from one second to the next, changing, breathing with life—than as an unchanging flat object, for which the most exciting feature might be an occasional dog-ear?

With the two novels for young people, *Mistik Lake* and *A Sky Black With Crows*, one transcends, and the other does not. Both might have, though, and that is disturbing. Particularly because I believe that the protagonist of *A Sky Black With Crows*, Katie Andrews, and her story, were deserving of the time and attention that might have caused the book to breathe.

Katie Andrews, age 13, longs to continue her education and become a nurse. Katie and her family live on "the Labrador," fishing in the harsh conditions there. Katie loses most of her family and is taken to the Grenfell orphanage to live, where she meets the historical Dr. Grenfell, considered a saviour by many. It is a story of courage and growth. Where it lies flat on the page is—partially—in its production. Missing is a final editor-led polish by the author (the dialect is erratic, and various plot threads are knotted; Katie's distress over not telling anyone about her search for her sister is unbelievable, as is her inexplicable ability to sew entire coats in one sitting and, after a day spent breaking needles and learning to sew, wedding dresses). Also missing is a final copy-and-line edit. Punctuation of a dialogue can stymie the MFA student, but should pose no problem for the competent line editor. One page of the book is completely bare, leaving me to wonder what part of the team fell asleep. Within the beautifully produced and attractive cover is writing that is frequently sloppy, with overused words and a plethora of adverbs. Adverbs can add to the texture of language, but here, words such as "slowly" and "quietly" are placed, more often than not, with prose that has already done the work. The overriding question is: Why the lack of care? Was the production rushed for deadline? Or was it something not so benign: some thought that the book is for young people who won't notice the periods-for-commas throughout? Or the switch from American to Canadian spelling? Or the narrative that frequently summarizes, and does not invite the reader to take part? With the latter, I have no doubt that the young reader will notice, even if she or he is unable to articulate the knowledge.

Mistik Lake does have a transcendent, living quality, with characters who are impossible not to care for, both females who inspire, as well as positive males. It is the story of 17-year-old Odella, whose mother carried a secret from the age of 16, and allowed for that one secret to become many. Odella and her sisters have had to live with their mother's abandonment and then her death and the revelation of those secrets. It is not only a story of grief and forgiveness, but of self-discovery and, more importantly, acting on knowledge of self and honouring that knowledge. Brooks causes the reader to believe that high

standards for joy and integrity are not only possible, but necessary. Apprenticing writers would do well to study Brooks' ability to find and create character, story, flow. It is intriguing to learn that Brooks is also a jazz singer, and I can't help but ponder what she brings of that knowledge to her writing. In the disparate threads—the point-of-view shifts, the fluidity of time—her ability to carry the reader through a flashback, and through past tense with a third person voice, alternating with first person and present tense—there is a coming together. Solos and a sense of improvisation are here, yet it reads—as do Brooks' other works—to be all of a piece, with arc and momentum and solid artistry of craft.

"*If he is patient and follows his heart, he will have a beautiful life.*" These are the words of one of the characters. In Brooks' works there is wisdom together with a clear eye for reality. There is also a sense of connection with her reader. The end author's note really doesn't shed any light on the story itself, but it does connect Brooks' life with the reader, and it also touches a tone of care. There is a sense that the team—writer, editor, publisher, copy and line editors, marketers, designer—have worked together, and with respect for the final part of the team, the reader.

Intimate Details

David Waltner-Toews
One Foot in Heaven. Coteau $18.95

Joan Alexander
Lines of Truth and Conversation.
Porcupine's Quill $18.95

Reviewed by Kathryn Carter

One Foot in Heaven and *Lines of Truth and Conversation* are impressive, intimate collections of short stories from accomplished writers. David Waltner-Toews has been writing for many years—this collection includes stories published as early as 1979—while developing his career as a veterinarian epidemiologist at the University of Guelph, a coincidence that adds interesting layers to the stories he tells. His animal science background is most obvious in "The End Times" where details of the operation of a slaughterhouse add gritty realism to a character sketch of Prom Koslowski, a central figure whose story of escape from Russia begins the collection and whose migration provokes the chain of events that give rise to all of the other stories. Remaining stories follow Prom's children and an interconnected circle of acquaintances through their prairie Mennonite community and beyond (maybe a Mennonite forerunner to the interconnected narrative structure of *Babel* or *Crash*?), and so the stories deal with well-thumbed Mennonite literary themes such as origins, belonging and community; or salvation versus the desires of the flesh. The stories surprise, however, in how effectively they juxtapose those common elements. For example, it is a measure of his ability as a writer that he effortlessly leads the reader from imagining the barren dental work of Prom Koslowksi's mouth, to India's heat and then to a finely realized sex scene in a shower in Winnipeg; the range and a scope of these stories make them very engaging. It is not clear, however, how much editing was involved in compiling stories that date back

to 1979. Some could have used a sharper editorial eye. Take this sentence for example with its rash of adjectives: "a cold wind whipped off the lake in the pale early morning light as the red fireball sun lifted her searing face over the white-capped genuflections of the thundering waves." At other times, though, adjectival metaphors work to brilliant effect, such as when he describes the sun in India as a "knife-tongued, nagging salesman, forcing on everyone his tedious bargains." It is worth mentioning too that the settings work against each other nicely here: the insistent sun of India plays against the winter winds of Manitoba and Alberta, offering relief to the predominant setting of Mennonite stories.

It comes back to Prom Koslowski to enunciate the central theme of Waltner-Toews' collection. In the penultimate story, Prom is butchering a pig and looking out at a gathering snow storm. The narrator explains Prom's search for meaning as a "just beyond his grasp, in these glorious ever-changing whorls of cold light pluming up before his headlights." The narrator continues: "in the blinding, numbing blizzard out there lay the pure meaning of his life's patterns . . . of all lives." Attention to life in all of its messy details is the motivation for these stories which are anchored firmly in place by a poetic search for meaning.

Joan Alexander's short stories do not shy away either from the gritty, sometimes ambivalent, sometimes unclear details of life. The tour-de-force of this collection is a story called "Five Months." The story stays with you long after reading for its absolutely honest portrayal of a woman dealing with her father-in-law's death by cancer. Unflinching is a clichéd word trotted out far too often in book reviews, but it is the only suitable word here. She leavens the profundity of the event with the many stupid details that invade everyday life: music piped into a pharmacy, celebrity news, a child's bedroom filled with "autographed baseballs, plastic boxes filled with hockey cards and marbles." Far from detracting from the story, these details prepare the reader for those that are more grim: the thrush that infects the tongue of the dying man, for instance, or the bodily noises that escape him. And though it is a long story at nearly 60 pages, it is perfectly realized, ending neither too soon nor lasting too long. Its structure is a little like the process of dying itself, inexorable, longer than one would expect, and ringing in its finality. It ends with the unsentimental statement: "Pa is dead, I said to myself. This is a fact of life." That she manages to achieve all this in a story centred on a man who does not excite sympathies is even more remarkable. "Love Junk" deserves another honorable mention for detailing a kind of man who does exist but has escaped much literary scrutiny thus far: the self-involved, faux-enlightened wordsmith who snares sensitive women with vague yet grand sounding promises. Encouraging a married woman to begin playing with fire (him), he advises by e-mail: "try to see fire in its many incarnations, as holy and blessed" and signs off, "Please be assured that your correspondence will be guarded in a sacred fashion." Yet he is never able to achieve any sort of real connection with the increasingly frustrated Patti who returns in spirit to her children, her laundry and her prosaic husband. "Snap" ensnares the reader with a finely crafted vision of childhood misery in 1960s Chicago, but ends with what seems at first to be a complicated and unsatisfying note about the passage of time. As the stories unfold, however, a pattern emerges whereby the author is loath to conclude the stories (aside from "Five Months") with any kind of finality. Characters are instead left like Elena at the end of "The End of Metaphors" "wondering what to do with her sadness, [walking] along, thinking of books." The cumulative effect of these endings begins to feel much less unsatisfying:

a motif emerges where the characters are left to wander out of their own stories and into each other's, even while leaving behind a trail of ashes (and there are several trails of ashes in these stories). So the final effect is one of characters turning away from their singular troubles and facing instead something that is shared and universal. It is no surprise that Alexander's writing was nominated for the Journey Prize: she writes stories that unsettle and burrow under readers' skins. With finely nuanced details, she leaves a trail of ashen words to lead us into a darkened forest.

Colonial Spectacle

Jerry Wasserman
Spectacle of Empire: Marc Lescarbot's Theatre of Neptune in New France. Talonbooks $21.95

Reviewed by Alan Filewod

Rarely read, less rarely taught and unperformed for four centuries, Marc Lescarbot's *Theatre of Neptune in New France* has always been a problem for historians of theatre in the Canadas. As Jerry Wasserman outlines in this very useful teaching edition, which includes a historical essay, Lescarbot's original text, two translations and ancillary matter, *The Theatre of Neptune* has occupied an ambivalent terrain. It may not have been the first European theatrical performance in the Americas (such genealogical attempts at fixity implode along contested boundaries of "theatrical," "performance" and "European") but it seems to be the earliest textual transcription of a theatrical event. As such it has been claimed by several disciplinary formations as a point of origin: as a founding text variously of Canadian theatre, Canadian literature, Québécois literature and even American theatre.

Theatre historians know quite a bit about the single performance of *The Theatre of Neptune*, but that knowledge is skewed, because the only real source is the author's own recollection. That means that despite the accumulations of tradition and iconography, we know very little about what actually *happened* on that November day 400 years ago. In his critical essay, Wasserman offers an engaging and supple overview of the historical variations of the play as a cultural event. He offers a comprehensive summary of the known facts and an excellent overview of the critical literature.

Wasserman is a distinguished anthologist of Canadian theatre whose two-volume collection of modern Canadian plays effectively defines the canonical boundaries of the academic discipline. He is also a major voice in the field of Canadian theatre history. This present book is the product of the anthologist rather than the historian. It does not seek to offer new research into the field, but instead brings together, for the first time, a basic package that will enable teachers and researchers to resituate the play in the canon. The two translations (by Harriet Taber Richardson in 1927 and Eugene Benson and Renate Benson in 1982), are sufficiently different to be useful examples of the politics of translation, and the contextual information on masques, pageants and entries will locate the theatrical traditions of Lescarbot's form. The inclusion of *The Masque of Blackness* seems more of a convenience than a scholarly necessity, but the juxtaposition of the two texts enables a discussion of the historical procedures of racial masquerade and surrogation. This is a subject that Wasserman acknowledges but does not engage.

No discussion of *The Theatre of Neptune* can avoid the central problem that this masque was an operation of colonialism through spectacle, enacted through the surrogative bodies of Frenchmen masquerading as Indigenous peoples, who offer the new world to the French king in perfectly framed alexandrines. Wasserman does not avoid this discussion, but does take a mediating position against those (like myself) who

have argued that the play was a racist masquerade that deployed spectacle to transform wilderness into empire. In his analysis, Lescarbot emerges as a French humanist whose representations of the Mi'kmaq peoples were "genuinely civil, or at least less toxic than most." Unlike previous writers (like myself) he contextualizes the Mi'kmaq "sauvages" in the play in the larger field of Lescarbot's writings, which he describes as "an extraordinary exercise in comparative ethnography." In this, Wasserman finds levels of complexity that have not been addressed by previous scholarship.

That *The Theatre of Neptune* still resonates through our cultural imaginary can be seen in various efforts (including reenactments, artistic renditions and citations, such as Halifax's Neptune Theatre) to mark it as an icon of nationhood. As Wasserman shows in his discussion of the carnivalesque attempt by the radical Optative Theatrical Laboratories to obstruct plans to reenact *The Theatre of Neptune* on site to commemorate its quadricentennial in November 2006, such citations still incite controversy. The rush to publish this text as a "400th Anniversary Edition" (to quote the cover copy) may explain why Wasserman did not include Optative's deconstructive script, *Sinking Neptune,* in this volume. It would have been the ideal conclusion to this important and timely edition.

Epiphany vs. Exploitation

Patricia Young
Airstream. Biblioasis $24.95

Clark Blaise
World Body: Selected Stories: 4. Porcupine's Quill $24.95

Reviewed by Jennifer Fraser

Airstream follows in the tradition of the Joycean epiphany, whereas *World Body* exploits both world and body. Patricia Young's *Airstream* evokes through poetic language nuances of emotion leading to a decision; with each story one is startled by what Joyce would term the "revelation of the whatness of a thing." Young has the command of language and the depth necessary to discover, as Joyce would put it, "the radiant soul" of "the commonest object" or person. Reminding the reader of the diverse characters of *Dubliners*, in *Airstream*, the narrators vary, and the voices in which they think and talk vary; thus, although not packed full of international reference, the fictions of *Airstream* are far more foreign than those of *World Body*. *Dubliners* explores paralysis; *Airstream* examines betrayal.

A child is abandoned by her mother: "Hanging upside down from her knees, she rolls her eyes back and the woodchip playground becomes a sky. She flutters her eyelids and chants the new unlisted number, hoping her mother can hear her wherever she is." A 20-year-old falls in love and stops caring what people think: "every cell in my body was a small closed monastic room that had thrown its door open." A widow explains: "Doctor Whitely suggested I write these letters. He said I needed to find a way to hold onto the love while letting go. I have no intention of letting go, but I agreed to write letters in exchange for sleeping pills." A boy hides the toy gun he's been given by his father: "Mick loves the gun and hates it, which is sort of how he feels toward his mother because of the divorce." A foster-parent protects her child: "A metal plate slides down over my eyes and a horrible stink hits me like a blow to the head and something long and supple slips off a shore and into the water, and then my hands are around Butchy's neck." A hitchhiking teenager discovers: "The afternoon sun is a column of light pouring through the arched window at the end of the hallway, and she thinks she could tell this boy that she wishes she'd chanted at her father's bedside, she wishes she'd chanted and sung and prayed day and night, she wishes she'd pressed her mouth to his ear and begged

him not to give up, to please please hold on." A young girl yells in defiance: "All the other girls wear leggings" and her Scottish immigrant mother answers back: "I don't care if the Pope of Rome wears leggings." A teenager faces her boyfriend: "Trudy accepted all of it. She looked into his eyes, the pupils like tiny imploding black holes, and she saw the truth clearly: She was as wired to Dill as he was to heroin."

These quotes cannot capture the epiphanies which begin with the first word of the story and build with each phrase, sentence, paragraph. As suggested by her title, Young draws on the surrounding oxygen in order to create each story's combustion. The words of the stories are like air particles joining to form a high-altitude wind that blows apart characters' beliefs and hopes. It is this wind that an agoraphobic woman blows when her husband announces he's leaving her and the kids: "She might have been someone with somewhere to go, a woman who, having just applied nail polish, was blowing it dry." The terrified becomes the brave.

When you finish a Patricia Young story, your bones hurt. You ache. And it's because of the knowledge you now carry.

In contrast, the stories in *World Body* read like resumes, case studies or obituaries. Everyone is a stranger to everyone, even parents and children. Dr. Lander is trying to reach his son who has become an extremist Buddhist monk in Japan, but he's attracted to his son's girlfriend: "We were standing in a Tokyo subway, I was staring into cleavage and a warm zombie had just propositioned me." Dr. Lander next visits a colleague who has left his wife and children to marry one of the breathtakingly beautiful women who are a dime a dozen in Blaise's stories. Alas, Lander fails to secure her attentions for the night, so he takes next best: "And so that way they spent the night, his stiffened cock up the bitch's cunt, her jaw clamped firmly on his wrist." One realizes in *World Bawdy* that if gorgeous young women aren't available, one always can consider their pets. Another narrator, Picard, breaks his own code of conduct in Jakarta and has sex with a 15-year-old prostitute three times, but unfortunately for him, her arm gets blown off in an uprising.

The tone and diction of *World Body* are often clinical and academic until an occasional twist at the story's end. The narrators are so similar and the stories so formulaic in the pattern of sexual yearning and fulfillment or failed conquest that perhaps the collection should be thought of more as a repetitive novel. Sometimes the stories read as possibly brilliant academic essays on memory, but without the references or documentation, they seem a hodge-podge of ideas that tend to collapse when a woman "fresh from her shower" or a blushing "ex-student," now an elderly professor's wife, enters the room.

Sometimes Blaise's stories reach the rhythm of a meditation and resonate with striking insights as in "Kristallnacht": "No guns, the violence is more intimate; chains swung in an arc then down on a skull." Another powerful line is thought by a man who hears the story of a humiliated female stranger when they sit side by side on an airplane: "Leap, Saint Patty. I present myself to you like a tethered bull in a pasture. Rip my stupid throat out." Unfortunately, these potent ideas do not receive exploration; they surface in the story only to sink again. These stories recall a tabloid where tawdry sex occurs in different cities that function as backdrop to the same shallow human gestures.

Correction

Bill Howell's poem "Late Light" was incorrectly titled "Late Night" in issue 193. We apologize and have reprinted the poem in this issue.

Of Note

Peter Trower
Kisses in the Whiskey. DLM Records $10.99

Eleven skookum songs realize and extend the rough music of Peter Trower's four decades of poetry. Nouns still bend themselves into verbs. Verbs collide with nouns, stick to one another, and hum toward some undetermined but alluring alchemy. Guitar and keyboard, harp and saxophone blend and blur. You grope for the paradox that will sum them up—"ramshackle elegance" you think, or "lurching directness." Don McKay's thoughtful Foreword to *Haunted Hills and Hanging Volley* invents the unique figure, the post-logger poet, "part folk philosopher, part impassioned writer, part pure singer." "It is tempting to sum this up" McKay ventures in his most resonant proposal, "by saying that [Trower] turns a tall tale into a wide one." The wide tale: it incorporates the tall—a zest for exaggeration, a hint of having us on—but reaching for the wider audience that prefers its poetry in the ear rather than on the page.
— LAURIE RICOU

Noelle Boughton
Margaret Laurence: A Gift of Grace: A Spiritual Biography. Women's $19.95

Impressive biographies of Margaret Laurence (1926-87) have been published in the last decade—James King's *The Life of Margaret Laurence* (1997), Lyall Powers' *Alien Heart: The Life and Work of Margaret Laurence* (2003) and Donez Xiques' *Margaret Laurence: The Making of a Writer* (2005)—but "everything that was published on her" left Noelle Boughton "disappointed": "biographies made valiant attempts, but I finished each feeling that no one had yet excavated the essential Margaret Laurence." So when Canadian Scholars' Press/Women's Press asked Boughton, a former journalist writing a novel and studying theology, to write another book on Laurence, she decided to compose a spiritual biography. She attempted "to define the essence of Margaret Laurence's spirit, but finished having traced her spiritual journey"—Laurence's and her own.

Boughton emphasizes Laurence's commitment to the social gospel in both her life and writing. She quotes John Wadland of Trent University as saying, "Margaret was the incarnation of the social gospel." But Boughton does not consult various critics, including Angelica Maeser Lemieux or Barbara Pell, who have, in different ways, examined Laurence's religious influences.

Boughton's biography is a personal study, for her roots—as "a wannabe writer from small-town Manitoba"—parallel Laurence's, she believes, including their connections with *The Winnipeg Citizen*, the discussion of which provides one of the book's more detailed chapters. Composed of 28 chapters chronicling Laurence's life, Boughton's biography becomes more interesting with chapter 22 on "Roots and Wings," wherein she discusses the influence of Laurence's prairie roots on her creativity, and subsequent chapters maintain this increasingly personal approach.

Boughton draws on interviews with Laurence's childhood and college friends, plus colleagues, such as Pierre Berton and Walter Swayze. She includes amusing anecdotes recounted by friends, including the time six-year-old Peggy Wemyss, as Laurence was named, charged neighbours a penny to hear her story about the family holiday at Clear Lake. She also reports the Neepawa rumour that Peggy's father, town lawyer Robert Wemyss, died of influenza after passing a night in a snowdrift following "some late-night revelry."

Boughton's research includes examining Laurence's archives at York, McMaster and

Trent. She relies heavily on Laurence's own memoir *Dance on the Earth* (1989), with nearly one quarter of all quotations drawn from that work. She makes some use of King's and Powers' biographies, as well as collections of Laurence's correspondence with Gabrielle Roy, Al Purdy and Adele Wiseman, edited by Paul Socken, John Lennox and Ruth Panofsky respectively. She does not, however, consult monographs by J.M. Kertzer, Patricia Morley, Christian Riegel or Paul Comeau or valuable collections of essays, letters and interviews edited by Greta M. Coger, W.H. New, Colin Nicholson, Christian Riegel, David Staines, Christl Verduyn or J.A. Wainwright.

Boughton concludes, rightly, that Laurence, as "Canada's premier author," demonstrates "the power of literature to speak the truth across time and space." Although Laurence has been dead for 20 years, I agree that we, "her inheritors, are still being graced by her spirit."

While students and scholars of Laurence will prefer to read her memoir and the biographies by King, Powers and Xiques, as well as the numerous critical studies, editions and collections, the reader and admirer of Laurence who wishes to learn about the woman behind the books may prefer to read this short and readable account. — NORA FOSTER STOVEL

Sans lendemain le présent déchante

Réjean Beaudoin

La maquette donne à voir le profil anguleux d'une blonde frisée au buste raide, épaules dénudées, longs bras aux os pointus qui crèvent presque la peau aux articulations noueuses du coude et de la clavicule. La moue du visage exprime un sentiment qui allie l'hébétude à l'irritation. Pourquoi les signifiants de la séduction insistent-ils tellement sur le mauvais poil de la beauté fatale? Pourquoi le faciès rogue et les yeux vagues réveilleraient-ils le pinacle de l'excitation? Le paratexte iconique et le nom de Nelly Arcan réactivent la marque du succès de son premier roman, *Putain* (Seuil EUR 15.00). En fait, ces ingrédients croustillants composent un plat savamment nuancé dans un texte aussi sobre que rigoureusement composé. *Folle* (Seuil EUR 18.00) ne répond qu'à demi aux provocations qu'il étale sur la couverture.

La narratrice adolescente a mûri de dix ans et se retrouve au seuil de la trentaine, frontière temporelle qu'elle a choisi de ne pas franchir. Elle a abandonné son métier d'allumeuse, sans que l'on sache trop à quelle occupation rémunérée elle se livre, à part la gratuité emphatique d'une substantielle lettre d'adieu à son amant. L'épître constitue le livre que le lecteur tient entre ses mains. L'action consiste en séances d'exhibition dans les bars branchés, nuits bien arrosées et assaisonnées de drogues. L'héroïne traque les ex-copines de son homme, grosse pointure sous toutes les mesures et journaliste de profession. Français d'origine et tombeur à plein temps, la cuisse légère et la langue bien pendue, sa verve a séduit l'épistolière dès qu'elle l'a rencontré.

Outre le style techno, le Net, les cafés informatiques qui servent de décor et résument l'atmosphère du livre, l'amorce ne doit pas détourner l'attention du tableau de moeurs contemporaines, celui d'une jeunesse piégée par la société qui en fait le super-symbole de l'impasse du temps présent sublimé en spectacle. Le couple mal lié qui est au centre du récit ne cesse d'évoquer les générations précédentes à travers les ombres du grand-père de la narratrice et du père de son compagnon inconstant. Ces deux figures d'aînés hors-champ occupent une grande place dans la pensée des protagonistes, sous forme de propos remémorés, de réflexions et d'aphorismes au ton désabusé. Le géniteur du journaliste est représenté sous les traits d'un poète du cosmos enfermé dans son observatoire solitaire et occupé à surveiller la mort lumineuse de galaxies lointaines. Absent de la vie familiale, ce père distrait s'enfonce dans le trou noir de sa contemplation photographique des phénomènes astro-physiques. La matière en expansion investit la fiction d'une métaphore qui rapproche la structure de l'univers de la vocation des travailleurs du sexe : « Dieu a voulu que l'on puisse disparaître dans le silence des fonds océaniques ou dans l'oubli des ghettos. » Il y a aussi une tante tireuse de tarot qui n'arrivait pas à aligner les lames propices à dévoiler le destin de sa nièce, la narratrice.

Dans *Folle*, le titre n'annonce pas l'ordonnance très maîtrisée d'un récit qui reflue vers son point de départ et rentre dans l'*incipit*, progressant à rebours jusqu'à la rencontre de l'amant, origine et destination qui renferment et révèlent la rupture dont la décision a été prise antérieurement, terme arrêté à l'avance par la narratrice qui a résolu de mettre fin à ses jours à sa trentième année. Ainsi s'évanouiront tout ensemble la rencontre amoureuse, la séparation et l'ultime date du trentième anniversaire précédé de l'avortement de l'enfant conçu des oeuvres du vigoureux journaliste.

Si la famille s'apparente à une archéologie affective dans l'expérience de tels personnages, leur vie se jouant dans des réseaux d'interaction dont la condition impose plutôt l'absence d'implication personnelle—tout peut se faire entre partenaires sexuels, sauf l'investissement émotif—, c'est précisément cet interdit postmoderne que transgresse la lettre d'adieu qui contient l'espace de ce roman. En s'avouant amoureuse du destinataire, la narratrice fait l'autopsie d'une relation impossible et y inscrit la totalité de sa brève existence indénouable.

Piercing de Larry Tremblay (Gallimard EUR 11.00) réunit trois récits sous le titre qui est celui du deuxième, les deux autres s'intitulant « La hache » et « Anna à la lettre C ». Un professeur détraqué se dirige en pleine nuit vers la chambre d'un étudiant à qui il va remettre en mains propres son essai corrigé, après avoir allumé le feu à sa propre maison et abandonné ses enfants à l'incendie. Le discours délirant du pédagogue ressemble à une tirade théâtrale en forme de monologue intérieur. On songe à *La Leçon* d'Ionesco et à l'envoûtement d'un somnambule. « La hache » commence par des pages inoubliables sur l'affaire largement médiatisée de la maladie de la vache folle et sur le traitement réservé au bétail par l'industrie alimentaire. Une fois arrivé au chevet de l'étudiant médusé, le professeur lui débite une explication confuse qui tient du traité philosophique et de la déclaration passionnée. On y apprend que les enfants brûlés sont en réalité les manuscrits d'un poème de 97 pages, rédigés pendant une période de 27 ans; que la copie corrigée contenue dans la serviette est une hache en acier que le jeune homme avait remise en guise de dissertation; enfin, on comprend que la démarche du visiteur n'a d'autre but que d'adresser une prière d'immolation au garçon. Rien n'est à comprendre au premier degré dans ce jeu de substitution qui contamine ce récit à la deuxième personne. La chambre de l'étudiant ne correspond pas non plus au lieu de son logement mais coïncide avec la « chambre de pensée » qui renferme à la fois le poème incendié, le décor symbolique de sa genèse et la quête spirituelle dont il procède à la manière d'une imprécation eschatologique.

Ce professeur-poète veut poser un acte d'impossible restauration du monde. Éclatant d'une clameur dostoïevskienne, il s'écrie : « Écoute-moi, cette voix va te révéler un secret qu'elle n'a jamais encore divulgué à qui que ce soit : se tient devant toi un homme exceptionnel. Cette sorte d'homme qui n'apparaît qu'une fois par siècle. » Il faut noter que l'adolescent visité se vêt de noir, a les cheveux rasés, est chaussé de bottes noires. Sa beauté s'est emparé de l'esprit égaré du maître. Dans cette littérature du temps proche ou du présent sans distance, là où la banalité et l'horreur se reconnaissent en échangeant leurs signes, se dissimule et se révèle à la fois le secret d'un désastre aux accents prophétiques.

Le récit intitulé « Piercing » raconte la fugue d'une jeune fille de 17 ans vivant à Chicoutimi. À la mort de son père, incapable de s'émouvoir authentiquement de son deuil, Marie-Hélène quitte sa famille sans pré-avis et débarque à Montréal où elle est recueillie dans la rue par deux jeunes gens, Tony et Serge, eux aussi marginaux

volontaires vivant de petite rapine et de rude bohème dans une sorte de prostitution gratuite en guise d'ascèse spirituelle. Marie-Hélène ne comprend pas tout de suite que les deux garçons sont gais et bisxuels, mais leur particularité ne s'arrête pas là : l'un veut sauver les chiens errants qu'il héberge dans leur appartement et l'autre rivalise d'abnégation pour consoler les âmes en peine dans son lit. D'autres passants vont et viennent autour d'eux, tous ayant adopté pour gourou un certain Kevin, leur oracle et leur pourvoyeur qui pratique sur eux l'art insolite de leur perforer la langue, le nez, les sourcils ou le nombril pour y insérer de petits anneaux métalliques. Héritier d'une grande fortune, ce perceur d'organes inspiré est physiquement atrophié. Il a élu domicile dans une église gardée par un grillage de fer.

La fugueuse de Chicoutimi, étonnée de tant de merveilles qui manquent au lac Saint-Jean, n'en n'est pas moins habitée d'une violence latente dont elle semble observer en elle l'éruption inattendue sans y prendre part. Le point tournant de son séjour montréalais survient avec l'amour qu'elle voue à Raphaël, l'un des protégés de Kevin. Ce jeune prodige rédige des thèses sur des sujets pointus et les brûle ensuite. Il fume des cigarettes à la chaîne et émerveille sa nouvelle conquête par les propos qu'il tient pour lui expliquer ses recherches. À leur seconde rencontre, Marie-Hélène le surprend au lit avec Arno, un ouvreur de cinéma avec qui elle a fait la même expérience. L'ultime étape de ce parcours initiatique consiste dans la perforation d'un sein, opérée par Kevin.

« Anna à la lettre C » raconte d'une façon minimaliste la rencontre d'une secrétaire avec un vieux projectionniste désoeuvré qui surveille l'itinéraire quotidien de la jeune femme et guette son retour chez elle chaque fin d'après-midi. Un jour de canicule, elle l'invite à prendre un verre de thé glacé, lui cuisine des hamburgers et se laisse masser les seins par le vieillard bientôt frappé d'un malaise cardiaque dont il se rétablit cependant avant de repartir comme il était venu. C'est la plus courte des trois nouvelles, à peine une vingtaine de pages, qui clôt le recueil. De l'emploi d'Anna, le lecteur n'apprendra d'autre information que celle-ci : « Je tape. Je suis sur une machine. On m'a mise sur la lettre *c* : carême, caresse, cartouche. Toute la journée. » (143)

Le décrochage qu'on observe chez les personnages de *Piercing* n'a rien à voir avec le milieu scolaire. Il est général et existentiel, caractérisant des individus jeunes ou moins jeunes chez qui nulle occupation réglée ne tient la moindre place dans leur vie. La révolte qui les habite paraît dépouillée de toute composante pulsionnelle et s'impose sans discours articulé, sans relais idéologique, comme s'il allait de soi de constater le néant avéré de toute valeur et de toute transmission. Ce trait peut servir de commun dénominateur aux créatures fictives de Larry Tremblay et de Nelly Arcan, mais aussi à bien d'autres.

Le très court roman de Jonathan Harnois, son premier sans doute, porte un titre frappant : *Je voudrais me déposer la tête* (Sémpahore 16,95 $). C'est un autre portrait troublant de la jeune génération condamnée au vagabondage sans issue et au travail terne dans la laideur des banlieues. Une petite bande d'adolescents forme une espèce de micro-société aux rituels invariables de consommation d'alcool et de drogues, de violence sans objet et d'errance nocturne. Parmi eux deux amis inséparables, Félix et Ludovic, sont brusquement privés l'un de l'autre lorsque le premier décide de s'enlever la vie. Le survivant, narrateur du récit, fait douloureusement son deuil en scrutant son âme, leur vie, l'avenir qui lui reste, et il prend le parti de vivre grâce à l'amour de sa copine Andelle. La plume parcimonieuse de l'écrivain se montre très littéraire sans manquer d'originalité. Ce n'est pas un quelconque document social qu'il exhibe, même si le sujet traité recoupe essentiellement

le suicide d'un jeune homme. Jonathan Harnois pratique le resserrement des mots et en extrait parfois une force concentrée, mais l'écriture se cherche et n'évite pas toujours le tour laborieux.

J'ai lu deux des romans de Catherine Mavrikakis. Elle ne fait pas non plus dans la dentelle en s'attaquant de front aux fantômes résistants de l'Histoire pour faire place nette au flux inexorable du présent, mais sans exclure la filiation essentielle des liens matrilinéaires. Cette prose fusionne allégrement les registres éloignés de la parole la plus décontractée et de la langue la plus chargée de mémoire littéraire, pôles constamment dynamisés par la haute voltige verbale de narratrices survoltées. *Fleur de crachat* (Leméac 20,95 $) ne fait pas mentir son titre : « Je sais seulement cracher. Je suis comme un dragon. Je vomis des mots de feu. La littérature, c'est une autre histoire! » Celle qui s'exprimer ainsi tient un peu de Régine Robin (*La Québécoite*) revue et corrigée par Bérénice Einberg, l'héroïne de *L'avalée des avalés* de Réjean Ducharme. Flore Forget, chirurgienne de profession, née de père québécois et de mère française, appartient à une famille d'émigrants européens dont les membres sont dispersés des deux côtés de l'Atlantique dans un exode où le Québec sert de pont entre deux mondes ou deux temps séparés dans l'aventure du 20e siècle, marquée dans la vie des parents et des grands-parents de la branche française du tronc généalogique. Des deux guerres mondiales subsiste l'empreinte indélébile des hostilités franco-germaniques, partout répandues dans le folklore familial. C'est ce passé, qui est à peine le sien, que Flore s'acharne à liquider sans relâche et sans s'embarrasser de subtilités, tout comme elle mène un combat sans illusion contre l'administration douteuse de l'hôpital montréalais qui l'emploie. Lors de la mort de la mère de Flore, c'est tout l'héritage réfusé de la mémoire militaire du vieux continent qui fait retour sous les traits du frère de la narratrice, un forcené du ressentiment incurable.

À l'inexpugnable fureur des guerres passées, Flora oppose l'expérience également ineffaçable de l'amour de sa mère et de sa fille. Là réside la beauté convulsive et contradictoire du roman dans sa puissance à confronter les deux extrémités du charnier et de l'épanouissement, les généalogies égrenées des deux côtés du monde, celui de la démence meurtrière et celui de la vie recommencée : « C'est inouï comme ce monde éclopé flirte allégrement avec sa perte. »

Dans *Ça va aller*, paru en 2002 (Leméac 19,95 $), Mavrikakis fictionnalise les figures célébrées de deux romanciers québécois de grande envergure, Réjean Ducharme et Hubert Aquin. Les deux hommes s'opposent en tout dans cette entreprise de démolition joyeuse du mythe de Ducharme, accusé d'infantilisation irréversible de la psyché québécoise. En valorisant le génie intouchable d'Aquin, tandis que Ducharme est descendu en flammes (son sosie fictif s'appelle Laflamme) à toutes les pages, le roman juxtapose l'effigie d'un épouvantail et la statue en bronze d'un héros. Sappho-Didon Apostasias s'épuise à refuser la ressemblance qui l'identifie à la célèbre héroïne de Laflamme, qu'elle déteste cordialement, mais sa stratégie de résistance au miroir textuel l'incite plutôt à pousser le mimétisme jusqu'au bout, ce qui donne lieu à un éblouissant festival de citations transparentes et d'intertextes adroitement brouillés : « Ce que j'écris, c'est d'un confus, cela va dans tous les sens. C'est nul. J'ai trop lu de Lafamme, cela déteint. »

Il convient de remarquer que la manière de Mavrikakis s'écarte des fictions dont il a été question jusqu'ici. Le surinvestissement de l'espace littéraire et de ses instances institutionnelles absorbe le temps présent en le privant de l'hégémonie qu'il exerce dans les autres textes que j'ai commentés. Loin du minimalisme actuel, l'écriture mavrikakienne recourt massivement à la

polysémie et au brassage des signes pour instruire le procès de la littérature québécoise dans le contexte élargi de la pluralité culturelle de l'espace contemporain. Mais cette critique, si féroce qu'elle paraisse, n'en conserve pas moins un air de complicité et d'appartenance affectueuse au milieu montréalais.

Il est hasardeux de supposer des affinités relevant d'une même conjoncture entre des livres qui n'ont d'autre point commun que la date de parution. Pareil rapprochement fait toutefois partie des réflexes du chroniqueur, spécialiste de l'air ambiant. Les histoires dont je viens de parler me donnent l'impression de partager les désarrois de l'époque où nous sommes. Les héros sont presque tous des jeunes gens ou bien le demeurent jusqu'à leur maturité qui présente la même concentration de fébrilité et de désespoir, de véhémence et de conduite d'échec. La sexualité exacerbée sur le modèle des sports « extrêmes » et le culte dominant du superlatif économique ou du dernier cri technologique équivalent à une forme renouvelée de nihilisme. Contrairement à l'éternelle jeunesse naguère fantasmée par la génération née au lendemain de la Deuxième Guerre mondiale, ne dirait-on pas que les rejetons des baby boomers vieillissants, les jouvenceux du 21e siècle, sont prématurément acculés à la conscience aiguë de leur mortalité. Confrontés à la clôture de l'avenir dans la vanité prodigieuse des gadgets, ils éprouvent la certitude de vivre dans l'accélération effrénée d'un monde sans lendemain. Pourquoi s'étonner de leur tendance à défier l'existence en précipitant la chute par un bond suicidaire au lieu de prolonger l'impasse d'une vie en sursis?

Ce n'est pas la joie de vivre qui s'épanche dans ces fictions brèves, à l'image du présent raccourci qui nous agite. Ce n'est pas non plus la mélancolie. Chaque âge invente son propre mal du siècle. Celui que traduisent ces récits se caractérise par l'urgence d'en finir, la frénésie d'épuiser toutes les possibilités avant qu'elles ne subissent fatalement le tri réducteur du réel. Nous voici en face d'un appétit féroce de dilapider un avenir qui se montre déjà à moitié fini, dévasté, défloré de son éternelle verdeur, appauvri jusque dans sa sève. La sexualité accuse surtout le malaise terminal de sa vertu séminale. Tantôt gouvernant la régénération universelle, tantôt en concrétisant la ruine, Éros achève-t-il ainsi le déploiement de ses extravagantes parades?

Enfin, pour bien resserrer l'étau de notre époque, je ne trouve rien de mieux que le contraste de la délicieuse sélection de chroniques rassemblées par Vincent Charles Lambert dans *Une heure à soi : Anthologie des billettistes (1900-1930)* (Nota bene 19,95 $), petit recueil de proses à vocation journalistique du début du siècle dernier. Ces textes d'une fraîcheur doucement surannée et pourtant « modernes », signés d'auteurs qu'on ne lit plus—hélas!—, ne peuvent qu'émouvoir le lecteur qui sort ébranlé de la prose des dernières années. Leur limpidité, leur concision, leur facture achevée doivent beaucoup, je le sourçonne, au goût exigeant de l'éditeur qui les a prélevés avec soin dans un amas de feuilles périodiques et de livres maintenant oubliés. « Mademoiselle Lisette, toute seule, marche sur la grande route qui suit le bord du lac paisible. Les étoiles brillent et la lune, derrière un gros nuage, prépare son entrée dans le soir. »

Qui, comme la marquise sortie à cinq heures ou comme la lune parée de voiles diaphanes, peut faire ainsi son « entrée dans le soir »? Les fictions du 21e siècle ont bien muré la porte par où l'on pouvait autrefois s'évader du présent.

Contributors

Articles

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Colin **Hill** is an Assistant Professor in the Department of English at the University of Toronto and director of the Canadian Studies program at U of T's Mississauga campus. He is editor of a critical edition of Irene Baird's *Waste Heritage* (U of Ottawa P, 2007) and author of several articles on Canadian literature. He is working on a book about modernism and realism in early twentieth-century Canadian fiction and editing scholarly editions of previously unpublished novels by Hugh MacLennan and Raymond Knister.

Cheryl **Lousley** is an Assistant Professor in English at Wilfrid Laurier University, Waterloo, Ontario.

Jean-Sébastien **Ménard** termine actuellement son doctorat au département de langue et littérature françaises de l'Université McGill où il travaille sous la direction d'Annick Chapdelaine. Sa thèse, dont la soutenance est prévue pour janvier 2008, porte sur l'inscription de la Beat Generation au sein de la littérature québécoise.

De septembre 2006 à décembre 2007, Martine-Emmanuelle **Lapointe** a enseigné la littérature à l'Université Simon Fraser. Elle est professeure adjointe au Département des littératures de langue française à l'Université de Montréal depuis janvier 2008. Ses recherches et ses articles portent plus particulièrement sur le roman, l'essai et le discours critique au Québec.

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Derek **Beaulieu** lives in Calgary. Michael **deBeyer** lives in Kentville, NS. Barry **Dempster** lives in Holland Landing, ON. Michelle **Elrick** lives in Winnipeg. Greg **Evason** and Bill **Howell** live in Toronto. Garry T. **Morse** lives in Vancouver. Roger **Nash** teaches at Laurentian University.

Reviews

Alison **Acheson**, Peter R. **Babiak**, Marlene **Briggs**, R. Kenneth **Carty**, Susanna **Egan**, Elizabeth **Hodgson**, Maia **Joseph**, Patty A. **Kelly**, Christopher **Lee**, Monica **Prendergast**, Laurie **Ricou**, Matthew Jordan **Schmidt** and Gernot R. **Wieland** teach at the University of British Columbia. Andrew **Bartlett** and Paul **Tyndall** teach at Kwantlen University College in Surrey, BC. Jerome H. **Black**, Antoine **Boisclair**, Wes **Folkerth** and Berkeley **Kaite** teach at McGill University. Katherine **Carter** teaches at Wilfrid Laurier University. David **Chariandy** teaches at Simon Fraser University. Donna **Coates** and Erin **Wunker** teach at the University of Calgary. Greg **Doran** teaches at the University of Prince Edward Island. Roseanna **Dufault** teaches at Ohio Northern University. Alan **Filewod** teaches at the University of Guelph. Graham Nicol **Forst** teaches at Capilano College in North Vancouver, BC. Jennifer **Fraser** teaches at St. Michael's University School in Victoria, BC. Lyne **Girard** and François **Ouellet** teach at the Université du Québec à Chicoutimi. Stéphane **Girard** teaches at the Université de Hearst in Hearst, ON. Robert **Gray** teaches at Lakehead University in Thunder Bay, ON. Lisa **Grekul** teaches at the University of British Columbia—Okanagan. Colin **Hill** teaches at the University of Toronto. Coral Ann **Howells** teaches at the University of Reading. Stéphane **Inkel** teaches at Queen's University. Chris **Jennings** and Robert **Vigneault** teach at the University of Ottawa. Catherine **Khordoc** teaches at Carleton University. Alexis **Kienlen** lives in Grande Prairie, AB. Vincent Charles **Lambert** lives in Saint-Philémon, QC. Dorothy F. **Lane** teaches at the University of Regina. J.N. **Nodelman** teaches at the University of Winnipeg. Neil **Querengesser** teaches at Concordia University College of Alberta in Edmonton, AB. Sina **Queyras** lives in Montreal, QC. Laura M. **Robinson** teaches at the Royal Military College in Kingston, ON. Darlene **Shatford** teaches at the College of New Caledonia in Prince George, BC. Nora Foster **Stovel** teaches at the University of Alberta. Justin **Sully** teaches at McMaster University. Hilary **Turner** teaches at the University College of the Fraser Valley in Abbotsford, BC. Emily **Wall** teaches at the University of Alaska Southeast.

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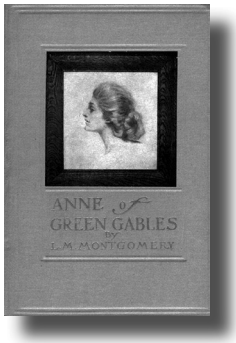

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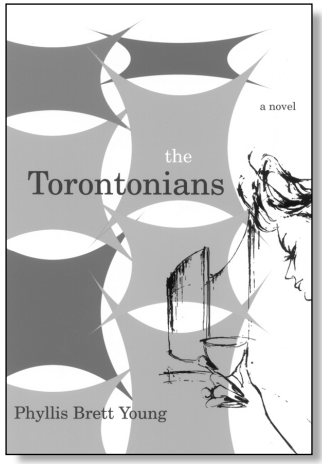

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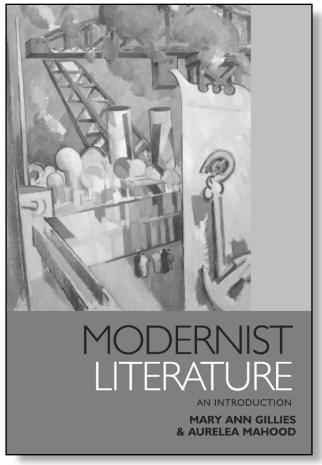

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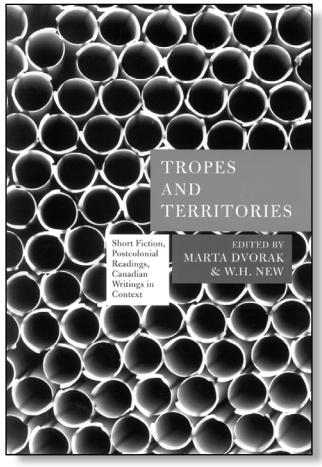

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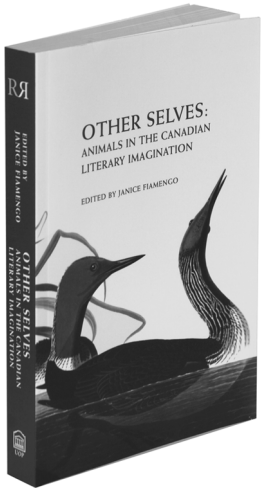

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