

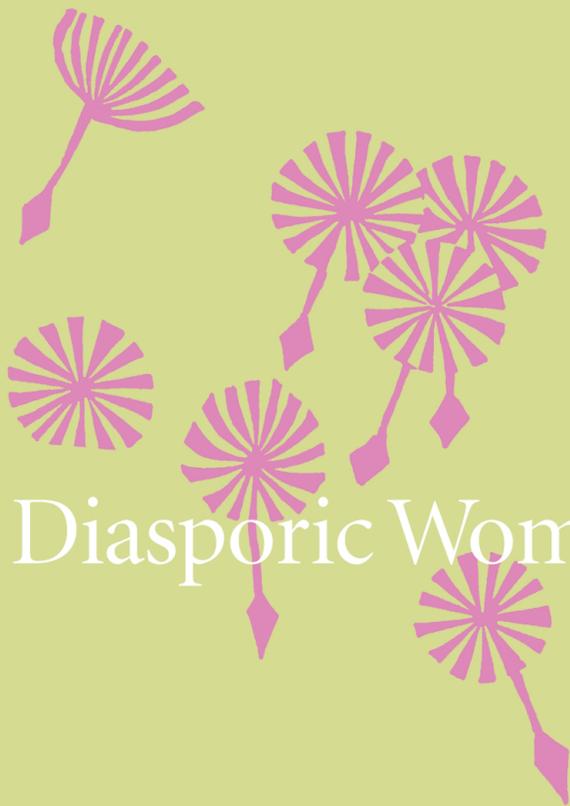
Canadian Literature

A Quarterly of Criticism and Review

Spring 2008

\$19

196



Diasporic Women's Writing

Canadian Literature / Littérature canadienne

A Quarterly of Criticism and Review

Number 196, Spring 2008, Diasporic Women's Writing

Published by The University of British Columbia, Vancouver

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Guest Editorial

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Serial Accommodations: Diasporic Women's Writing 6

Articles

Faye Hammill

Martha Ostenso, Literary History, and the
Scandinavian Diaspora 17

Maria Noëlle Ng

Mapping the Diasporic Self 34

Emily Johansen

“Streets are the dwelling place of the collective”:
Public Space and Cosmopolitan Citizenship in
Dionne Brand's *What We All Long For* 48

Jennifer Bowering Delisle

A Newfoundland Diaspora? Moving through
Ethnicity and Whiteness 64

Shani Mootoo

On Becoming an Indian Starboy 83

Marie Lo

Model Minorities, Models of Resistance: Native Figures in Asian Canadian Literature	96
--	----

Poems

<i>Sonnet L'Abbé</i>	16	<i>Rita Wong</i>	63
<i>Yasmin Ladha</i>	32	<i>Proma Tagore</i>	82
<i>Hiroimi Goto</i>	46	<i>Adebe D.A.</i>	95

Books in Review

Forthcoming book reviews are available at <http://www.canlit.ca>

Authors Reviewed		<i>Anna Pia De Luca</i>	181
<i>Nora Allyn</i>	148	<i>Licia Soares de Souza</i>	175
<i>Bernard Andrès</i>	113	<i>Joël Des Rosiers</i>	132
<i>Tammy Armstrong</i>	148	<i>Jean Désy</i>	143
<i>Anita Rau Badami</i>	114	<i>Lisa Dickson</i>	118
<i>Jim Bartley</i>	164	<i>Brian Doyle</i>	144
<i>Bart Beaty</i>	115	<i>Matt Duggan</i>	144
<i>Yves Beauchemin</i>	117	<i>Susanna Egan</i>	179
<i>Claude Beausoleil</i>	143	<i>Elizabeth Rollins Epperly</i>	145
<i>Mike Bechthold</i>	147	<i>Suzanne Evans</i>	147
<i>Stan Beeler</i>	118	<i>Alessandra Ferraro</i>	158, 181
<i>Paul Bélanger</i>	136	<i>Janice Fiamengo</i>	148
<i>bill bissett</i>	120	<i>Marya Fiamengo</i>	148
<i>Hélène Boissé</i>	121	<i>Sheila Fischman</i>	154
<i>Fred Booker</i>	122	<i>Jean Forest</i>	150
<i>Marilyn Bowering</i>	124	<i>Cécilia W. Francis</i>	152
<i>Nadia Bozak</i>	126	<i>Danielle Fuller</i>	153
<i>Robert Bringham</i>	127	<i>Alain Gagnon</i>	121
<i>Andy Brown</i>	122	<i>Emily Givner</i>	130
<i>Joan Itoh Burk</i>	172	<i>François Gravel</i>	154
<i>Heather Burt</i>	128	<i>Geoffrey Hayes</i>	147
<i>Jennifer Burwell</i>	189	<i>Stephen Henighan</i>	130
<i>Barry Callaghan</i>	130	<i>Charles C. Hill</i>	187
<i>Tim Carlson</i>	162	<i>Annick Hillger</i>	155
<i>Emily Carr</i>	131	<i>Franca Iacovetta</i>	157
<i>France Cayouette</i>	132	<i>Andrew Iarocci</i>	147
<i>Jean Charlebois</i>	134	<i>Raul Sanchez Inglis</i>	174
<i>Herménégilde Chiasson</i>	162	<i>Mark Anthony Jarman</i>	122
<i>Andrée Christensen</i>	135	<i>Marlene Kadar</i>	179
<i>Guy Cloutier</i>	136	<i>Sergio Kokis</i>	182
<i>Trevor Cole</i>	124	<i>Johanne Lamoureux</i>	187
<i>Daniel Coleman</i>	137	<i>Dominique Laporte</i>	158
<i>Stephen Collis</i>	140	<i>Karim Larose</i>	150
<i>Louise Cotnoir</i>	136	<i>Thomas Lavoie</i>	150
<i>Lorna Crozier</i>	141	<i>David Leblanc</i>	160
<i>Jean-Paul Daoust</i>	142	<i>Robert Lecker</i>	161

<i>Stewart Lemoine</i>	162	Of Note	
<i>Svante Lindberg</i>	158	<i>David Biespiel</i>	191
<i>Ian Lockerbie</i>	150	<i>Adam Dickinson</i>	192
<i>Paul Chanel Malenfant</i>	167	<i>Sheila Harrington</i>	192
<i>Jerry Mander</i>	168	<i>Derek Hayes</i>	192
<i>Carol Matas</i>	170	<i>Judi Stevenson</i>	192
<i>Seymour Mayne</i>	148	<i>Barry Lopez</i>	193
<i>Peter Melville</i>	171		
<i>Louis Mercier</i>	150	Reviewers	
<i>François-Michel Durazzo</i>	175	<i>Bert Almon</i>	177
<i>Ines Molinaro</i>	150	<i>Sarah Banting</i>	174
<i>Catherine Morency</i>	143	<i>Andrew Bartlett</i>	128
<i>Ken Norris</i>	177	<i>Gordon Bölling</i>	117
<i>Leigh Oakes</i>	150	<i>Luc Bonenfant</i>	160
<i>Yuzo Ota</i>	172	<i>Nicholas Bradley</i>	155, 161
<i>Morris Panych</i>	174	<i>Susan Butlin</i>	131
<i>R. Patrick</i>	170	<i>Jorge Calderón</i>	158
<i>Pierre Raphaël Pelletier</i>	132	<i>Constance Cartmill</i>	113
<i>Jeanne Perreault</i>	179	<i>Paulomi Chakraborty</i>	114
<i>Luc Perrier</i>	167	<i>Nelson Charest</i>	143
<i>Jeff Pew</i>	120	<i>Joan Crate</i>	141
<i>Anne Claire Poirier</i>	148	<i>Rita De Grandis</i>	175
<i>Marie Hélène Poitras</i>	134	<i>Kit Dobson</i>	126
<i>Jaume Pont</i>	175	<i>David Dorais</i>	134
<i>Steven Price</i>	177	<i>Jane Everett</i>	152
<i>Julie Rak</i>	179	<i>Sherrill Grace</i>	147
<i>Nigel Reading</i>	168	<i>Katia Grubisic</i>	132
<i>C.S. Richardson</i>	128	<i>Kristen Guest</i>	148, 170
<i>Raquel Rivera</i>	170	<i>Mark Harris</i>	189
<i>Kevin Roberts</i>	177	<i>Sandra Hobbs</i>	182
<i>Liliane Rodriguez</i>	150	<i>Thomas Hodd</i>	122
<i>Mercedes Roffé</i>	175	<i>Adele Holoch</i>	154
<i>Nelly Roffé</i>	175	<i>Tricia Hopton</i>	162
<i>Stephen Roxborough</i>	120	<i>Marilyn Iwama</i>	172
<i>Wendy Schissel</i>	157	<i>Karl E. Jirgens</i>	120
<i>Adam Lewis Schroeder</i>	164	<i>Anne L. Kaufman</i>	157
<i>Sholem Shtern</i>	181	<i>J. Kieran Kealy</i>	115
<i>Carmen Strano</i>	182	<i>Jonathan Lamy</i>	121
<i>Charlotte Sturgess</i>	183	<i>Lucie Lequin</i>	190
<i>Ann-Lee Switzer</i>	131	<i>Amanda Lim</i>	140
<i>Victoria Tauli-Corpuz</i>	168	<i>Jeanette Lynes</i>	153
<i>Timothy Taylor</i>	185	<i>Thomas Mainguy</i>	136
<i>Ian M. Thom</i>	187	<i>Brandon McFarlane</i>	185
<i>Russell Thornton</i>	148	<i>Jean-Sébastien Ménard</i>	181
<i>Lise Tremblay</i>	117	<i>Isabelle Miron</i>	167
<i>Monique Tschofen</i>	189	<i>Linda Morra</i>	187
<i>Claude Verreault</i>	150	<i>J. Russell Perkin</i>	130
<i>Yolande Villemaire</i>	190	<i>Markus Poetzsch</i>	171
<i>Linda Warley</i>	179	<i>Rebecca Raglon</i>	127
<i>Gary Wyatt</i>	168	<i>Laurie Ricou</i>	191-93
<i>Pierre Yergeau</i>	135	<i>Wendy Roy</i>	164
<i>Dominique Zalitis</i>	132	<i>Niigonwedom J. Sinclair</i>	168

Reviewers, continued

<i>Cynthia Sugars</i>	137	<i>Nathalie Warren</i>	142
<i>Christa Zeller Thomas</i>	145	<i>Allan Weiss</i>	118
<i>Carolyne Van Der Meer</i>	124	<i>Gillian Whitlock</i>	179
<i>Penny van Toorn</i>	183	<i>Lynn (J.R.) Wytenbroek</i>	144
<i>Cécile B. Vigouroux</i>	150	<i>Kinga Zawada</i>	135

Opinions and Notes

Terri Tomskey

Theorizing the Disparities of Diaspora	194
--	-----

Kim Snowden

Gendered Multiplicities: Women Write Diaspora	198
---	-----

Canadian Literature, a peer-reviewed journal, welcomes original, unpublished submissions of articles, interviews, and other commentaries relating to writers and writing in Canada, and of previously unpublished poems by Canadian writers. The journal does not publish fiction.

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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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GST R108161779

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

Canada

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

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Publications Mail Agreement
NO. 40592543
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SUBSCRIPTIONS: \$50 INDIVIDUAL;
\$89 INSTITUTIONAL, GST INCLUDED.
OUTSIDE CANADA: US \$75 INDIVIDUAL;
US \$114 INSTITUTIONAL.

ISSN 0008-4360

Managing Editor: Donna Chin
Donna.Chin@ubc.ca
Production Staff: Matthew Gruman
Melanie Triemstra
Beth Veitch
Design: George Vaitkunas
Illustrations: George Kuthan
Printing: Hignell Printing Limited Canada
Typefaces: Minion and Univers
Paper: recycled and acid-free

Serial Accommodations

Diasporic Women's Writing

Sneja Gunew

Where once “Where are you coming from?” implied the beginning of inclusion in a community, now the same question is shadowed by another question (“What do we do with them now?”).

—V. Mishra 5

An underlying question animating this special issue is whether or not the term “diaspora writing” retains any useful heuristic properties in relation to literary criticism. Complicated further by a focus on gender, the essays all question whether or not an emphasis on the kind of affiliations and mediations attached to notions of diaspora enable new interpretations of writers in relation to their various embeddings (including national ones). Does the application of “diasporic,” for example, instantly characterize a writer as transgressing national canonical taxonomies? Does it elevate a writer’s cultural stock by acquiring a transnational or transcultural dimension, thus, local but also global?

Not all the writers engage specifically with the shoals and eddies of diaspora criticism. Some, like Jennifer Delisle, do indeed carefully situate their own work within a genealogy of diaspora criticism ranging from William Safran, to Khachig Tölölyan, to the insights of local exponents such as Lily Cho and David Chariandy. While it isn’t really possible to pin down definitive critical elements, one might view diaspora criticism as bringing together the many disparate elements critics have associated with the field (and these do overlap with other fields such as, for example, postcolonial studies) and to use them strategically to open up and interrogate the criteria that help construct national literary histories, something Faye Hammill also explores in relation to Martha Ostenso’s work.

What we can confidently assert is that the condition of anomaly and ambiguity is at the heart of the diaspora experience and is examined in its complex permutations by many cultural texts. According to Stuart Hall, “the diaspora experience . . . is defined, not by essence or purity, but by the recognition of a necessary heterogeneity and diversity: by a conception of ‘identity’ which lives with and through, not despite, difference; by *hybridity*” (401-02). But the universal applicability of this term raises complex questions and calls for a new understanding of what it means to be diasporic in specific places and periods in the world. For instance, is it helpful to speak of diaspora as an already formed body (community or individual) that enters into a relationship with an existing nation-state? As a politically contested term, diaspora is often used in a normative sense to mean dispersal and dislocation, but how does diaspora differ from adjacent terms such as transnational, global, multicultural, and immigrant, and how do these terms enter literary discussions? How do processes of racialization and gendering complicate these issues further? To what extent (and for how long) are writers burdened with conveying diasporic histories or representing diasporic communities? While diaspora often evokes a homeland, how do women writers assert, negotiate, and contest multiple, political ideas of home across time, history, and geography? In what ways do women writers accommodate serial diasporas, often in multiple languages?

Diasporic subjects are often used to represent the dilemma of not being able or permitted to acquire the substance and consequence that are attached to many models of citizenship arising out of the bounded and “pure” characteristics associated with entities such as nation-states. Instead they signal the instabilities of hybridity, métissage, creolization, and “contamination.” While nations may designate such qualities to be troubling ones, diasporan subjects themselves often find this condition to be enabling, one that lifts them above the turmoil associated with myths of nationalism to what one might term a hyper-rationalist realm. And certainly within postcolonial theory W.E.B. DuBois’ notion of “double consciousness” and Edward Said’s of “contrapuntal consciousness” have (at their best) facilitated gimlet-eyed analyses of the spectrum of emotions generated by colonialism or nationalism or, for that matter, religious fundamentalisms. In other words, their dual or multiple perspectives are at odds with bounded and discrete models of thinking and dwelling. Knowing that there is more than one language or more than one prescription for social interaction means that one can more easily be critical of all those entities that speak in universal terms in relation to civilizations

or nations or even family. But much depends on the degree to which one's baggage includes a secure cultural capital when one migrates—dependent on one's class, one's age, etc. Otherwise the diasporic state is too often fraught with those apparently inescapable abjective dimensions catalogued by critics such as Rey Chow (2002). In these formulations the abjective state is always minoritarian, liminal, and restricted to eternal plaintiveness.

The genealogy of diaspora studies has been assembled over the last decade, galvanized by the appearance of the journal *Diaspora* (1991) edited by Khachig Tölölyan. Many date some of the first pronouncements to William Safran who argued (1991 and still argues, 2004) for the defining models of the Jewish, Armenian, and Greek diasporas and maintains that diaspora studies' heuristic value depends on excluding groups he describes as simply minority or those that travel. Such earlier models reinforced a kind of binary between what has been termed homeland and hostland. Robin Cohen attempted to move beyond this binary by constructing taxonomies focused on victim, labor, trade, and colonial diasporas as providing a more complex and realistic structure for identifying diasporic groups and mobilities. But Cohen has been critiqued for surreptitiously reintroducing the reified mechanisms associated with ethnic affiliations (S. Mishra 43-49). More recent models evoke the serial diasporas (movements across borders and within them) of groups and individuals: James Clifford, Vijay Mishra, Sudesh Mishra, R. Radhakrishnan. Questions raised have included whether or not diaspora studies now include all forms of transnational mobility or whether they should be reserved for "rooted" and local groups or individuals, particularly those held together by an identifiable historical trauma. Embedded within these analyses is the question of how temporal concerns (histories) interact with spatial considerations and indeed, whether or not oppression and trauma need to be the defining elements. Avtar Brah, for example, is more concerned with the "homing desire" that animates diasporic consciousness and that she distinguishes from a desire for a specific homeland:

I argue that the concept of diaspora offers a critique of discourses of fixed origins, while taking account of a homing desire which is not the same thing as desire for a "homeland." This distinction is important, not least because not all diasporas sustain an ideology of "return." In examining the subtext of "home" which the concept of diaspora embodies, I analyse the problematic of the "indigene" subject position and its precarious relationship to "nativist" discourses. (180)

As the quotation from Brah indicates, concepts of "home" are at the heart of debates on diaspora and one must question whether there is indeed

always an imperative to return to some putative, nostalgically invested motherland or whether such feelings may indeed be generated by the sense of un-homeliness accompanying even a prolonged residence in the new country? In my own research these neat models fall apart when one is grappling with the affective economies of generational transmission where even third-generation artists and writers are still being designated “migrant” or “ethnic” (Gunew 2004). In some ways this work was easier to do in settler colonies because among those marginalized and rendered homologous with “foreigners” were indigenous groups, thus exposing (as Brah suggests) the contradictions and fault lines within such foundational models. Indigenous groups base their claims on an autochthonous relationship to place—they have always been there and their political strategies are based on designating all other groups as immigrants, settlers, and colonizers.

The term “serial accommodations” of my title¹ attempts to signal the contradictions that lead away from oppositional models. It is certainly not meant to reinforce the binaries of home and away or to naturalize belonging and un-belonging, as though those designated diasporic were somehow being automatically constructed as aspiring to cultural citizenship. More accurately it is a way of suggesting that some writers who are situated or qualified through hyphens and other devices do not choose these devices and that these often reflect the insecurities of those who are generating such terms of engagement.

Diaspora as a generalized image is connected with seeding and dissemination, but I would like to focus on more centrifugal questions: what holds people together in an imagined diaspora? There is also the reminder that diaspora is imagined as much by the nation as those internal to it and in this version spawns those anxieties that quickly turn diasporic individuals and groups into targets. The nation (or other entity) is provoked by whatever glue binds diasporic groups together. Vijay Mishra discusses this “jealousy” concerning the manifestation of other allegiances in terms of a Hegelian and Žižekian “Nation Thing” (14-15), whereas Ghassan Hage (36-43) compares it to the imaginary unconditional love a mother has for her child: both models are fantasy structures, of course. What that formulation also implies is the centrality of gender and whether women and men are perceived to carry differing responsibilities in maintaining cultural links. Women are often constructed as the bearers of tradition, more vehemently so when in transition (Kandiyoti, Yuval-Davis). In very abstract terms there are forces of internal differences here as well, whether these be political or generational, for example, the allegiances and values of those who fled fascism or state

communism (perhaps not so different after all, in retrospect). Psychoanalysis and its structures of mourning and melancholia offer further frameworks of meaning,² as does the burgeoning field of affect theory.³ Certainly psychoanalytically inspired studies suggest that the children of diasporic peoples often inherit disabling guilt and longings from their parents (Rashkin; Cheng). Suffice to say that the diasporic subject exists in a permanent state of misrecognition in the mirror of the social, but simultaneously functions as an enduring symbol for the nation-state because this misrecognition is, in a sense, inevitable. It is another way of formulating the instability that exists at the core of national cultures or any cultures aspiring to homogeneity. Homi Bhabha's well-known concept of mimicry is another version of the ways in which this logic functions. In other words the impulse towards assimilation embodied in mimicry is precisely the mechanism that undoes the claims of (in this instance) colonial authority. In that case, should we not distinguish amongst the functions the diasporic subject performs for the nation, for the putative home culture, and for the so-called diaspora itself? And how does all this influence the ways in which we read texts, for example, do we reinforce the binaries, the reifications, where texts stand in for diasporic subjects who are designated to be at a tangent to a unified culture? Indeed, they can be seen to testify by their supposedly diasporic nature (disparate groups and individuals struggling to get in) to the very existence of a unified culture?

The consequences are both symbolic and material in ways that remind us of Althusser and his concept of ideology: people's imagined relations to their real conditions (38-39). Indeed, the Althusserian idea of interpellation, or hailing, is useful for analyzing these relations.⁴ While it is always slightly dangerous to treat groups as though they were individuals, how the hostland interpellates visitors or guests, for example, the immigrants, refugees, asylum seekers who seek to enter nation-states, is often evaluated as a measure of a culture's self-confidence and even civilization. One needs to point out as well that the ideology of the imagined nation carries material consequences in terms of whose work gets funded and published and who gets taught as part of a national culture. Folded into these concerns are questions concerning who are designated expatriate members of the "home" culture, functioning as a kind of "outreach" for it—a further marker of underlying ideological assumptions (Ghosh).

Adjacent to the slightly problematic notion of Althusserian "hailing into being"⁵ is the Lacanian mechanism of the mirror-stage in which the subject comes into being at the same time as becoming split. While the

misrecognition inherent in the Lacanian mirror-stage is described as occurring at an unconscious level it also leads to speculations concerning the degrees of consciousness involved, particularly when Lacanian emphasis on the unconscious being structured like a language summons up notions of a particular language. A suggestion I would like to make is that interpellation involving a misrecognition (we are not hailed in ways to which we wish to assent) brings into consciousness a self-consciousness or reflexivity. Caught in the baleful and paralyzing glare of the stereotype (social misrecognition) the subject-in-process summons into being a reflexivity that undermines such structures by a number of different tactics. If marginalization (arguing for difference) is invariably constructed as permitting the subject to be subjugated through taking up the position of ethnic abjection, there doesn't appear to be any room left for agency. However, some have argued ethnic abjection can also be a tool for agency (Nava; Nyers).⁶ My emphasis here is to say that the stereotypes of ethnic abjection emanating from the host culture call into being an active set of tactics to undermine and construct alternatives to this abject field.

Vijay Mishra's statement quoted as epigraph emphasizes the sobering context for diaspora studies. Numerous studies, including recent ones organized around multiculturalism and New Labour in the UK (Fortier), have shown that these double questions are never resolved. Those designated "diasporic" or "multicultural" can never display their allegiances to the nation-state sufficiently, adequately, or often enough to resolve the grounds of their differences. And for those diasporic subjects themselves, the wisps of interpellations perceived as emanating from home cultures, or simply other ways of existing, hail into being a "what if" subject. At worst they reinforce archaisms and fundamentalisms and at best help to deterritorialize origins and identities towards bringing into play the kinds of nomadic subjectivities celebrated, for example, in the work of feminist philosopher Rosi Braidotti:

Comparing diasporas raises ethical questions about the methods of laying alongside each other different forms of traumatic dispersal. Faced with a proliferation of such discourses and social practices of nomadism, how can we tell the proactive from the regressive ones? The counter-method starts from the politics of locations . . . This politics of locations is best served by a non-unitary vision of the subject that stresses nomadic complexity and open-endedness . . . far from resulting in moral relativism, non-unitary subject positions engender alternative systems of values and specific forms of accountability. (92-93)

Exploring such new and flexible subjectivities is part of the excitement of diaspora studies and the papers in this issue give numerous examples.

Faye Hammill's essay on Martha Ostenso clearly reveals that diasporic writers do not necessarily fit easily into national boundaries. As someone who moved between Canada and the US as well as her native Scandinavia, Ostenso remains an ambiguous figure who demands reassessment within Canadian and other literary histories. Ostenso raises further questions in relation to the ways in which she genders and racializes her characters, according to Hammill, and challenges as well notions of genre in the sense that her work is often dismissed as too popular and formulaic. Ostenso's work also leads to questions concerning the nature and construction of nationalistic "whiteness" in Canadian fiction. Drawing on Daniel Coleman's work Hammill links Ostenso to the development of models of "white civility" in the nationalist project.

Jennifer Bowering Delisle uses the memoirs of Helen Buss/Margaret Clarke to construct a notion of a Newfoundland diaspora as a way of challenging the assumption that diaspora writings are always situated in relation to national canons. Basing her claim on the repeated characteristics within diaspora criticism that diasporic groups cohere around trauma and "coercive displacement," Bowering finds these elements in Buss/Clarke and suggests that her text articulates recurrent Newfoundland expressions of feeling discriminated against and even colonized by the rest of Canada. These regional frustrations have, in Delisle's opinion, as much of a claim on diaspora studies as other contenders. Delisle concludes her analysis by endorsing Ien Ang's concept of "postmodern ethnicity" which contends that all identities are provisional and partial and deflect an automatic coupling to ancestry or place. More controversially, she also suggests that considerations of a Newfoundland diaspora may help disaggregate the category of "whiteness."

Marie Lo's essay also takes up concerns with "whiteness" through examining the mechanisms adhering to the "model minority" comparison which is usually invoked in conjunction with Asian American and Asian Canadian subjects. Lo analyzes Joy Kogawa's *Itsuka* and SKY Lee's *Disappearing Moon Cafe* to make the case for needing to link anti-racism struggles to Indigenous decolonization battles. Through the delineation of family relations she traces in both texts, she cautions Asian Canadian writers against reproducing the traditional colonial tropes of a "Native-white binary" identified by Canadianists such as Terry Goldie and Margery Fee. Such a move would also help differentiate Asian Canadian critical concerns so that they are not collapsed into Asian American ones.

Maria Ng's memoirs of being born in Macau and raised in Hong Kong paradoxically credits her colonial education by American nuns as helping to liberate her from the somewhat stifling constraints of Confucian familial values for a female Chinese subject. She also attributes to her Western education the ability to see people and situations more objectively but confesses this facility to be disconcertingly at odds with the demands of memoir writing for the display of an emotional life. Ng also reminds readers, contrary to prevailing opinions, class could sometimes trump race and that material resources could effectively shield one from colonial racism. She concludes with a model of "serial non-belonging" that she feels to be a more generative model for contemporary mobile subjects than attempting to identify with one's roots.

Shani Mootoo's subversive odysseys through the fractured subject positions of Irish-Trinidadian-Canadian-Queer artist also revels in a transnationalism "bred in the marrow." While she battles the demands made on her by her Brahmin grandmother to be a good Indian girl, impositions which prevented her from immersing herself in the calypso delights of black Trinidadian traditions, she ruefully acknowledges her own seduction by Bollywood movies in terms of succumbing to their evocation of the models of masculinity that eventually structure her own "female masculinity."

Finally, in her discussion of Dionne Brand's novel *What We All Long For*, Emily Johansen posits the city rather than the nation as diasporic space. Her analysis is based on new debates in psychogeography arising out of the work of Saskia Sassen on global cities as well as Walter Benjamin's theories of the flâneur. Johansen distinguishes sharply between generations and locates hope for changing racialized power relations in the second rather than the first generation. Tracing Nancy Fraser's notion of a "subaltern counterpublic" she analyzes Brand's characters in terms of axes of resistance that aspire to a condition of cosmopolitan citizenship.

NOTES

- 1 The title was used for a seminar convened by the Centre for Women's and Gender Studies in March 2007. My thanks to Terri Tomsky, Kim Snowden, and Medha Samarasinghe for helping to organize this event. Thanks as well to Kim and Terri for helping expose the complications of the topic in their contributions to Notes and Opinions in this issue.
- 2 Vijay Mishra explores diaspora in these terms (Mishra 7-10).
- 3 Affect theory could be described as an attempt to analyze and theorize the complex field of emotions and the ways in which they shuttle between private and public realms, between

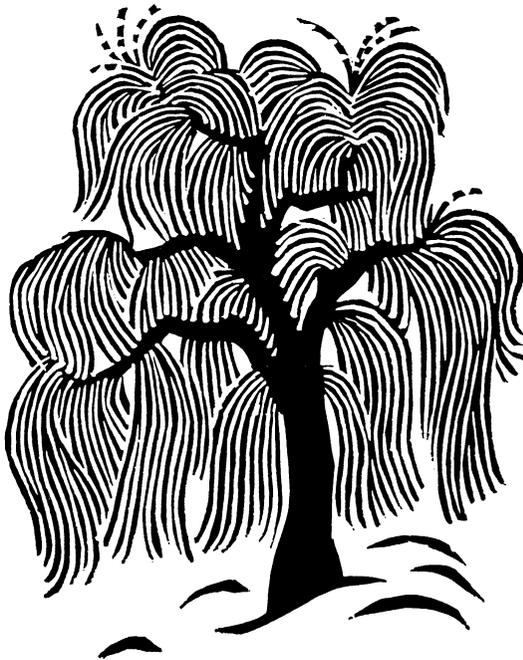
biology and abstract philosophical categories. See, for example, Ahmed, Brennan, Clough, Massumi.

- 4 The “hailing” of a subject is undertaken by an authoritative figure supported by institutional power, for example, a policeman or someone carrying out an official task such as a judge, a doctor, or a teacher (Althusser 48ff.).
- 5 Many critics have noted the existential contradiction in Althusser’s concept in the sense that he argues that this first hailing establishes the subject, in other words, something must already be in place to respond to this hailing and where does this something come from? It might make more sense to imagine the subject as a subject-in-process, to use Julia Kristeva’s term (103-05).
- 6 This is a case I argued in relation to critiquing Rey Chow’s influential notion of ethnic abjection (Gunew 2006).

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Objective

The conditions must be controlled. In order to measure the degree of sadness. Tears were measured in millilitres per second. The subject reported nothing. The left eye produced three tears more than the right eye in the first ten minutes, then tears were produced irregularly but in equal proportion over the next sixteen hours. At hour eleven the subject moved from her seated position onto the laboratory floor and lay her head down, such that the left eye's tears fell across the bridge of the nose into the right and the tears from the right eye mixed with those from the left and became indistinguishable. The stable level of the subject's sadness was evidenced by a continuous stream of water from the right eye. At hour twelve the subject drew her legs up near her chest and folded her arms around her knees. This was an unanticipated expression or perhaps result of the sadness. The curvature of the spine in this case may be correlated to the degree of sadness but such measurements were outside the parameters of this investigation. Anecdotally the technician asked the subject to report on the relationship of the curvature of her spine to the degree of sadness. The subject reported nothing.

Martha Ostenso, Literary History, and the Scandinavian Diaspora

Literary history . . . is governed by profound metanarrative designs. It has a didactic purpose that is aimed at constructing an idea of a nation, and it does so by giving it a certain form in both time and space. It requires clarity of origin and precise delimitation. As history, it constructs a past by selecting texts (canonization) and commemorating events so that the nation may be imaginatively shaped . . . into a kind of central protagonist that is born, grows, and reaches a certain maturity. (10)

—E. D. Blodgett, *Five-Part Invention: A History of Literary History in Canada*

Migrant and diasporic writers pose particular challenges to the narratives of nation constructed in literary histories. Their critical reputations often reveal the way that historians of literature police the borders of their imagined nations, rejecting certain writers on the basis of ethnic origin or place of residence, and even ignoring particular texts because of where they are set. The exclusionary practices of literary history, and the ability of migrant writers to destabilize constructs of nation and also region, are explored in this article through a case study of Martha Ostenso, a Norwegian-born writer who lived at different times in both Canada and the US. Her first novel, *Wild Geese* (1925), was remarkably successful and won a high-profile American prize.¹ According to the standard narrative of her career presented in Canadian literary histories, Ostenso produced an early classic of Canadian prairie literature, and then abandoned Canada for the States, where she published a succession of inferior books with US settings. Historians of American literature, on the other hand, usually identify Ostenso as a US writer, ignoring her Canadian connection and inscribing

her into narratives of immigrant assimilation or regional literary development. Neither American nor Canadian critics pay much attention to Ostenso's use of Scandinavian material, perhaps because the Scandinavian diaspora disrupts nationalist literary histories by crossing political and cultural boundaries between the US and Canada.

In fact, Ostenso's sixteen novels cannot be easily categorized according to whether they are set above or below the forty-ninth parallel. The assumption of most critics that *Wild Geese* is about a Manitoban community is fair, but is based principally on biographical evidence, since the text itself contains no exact markers of place.² Another early novel, *The Young May Moon* (1929), has also been located in Manitoba by critics though, again, its geography is vague. On the other hand, both *Prologue to Love* (1932) and *The White Reef* (1934) are clearly set in British Columbia, but have been ignored by both American and Canadian literary historians, since both groups identify Ostenso wholly with the prairies. Indeed, very few critics show any awareness that Ostenso set books other than *Wild Geese* in Canada, while some misidentify the ones which are set there.³

One aim of this article is to initiate critical recuperation of some of Ostenso's neglected novels. The discussion focuses on the three which are set (or probably set) in Canada, since these are most relevant to the context of Canadian literary history, but it also seeks to lay the foundations for broader re-reading of the whole oeuvre. Rather than simply arguing that *The Young May Moon*, *The White Reef*, and *Prologue To Love* should be admitted to the Canadian canon along with *Wild Geese*, I would like to suggest that they—and indeed all the Ostenso novels—are best studied in the context of border crossing and migration. Given the circumstances of her career and the broad range of her fictional settings (from New York to Vancouver Island), it becomes futile to argue about whether Martha Ostenso is a Canadian, American, or Norwegian writer, or which region she belongs to. Clearly, she can only be understood in terms of hybridity or transculture.⁴ Her physical and imaginative movements between the US and Canada, between the Midwest and the West Coast, and between Scandinavia and North America inform most of her writing. Also, the texts engage in some detail with immigration, ethnic diversity, and diasporas, problematising traditional categories of nation and race. My discussion, then, revises accepted views of Ostenso's reputation by concentrating on her multiple ethnic, national and regional identification, and moves outward to comment on the strategies of literary history—particularly Canadian literary history—in relation to diasporic writers.

Biographical details are a necessary part of this discussion. Martha Ostenso was born near Bergen in 1900, and her family emigrated to Winnipeg in 1902. Two years later, they moved to the US, living in various towns in the Dakotas and Minnesota, before returning to Canada in 1915. Ostenso studied and taught in Manitoba until her early twenties, and following a period of further study in New York, she returned to Winnipeg to draft *Wild Geese*, which focuses on a remote, ethnically mixed farming settlement. After 1924, she lived entirely in the US with her partner, Douglas Durkin, eventually acquiring American citizenship in 1931. Most of the couple's homes were in Minnesota, but they had a house in Hollywood as well. Ostenso travelled frequently, including three return trips to Norway.

Ostenso's collaboration with Durkin, a Canadian writer of English ancestry but resident for many years in the US, further complicates the attempt to locate the novels in relation to a national canon. Archival sources suggest that the books were generally drafted by Ostenso, often using a plot supplied by Durkin, who then edited the manuscript.⁵ It is unclear how far Durkin contributed to *Wild Geese*, though by 1958, as Stan Atherton notes, both authors were prepared to sign a legal document about copyright which contains the clause: "all of the literary works of Martha Ostenso commencing with the publication of *Wild Geese* in 1925 were the results of the combined efforts of Douglas Leader Durkin and Martha Ostenso" (*Martha Ostenso*, 35). Just as the couple's geographical displacements and changes of citizenship challenge models of nationality and citizenship, so their collaboration challenges the boundaries of the authorial self. While bearing this in mind, I will nevertheless refer to the author of the novels as "Ostenso" because it is the reputation of the literary entity called Martha Ostenso, as named on the book covers, that I am interested in.

Whether or not Ostenso can be counted in that vexed category of "Canadian writers," the fact remains that literary historians have underestimated the extent of her engagement with Canada's landscapes and culture by ignoring her later books. At the same time, she cannot be unambiguously identified with a Canadian tradition, since her writing career transgresses national boundaries in various ways. At certain periods, this has damaged her reputation: literary histories written in the mid twentieth century, when the English-derived Tory tradition still had considerable purchase in Canada, usually omit Ostenso entirely. For instance, Desmond Pacey's *Creative Writing in Canada* (1952) delineates a national theme centring on resistance to American modernity and commercialism, and therefore

privileges conservative writers such as Thomas Chandler Haliburton, Mazo de la Roche, and Stephen Leacock. Ostenso's work was not thought amenable to the mid century nation-building project of Canadian literary history, since she almost erases the international border and inscribes a geography of Minnesota which is largely indistinguishable from her fictioned landscape of Manitoba.

In subsequent decades, a new emphasis on regionalism led to the unearthing and celebration of a prairie realist tradition, and this altered critical evaluations of Ostenso, or at least of *Wild Geese*. By 1965, Pacey had adjusted his ideas, and wrote in *The Literary History of Canada*: "*Wild Geese* . . . is the single most consistent piece of western realism to appear before the novels of Frederick Philip Grove, and has a niche of its own in . . . our literary development" ("Fiction" 678). In the 1983 *Oxford Companion to Canadian Literature*, Joy Kuropatwa comments: "While *Wild Geese* has elements of romanticism, it represents a major development in the Canadian movement towards realism" (626). Both these influential encyclopedias co-opt the novel into a narrative of Canadian literary development which follows a rising plot from romance to the supposedly more mature form of realism, and numerous critics have followed this lead.⁶ It is, though, equally possible to argue that romance and gothic predominate in the text. Margot Northey, in *The Haunted Wilderness* (1976), calls *Wild Geese* "the nearest twentieth-century counterpart to *Wacousta*" (63), while Daniel S. Lenoski focuses on its "basic mythic impulses and patterns" (284), and Brian Johnson characterizes it as "an uncanny love story" (39). None of these critics questions the Canadianness of the text. Instead of using *Wild Geese* to demonstrate the Canadian progression towards realism, they appropriate it for a different critical project: the elaboration of a Canadian mythology based on man's response to the terrifying power of nature. Both approaches may be aligned with cultural nationalism, since they present the Canadian literary canon in terms of improvement and consolidation.

Very different readings emerge when *Wild Geese* is incorporated into American narratives of literary maturation. Mary Dearborn, in a 1986 discussion of immigrant American women's writing, argues that the "overwhelming message" of *Wild Geese* is "that American identity for the daughters of immigrants is contingent on defiance of foreign fathers and ancestral identity" (74). This is because the protagonist, Judith Gare, rebels violently against her father, who Dearborn assumes is a Norwegian (though the Gares' ethnicity is left indeterminate in the text).⁷ It would, however, be

possible to argue, conversely, that Judith embraces her Old World heritage by marrying Sven, who is clearly identified as Norwegian, and bearing his child. Dearborn ignores this potential reading because she is using *Wild Geese* to illustrate her theory that the story of Pocahontas' acquisition of an American identity to replace her ethnically marked one is obsessively reiterated in the national literature. Janet Casey, on the other hand, in her forthcoming book *A New Heartland: Women, Modernity, and the Agrarian Ideal in America*, offers a very persuasive reading of Ostenson in the context of her American peers. While acknowledging the difficulty of categorising *Wild Geese* in terms of literary mode or national tradition, Casey productively compares it with other bestselling farm novels by women: Edna Ferber's *So Big* (1924), Elizabeth Madox Roberts' *The Time of Man* (1926), and Gladys Hasty Carroll's *As the Earth Turns* (1933). These texts are set in a variety of locales, and Casey argues that their success with readers across America reveals that the broad appeal of rurality transcended regionalist distinctions. Only one critic reads Ostenson in relation to a transnational group of North American women authors: Alexandra Collins classes her with Edith Wharton, Ellen Glasgow, and Ethel Wilson, suggesting that Wilson inherits from Ostenson a sense of the land "as the source of personal renewal" on the one hand, and "as the mysterious, predatory force which pervades human actions" on the other (68-69).

Nearly all published discussions of Ostenson are limited to *Wild Geese*. Pacey writes: "Martha Ostenson's later novels . . . were almost all set in the northern United States, and were more or less unsuccessful attempts to repeat her own achievement in *Wild Geese* ("Fiction" 678). The balance of this sentence equates the American settings of the later novels with their supposedly "unsuccessful" nature, and this view has hardened into a critical commonplace. Kuropatwa is equally dismissive: after mentioning Ostenson's relocation to the US, she remarks: "Besides *Wild Geese*, Ostenson published over a dozen volumes of fiction [and] a collection of poetry." Neither critic even counts up the exact number of novels Ostenson wrote, or observes that any of them concerned Canada. These examples are indicative of the general tendency of Canadian literary histories to present *Wild Geese* as an isolated masterpiece, the brilliant production of a precocious girl who subsequently became corrupted by the lure of American markets.⁸ But in fact, when the Ostenson novels are considered as a group, any simple demarcation between serious fiction and "potboilers" becomes untenable. These books belong to the troublesome realm of the middlebrow; they depend—to a greater or

lesser extent—on the conventional structures of popular fiction, yet they also diverge from such models in interesting ways, thereby disrupting cultural hierarchies.

The few critics who have read the later novels agree that *The White Reef* and *The Young May Moon* are two of Ostenso's best books, whereas the other "Canadian" novel, *Prologue to Love*, is a little formulaic and overstrained, though still of some interest.⁹ In all these texts, race is a fluid category, and ethnic identities can—to some extent—be chosen and negotiated. Nevertheless, a logic of assimilation determines the larger movement of the plots; the same is true of *Wild Geese*, and this aspect of Ostenso's fiction has enabled critics to align her writing with a normative WASP perspective, ignoring her often troubling explorations of identity and difference. The following brief account of *Prologue to Love*, *The White Reef*, and *The Young May Moon* reflects on their complex inscriptions of ethnicity, nationality, and place, and tests the possibilities of reading them in relation to Canadian and Scandinavian literary and historical contexts.

The White Reef and *Prologue to Love* are never included in surveys of BC writing, and this further demonstrates that the artificial structures of literary history can be maintained only by strategic exclusions. Ostenso is generally categorized as a pioneer of prairie realism, and her knowledge of British Columbia derived only from visits and not from residence there. Therefore, it seems that literary historians cannot accept her as an author of authentic West Coast fiction. Yet in fact, these two novels do offer a sustained engagement with the social and physical landscapes of western Canada.¹⁰ *Prologue to Love* concerns a girl named Autumn, who returns from Europe to her home in the Okanagan Valley and falls in love with the son of her dead mother's lover. Although predictable in its plot, it offers a valuable portrait of a prosperous BC ranching community. The many descriptive passages are rather saturated with metaphor, but they do successfully render a localized landscape, which, in some chapters, is made recognizable not only by actual place names (Kelowna, Kamloops, Lake Okanagan) but also by the careful identification of trees, flowers, breeds of farm animal, and so on. Other scenes take on a more mythical resonance:

On the slopes that streamed into the valley like smooth reddish cascades in the low sun, more than seven thousand head of sheep moved in bands, twelve hundred to a band. At dawn the herders had started them from home on the trek up the mountains to the very margins of the eternal snows, in the relentless, lonely quest for grass. (82)

The sight of the herd fills Autumn with “a strange, nameless nostalgia, a yearning of racial memory” (82), and this is one among several intensely visual scenes which are used in the service of the novel’s preoccupation with themes of class, race, and empire. Autumn’s “inscrutable awareness of remote ages when primitive man had driven his flocks upward into sweet hills” (82) relates to her desire for an uncorrupted man who is in tune with the natural world and traditional ways of life. Immediately following this scene, she rides in search of Bruce Landor, a neighbouring rancher who is hard-working, physically strong, and “purposeful,” though also sensitive to the beauties of the local landscape (46). Bruce, whose very name links him with land ownership, corresponds to the Canadian nationalist ideal. In his innovative study *White Civility* (2006), Daniel Coleman argues that in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, literature—especially popular fiction—celebrated a particular kind of national type:

What has come to be called “the Northern myth” was central to this figuration of Canada as a testing and improving ground for effete European manhood. According to this myth, the rigours of life in a stern, unaccommodating climate demanded strength of body, character, and mind while it winnowed away laziness, overindulgence, and false social niceties. (24)

Bruce’s rival for Autumn is the foppish, cocktail-drinking, “impeccably tailored” (38) Florian Parr, who has been educated in England and is associated with a decadent, excessive European modernity. Autumn’s inevitable choice of Bruce over Florian implies the victory of the Canadian type over the degenerate European.

The White Reef is considerably more sophisticated than *Prologue to Love*. It is about an unmarried mother who is rejected by her lover and by her self-consciously respectable community, and subsequently behaves with proud resentment. This novel, too, is explicitly marked as Canadian: the setting for the main action is a fishing village on Vancouver Island. Though a maritime environment was not Ostenson’s habitual milieu, it is evoked with some success. The coastal landscape is often described in a highly romantic mode, but at certain points, there are more precise and localized accounts of vegetation, landforms, and marine life.

While *Prologue to Love* concentrates on Canadians of British descent, *The White Reef* represents a more diverse community, including Native Canadians, immigrants of Chinese, Scandinavian, English, and Irish origin, and even some supposed Spanish ghosts. The Chinese and Native characters are regarded with hostility by the more conventional inhabitants

of Heartbreak Cove, who also seek to exclude particular people from their society by associating them with racial otherness. A mentally disturbed character is treated in this way: "They said Ethan Ashe was half Indian, from the north end of the island, but nobody really knew" (6). But the novel's heroine, Nona Darnell, declares: "I think there's something grand about Ethan," explaining: "Whether he's crazy or not, he clings to a hope, and that's something!" (72). Nona, with her "deep and impious strain" (57) and unconventional behaviour, is perceived by her neighbours as a threat to the moral consensus of their community, an anxiety they express in racialized terms: "If she felt like it she'd marry six Chinee belly-cutters and keep 'em—right here in the Cove" (5). The narrator, however, firmly aligns Nona with admirable Scandinavian values; she and her brother Jorgen are half-Irish and half-Norwegian, and her closest friend is the Norwegian Ivar Hansen. These three are the most generous and courageous characters in the book, and several of their Scandinavian neighbours are also sympathetic, and do not condemn Nona for her extramarital pregnancy. She gradually redeems herself in the eyes of the community through her devoted performance of female nurturing roles in relation to her father, brother, and son.

The Young May Moon is set in a prairie town called Amaranth, and while it is not clearly situated in the US or Canada, internal and archival evidence does, on balance, suggest a southern Manitoba location.¹¹ As Atherton suggests, it might be grouped with the texts set in the northern US, under the heading "border novels" (*Martha Ostenso*, 31). Novels such as *The Mandrake Root* (1938) and *O River, Remember* (1943), explore the diasporic Scandinavian settlement, which itself crosses the boundary between Manitoba and Minnesota, and *The Young May Moon* also has Scandinavian resonances. The narrator notes that the "first pioneers" in Amaranth were "Germans and Scandinavians" (15), but as in *Wild Geese*, the ethnic origins of the minor characters are clearly identified, while those of the protagonists are occluded. Judith in *Wild Geese* is probably partly Norwegian, but this is never explicitly stated, and the ethnicities of Marcia Vorse and Paul Brule in *The Young May Moon* are similarly unfixed. This permits all three to explore and test different allegiances and identities.

Marcia is repeatedly identified with non-charter group immigrants. She passionately loves her husband, Rolf Gunther, who is evidently of German descent, but after his death, she becomes increasingly aligned with Scandinavians. The name Vorse contains a suggestion of "Norse," and the text explicitly links her with Norse mythology:

Already the inhabitants in the flats looked at her askance and with an expression of almost superstitious mistrust in their eyes when she came down from the hillside, the wind whipping her skirt smooth against her limbs, slashing her black hair into wild locks about her cheeks, and blowing at the boy she led as though he had been a fairy child. The eyes followed her with wonderment and doubt all the way to the door of Karl Stormo, the Norwegian truck farmer, whose daughter Haldis was looked upon with curiosity because it was she who cared for Marcia Gunther's boy on days when Marcia went into the town to work. Old Jens Stormo, Karl's aged father, who knew things others did not know, out of the mists of his Norse lore, had said that the woman on the hill was a Valkyrie and that her rare singing on nights of rain or very clear starlight was an omen that bore hearing to. (153)

Marcia's remote hilltop house emblemizes her socially marginal position as well as her moral superiority to most of her neighbours. Although her black hair suggests that she is not Scandinavian (or at least, not wholly),¹² she is nevertheless allied with the Norwegian characters, sharing their strength and generosity as well as their difference from the rest of the community.

Marcia's untamed quality is rendered in racialized terms. Hearing of a group of Romanies camping near the town, she reflects on the "magic" in the word "Gypsies" (212), and goes to watch them covertly:

Their women moved facilely about in the tattered, eternal carnival of their brilliant skirts; their brown, frowsy children played on the ground, belly down. Their horses stood, meek and thin, like ghosts of old trees, with heads bent and backs sagging. And the dark boy with the red bandanna kerchief about his neck played on the violin.

She did not know how long she crouched there, flat against the rock . . . With all the life of her being she wanted the dark youth and his sullen, beautiful mouth. (213-14)

But her eroticized longing for freedom is only momentary. It is a fantasy of identification with an exotic other, almost a fantasy of reversion to a belly-down, sensual race. It passes by as quickly as the gypsies themselves, leaving Marcia with the recognition that her future is really in Amaranth, and in a new marriage, in alignment not with dark gypsies but with pale Nordics. Despite their previous mutual hostility, she has fallen in love with Paul, the local doctor. Paul's status as a social outsider is, once again, imaged through associations with foreignness: "His voice . . . was dark with mystery. It had been mellowed in foreign places where Paul Brule had striven to mould his accents to fit a dozen alien tongues. Marcia liked it best when he talked of strange cities" (31). Paul and Marcia first begin to move towards one another, and to be integrated into the society of Amaranth, when they work together to save the life of a dangerously ill neighbour. They transform the

community, to some extent, with their qualities of tolerance, compassion, and energy. More importantly, they are themselves transformed, learning to temper their wilder impulses, accommodate themselves to communal norms, and engage with others. Finally, both Marcia and Paul overcome their deathly absorption in lost love affairs; the theme, as in *The White Reef*, is one of escape from obsession with the past.

The history of Scandinavian immigration is an important context to novels such as *The Young May Moon*, *Wild Geese*, and *The White Reef*.¹³ Almost three million Scandinavians emigrated to North America between 1830 and 1930, settling mainly in the prairies. The 1858 Fraser River gold rush, together with the extension of the Canadian Pacific Railway, drew some of these immigrants further west. They came lower in the social hierarchy than English- or Scottish-descended settlers, but as Protestants, were preferred over southern and eastern Europeans, who were mainly Catholic. Anti-Catholic nationalism was an important strand in the North American nativist movements around the turn of the century, and the American Protective Association, which Scandinavians in Minnesota joined in large numbers, was soon extended into Canada. In 1916, Madison Grant, an important American nativist thinker, published *The Passing of the Great Race*, which divided Europeans into three so-called “races”: the Alpines, whom he described as a breed of peasants, the Mediterraneans, who at least showed artistic tendencies, and the Nordic, whom he called “the white man par excellence” (qtd in Higham 156). Grant argued that Mendel’s laws suggested that these three races could not successfully blend, and that the immigration of Mediterraneans and Alpines, and especially Jews, should be discouraged, in order to keep America’s Nordic stock pure. (Grant used “Nordic” in an inclusive sense to mean those originating in Britain and Ireland, the Netherlands, and Scandinavia.) This kind of thinking led to the “Nordic Victory,” that is, the 1924 US immigration quota law favouring northern Europeans.¹⁴

Many literary texts reproduced or explored notions of racial types. In some North American fictions, especially those by immigrant writers, the various Scandinavian nations are distinguished as separate types, but more often, they are combined in undifferentiated images of fairness, vigour, healthiness, and cleanliness, together with independence and integrity, culture and literacy, high temper, and an uncompromising nature. These supposed ethnic traits fed directly into Canadian eugenicist thinking in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Eugenicists traced a common

ancestry for English and French Canadians to their Norse antecedents, theorising that the passions for liberty and justice, together with high intelligence, were essentially Nordic, and therefore already present in Canadians' inheritance (see Coleman 148). This logic is worked out in several of Ostenson's texts. The values and characteristics associated with a Scandinavian heritage are celebrated, and many of her main characters embody them, and in some cases bear affinities with Norse mythological types.¹⁵ Yet it is not always the actual Scandinavian characters who possess these traits; rather, they are assigned to white characters of various ethnicities who can be identified with a nationalist Canadian ideal.

Coleman points out that expansion-era nationalist optimism was inclusive in that immigrants of various ethnicities were encouraged to aspire to become A1 Canadians, but it was culturally racist in that it required assimilation to white, often British-derived norms. He discusses Nellie McClung's *Painted Fires* (1925), which concerns a Finnish immigrant to Canada, Helmi Milander, who is continually thwarted in her attempts to find work, accommodation, and friends by Anglocentric, patriarchal power structures. The novel laments this treatment, but also shows that "the non-English immigrant can, by dint of hard work and conversion to Protestant values, overcome this adversity to become the ideal empire-making, future-oriented, western Canadian" (Coleman 147). Ostenson likewise requires her Scandinavian characters, admirable though they are, to adjust to Anglocentric ideals of civility. Judith in *Wild Geese* gradually brings her violent, passionate nature under control, and becomes feminized, finishing up as the embodiment of healthy, contented maternity while retaining a strength of character which associates her with the imperial mother figure.¹⁶ Nona in *The White Reef* similarly overcomes the hatred, anger, and shame which she has cherished for six years because of her abandonment by Quentin, the father of her child. She eventually realizes that her refusal to forgive is destroying them both and that, since they are still in love, it is right that they should marry. A comparable pattern is discernible in *The Young May Moon*: while Marcia is probably not Scandinavian, she is identified with Norwegians, and she shares the passionate, defiant attitudes of Nona and Judith. She, too, adjusts herself to dominant social values, resists her desire to escape (symbolized by the gypsies), and eventually remarries.

Ostenson's privileging of "white civility" has doubtless contributed to the gradual canonization of her work (or at least, of one of her books) in Canada. She has found greater acceptance than many writers from visible

minorities or more recently established diasporic communities. Yet in order to incorporate her work into nationalist myths of pioneering and settlement which are largely predicated on whiteness or, more precisely, Britishness, critics have downplayed Ostenso's subtle explorations of race, ethnicity, culture, and inheritance,¹⁷ instead identifying generalized themes of tyranny, isolation, and male-female conflict as her major preoccupations. Most critics also seek to inscribe *Wild Geese* into a pioneer tradition by concentrating on its man-versus-nature tropes and imaginative engagement with landscape,¹⁸ yet very few attend to the implications of its setting in a Scandinavian immigrant community.¹⁹

To date, Ostenso has been co-opted into nationalist narratives of Canadian, and occasionally American, literary history, but on the basis of an extremely selective reading of her work. I think that her oeuvre needs to be read as a whole, and in relation to several contexts, including western Canadian literature, American rural writing, and Norwegian and Icelandic mythology. In particular, the Ostenso novels should be compared with other North American writing about Scandinavian families. A literary context for Ostenso's cross-border writing about Scandinavian migrants might be provided, for example, by Willa Cather's *O Pioneers!* (1913), which concerns a Swedish family in Nebraska, or *The Song of the Lark* (1915), about a Scandinavian American opera singer; Sinclair Lewis' *The Trail of the Hawk* (1915), about second generation Norwegians in Minnesota; Laura Goodman Salverson's *The Viking Heart* (1923), a narrative of Icelandic settlement in Manitoba, or her autobiography, *Confessions of an Immigrant's Daughter* (1939); Nellie McClung's *Painted Fires* (1925); Frederick Philip Grove's *Settlers of the Marsh* (1925), which focuses on Swedish prairie settlers;²⁰ and Ole Rølvaag's *Giants in the Earth* (1927), about Norwegian immigrants in Minnesota. Comparisons with such a group, including writers of American and Canadian citizenship, and Scandinavian, non-Scandinavian, and even (in the case of Grove) pretended Scandinavian origin, would enable a more nuanced understanding of Ostenso's place as a migrant writer of multiple cultural affiliations.

NOTES

I would like to thank Heather Milne for invaluable comments on an earlier draft, and Janet Galligani Casey for helpful discussions of Ostenso and for sharing her unpublished work.

- 1 It was a contest for the best American first novel, sponsored by *The Pictorial Review*; Dodd, Mead, and Company; and Famous Players-Lasky. Ostenso beat 1,389 competitors to win \$13,500, an unprecedentedly large sum for a literary prize. On the prize, and its effect on Ostenso's reputation, see Hammill.

- 2 Arnason comments that Ostenson “did teach in a farm community near the narrows on Lake Winnipeg. . . . Residents of the area can still identify the farm and can name the characters on whom the novel is supposedly based” (Afterword, 303). Some textual details, such as the prevalence of flax and the style of fishing (with a pole and net), suggest Canada rather than the US; also the character of Malcolm has a Scots Cree heritage which is more common in Manitoba than Minnesota. There is, however, no direct reference to Canada. Keahey suggests this might be due to Ostenson’s interest in the American prize: “[A]n explicit rural Manitoba setting may have been regarded as too ‘regional,’ in the ‘merely local’ sense, for Ostenson’s ‘international’ aspirations” (15).
- 3 This is understandable, given the ambiguity of some of the settings, but certain critics do read carelessly. Hesse, for example, asserts that two of Ostenson’s later novels, *The Dark Dawn* and *Prologue to Love*, drew on her Canadian background (47). In fact, in *The Dark Dawn*, one character travels northwards to North Dakota, and another has “whimsically gone up to Winnipeg, in Manitoba” (240) to study.
- 4 The term “transculture,” coined by Fernando Ortiz, a scholar of Afro-Cuban culture, is often used in Canadian literary theory as an umbrella term for First Nations writing, migrant writing, and *métissage* texts. Transcultural writers draw on at least two cultures, often focusing on mediation and exchange rather than resistance.
- 5 See Arnason, Afterword, 305; “Development,” 132; Atherton, *Martha Ostenson*, 3.
- 6 Arnason (Afterword; “Development”), Harrison and Thomas, among others, emphasize the realism of *Wild Geese*, though they do acknowledge elements of romance.
- 7 MacFadden and Lawrence both argue that the Gares are probably Norwegian. They cite fairly convincing evidence relating to the narrator’s mythological references and the Gares’ domestic customs, as well as the likely origins of their name, but other critics have read the Gares as English (see, for example, Harrison 101). Judith’s mother, Amelia, was brought up a Catholic, which makes it unlikely that she, at least, is Scandinavian.
- 8 Compare Mount’s argument about expatriate Canadian writers living in the US during the 1880s and 1890s, who were “celebrated at home when they were needed, dismissed as not Canadian enough when they were not, and selectively repatriated and reinvented after their deaths as contributors, whether as founders or footnotes, to a discretely Canadian literary tradition” (253-54).
- 9 See Atherton, “Ostenson Revisited”; Atherton, *Martha Ostenson*, 14; Thomas.
- 10 An interesting comparison for these texts would be Frances Herring’s BC books, such as *Canadian Camp Life* (1900). Combining fiction with history and travel narrative, Herring’s work “provides insight into early British Columbian culture, and more specifically, into the symbolic position of white femininity in the formation of a British Columbian social imaginary at the turn of the twentieth century” (Milne 107).
- 11 Several characters visit a place usually designated “the city,” but once named as Chicago (157). On the other hand, Atherton, having consulted family papers, is confident that the novel is set in Manitoba, and there is a real Amaranth near the Lake Manitoba Narrows. But Atherton’s speculation that Ostenson’s Amaranth is based on Brandon, since it has a college (“Ostenson Revisited,” 65 n16) is doubtful, since the fictional town has a “few hundred” inhabitants (15), whereas the 1931 census gives Brandon’s population as 17,000.
- 12 Nona in *The White Reef* has black hair, inherited from an Irish father, but her mother was “a white-haired Norwegian” (13).
- 13 On Scandinavians in North America, see Norman and Runblorn. Cf. the early twentieth-century accounts of Danish author Aksel Sandemose, who visited Scandinavian settlements in western Canada in 1927 (see Hale).

- 14 Also known as the Johnson Act, this legislation imposed quotas based on the 1890 census. Maximum annual immigration from each country was two per cent of the number of foreign-born American residents of that nationality in 1890. The purpose was to privilege the northern European groups which had made up the bulk of early immigrants, and discourage the newer waves of immigration from the Mediterranean and eastern Europe. In fact, though, the quotas severely reduced immigration from the whole of Europe. In 1929, a new system fixed the total number of immigrants to be accepted each year, allocating a proportion to each nationality according to the current US population breakdown.
- 15 Scandinavians were, statistically, the most literate among immigrant groups. Lewis gives a literacy rate of 99.8 per cent for Scandinavian immigrants to America in 1909 (9).
- 16 On the imperial mother in the Canadian context, see for example Devereux, Henderson.
- 17 Only Keahey emphasizes these aspects of Ostenso's work (15-19).
- 18 For thematic accounts of *Wild Geese* and its perspectives on landscape, see for instance Harrison 107-14; Hesse; Johnson; Lawrence; Lenoski; Northey; Pacey, "Fiction"; Thomas. See Hammill for a fuller list.
- 19 A potentially productive approach to Ostenso is initiated in a graduate thesis tracing the influence of Icelandic saga on *Wild Geese* (McFadden).
- 20 Among these authors, Ostenso is usually compared only to Grove, and the basis of the comparison is invariably their evocation of the relationship between humans and the prairie environment, rather than their depiction of Scandinavian diasporas.

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Kiss Mummy openly

Kiss Mummy openly

many times, our spatter of hands, feebly back and forth, her winter coat already a remote spot of black. Departures are sobering, wringing you dry the same time. Not a young smolt, I have done this before, migrating elsewhere for a job. Leaving Calgary is like a Sunday evening in Dodoma. I am seven, Mohamed Rafiq sings weepy songs on the honey-coloured twenty-pound radio. Back then, scientists had apparatus-knobs the size of plungers. Sad songs and gloomy lovers inaugurated Sunday evening torture, next day, school. You touched the radio dial light as a feather; otherwise, the air squeals split your eardrums. At Calgary International, an erosive ache, rot in mouth, will Mummy be okay? One bag to check in, too heavy, I'm told. Pay \$35 in excess baggage. The check-in Air Canada staff suffers from sciatic nerve. Red alert at Calgary International: NO TOOTHPASTE, JELLS, LOTIONS, LIPSTICK ALLOWED! The notices terrifying as gun shots. A Muslim girl wearing a fauvish headscarf eats a ripe nectarine with grater-efficiency, not a spill on her baggy garb. I want to trounce her. Who else is cankered with ill thought for the twelve-year-old? Only one carry-on permitted. I stuff my shoulder bag in my computer case, coax and ram, ram and coax, pull out a novel: done! At Heathrow, orders barked to remove shoes, lipstick pileup in the confiscation tray, passengers in a state of fugue, trauma so immense they are unaware their brains have shut down. Bloody terrorists! As if life isn't hard already. I buy lip gloss and Smile toothpaste, Boots doing smashing business in Terminal 3. 8-hour-halt in the smelly pen before I board on Gulf Air to Muscat, Oman, the land of Sinbad; Sheba docked here as well to fill her ships with

frankincense. At a quaint gallery in old Muscat of alleys and suqs, I stand in front of a painting of two camels at the back of a pick-up, toothy red on white license plate: TOYOTA. In a Bedouin's desert, a pick-up is "The Big Moustache," move over camel. My penchant is driving a blue one, pretty as a toy, to the farmer's market in Millersville, a Saturday country ride from Calgary, long scarf trailing around my neck like Miss Brodie—pick-up truck, c'est moi—in the company of Ian Tyson's leggy cowboy charm. But I don't drive, not even in Calgary, frozen on tarmac for over twenty years after an accident, still prickly, it wasn't my fault. Mummy, I should have gotten behind the wheel soon after. The spill of heady jasmines from the posh emerald gardens of a five-star Muscat hotel, I sip a sip of Famous Grouse to extirpate heartache, are you okay, Mummy?

Mapping the Diasporic Self

Begin at the beginning. That was my plan when I first started drafting the structure of my memoir. State one's name, one's birth date and place, one's parents' names and so on. This narrative plan would provide forensic clarity as well as the illusion of truthfulness. However, it also simplifies the process of subjectivity formation and precludes the equally messy reality of one's memories and the representations of these memories on paper. If I should begin my memoir with my birth, or perhaps my parents' or even my grandparents' birth, followed by annual events, school, love affairs, marriage, professional achievements, and so on, I would have fallen into a pattern of inscribing subjectivity that privileges a male tradition of telling one's story, a tradition that promises a logical resolution to the puzzlement of existence, and an affirmation of Enlightenment ideals.¹ But this linear progression is a narrative that bears no resemblance to the constantly shifting perspectives that present themselves as one reviews one's life and tries to make sense of events, of commissions and omissions, of departures and arrivals. It does not reflect the perpetual conflict between the nature of representing/writing and the nature of remembering. Neither does this narrative pattern sufficiently articulate the cultural pressures a Chinese woman experiences, nor adequately address the contradictory lives of a "diasporic person in diaspora" (Chow 23).

Joanne Saul claims that the term "biotext" "captures the tension between the 'what' and the 'how' of the texts, between the 'bio' (with an emphasis on the 'life': including the family, relationships, and genealogy) and the 'text' (the site where these fragments are articulated in writing)" (4). In this paper

I examine the very tension quoted above, not through a term, but through the process with which I must engage in order to put words on paper. If the postmodern subject is multiple and decentred, then the diasporic subject is even more so. To articulate its existence and reality, the diasporic writer needs to contend not only with the disconnect between meaning and words, but also with the many historical and social trajectories that constitute a diasporic subjectivity.²

To recount my birth is not as straightforward as naming a place and a date. I was born a dual-colonial subject. I was born in Macau and my birth certificate named me a Portuguese citizen, an identity I have maintained, at least in bureaucratic forms. I grew up in Hong Kong and had established deep-seated affiliations with British culture and history. But I was also born a Han Chinese, an ethnic identity that reaches back several thousand years.³ My spoken mother tongue was vernacular Cantonese, a language not used in writing; my written language was classical Chinese; my father tongue, then, was English. My religious upbringing was strongly Catholic; the family had been Catholic for three generations on my mother's side, an indication of my family's familiarity with Western mores. My cultural and ethical upbringing was Confucianist. Already, before I could find my own life script, I was a product of dominant life scripts grounded in history, in class, in gender, and in race. As a result, an ethnic Chinese diasporic woman academic could find that, even when given a voice, her native experiences remain "untranslatable" (38), to gloss Rey Chow's term in *Writing Diaspora*. This untranslatability has to do with the narrative structure of "In the beginning I was born"—the masculinist *Bildungsroman* that assumes logical development, emotional maturity, and progressive enlightenment. As Helen Buss explains in *Mapping Our Selves*, women and their autobiographical efforts "enter . . . language from an already defaced position inside men's culture and language" (5). To find my own distinct voice, I have to use but also to resist "men's culture and language."

The Chinese Confucianist culture and the Chinese language is a tradition of male domination. This tradition inflicts various limitations on a Chinese woman writing her memoir. In the context of traditional Confucianism, I should come under the censure of my family as well as society at large. If I were to follow the path of a dutiful Chinese daughter brought up in the Confucianist tradition, I should not be writing about my family and its foibles and failings, nor should I be writing about myself, not being someone of historical or political importance, given that classical Chinese "is the perfect instrument for stating and restating the exemplary," and though

“virtuous maidens and chaste widows” are mentioned in county records, numbering in the tens of thousands, “these good women . . . remain faceless and in most cases nameless, only identifiable by the surnames of their fathers or husbands” (Wu 12). Not only am I positioning myself as a critic of the life that my parents have gifted me, I am writing my memoir in English instead of the language of my ancestors. (Yet, the formality and tradition of classical Chinese questions the legitimacy of a narrative that addresses not only an individual’s life, but a woman’s life.⁴) As I bear my father’s name, I would be expected to censor any details in my early life that reflect negatively on the Ng family, since “revealing one’s own sins [and other personal experiences] in public ran against the grain of a culture . . . which put so much emphasis upon propriety and discretion” (Wu 216). (But to present a whitewashed account would negate one of the presumed purposes of the genre of life writing.) If in the memoir I analyze and criticize my parents, it would be an act of filial impiety. (But literature bears many examples of critique of problematic familial relationships.) Thus, as a woman brought up by traditional Chinese parents, writing my memoir is an act of cultural defiance.

Even when I have overcome the patriarchal Confucianist tradition and refused to be silent and wise, writing about my family and my personal relationships in Hong Kong involves navigating the disconnect between the vernacular dialect my family speak (Cantonese), the classical written Chinese that I was schooled in, and the English I used at Maryknoll Sisters School. As Wu explains, “The Chinese writing system, consisting of characters rather than phonetic notations, had determined from the very beginning that in its written form the language was to be used to record facts . . . rather than to transcribe speech verbatim” (11). Classical or written Chinese is not a language that facilitates expressions of individual emotions and psychological conflicts; English is a more fluent language for me to express life. Yet, though I am writing my memoir in English, my memories are constructed of situations and conversations performed in Cantonese, and my knowledge of Chinese autobiographies is through formalized written Chinese. After I have translated my memories and knowledge into an English that is suitable for the genre and for publication, it becomes a life lived in three languages compressed into one.

Thus far, I have to decide to forgo Confucianist reticence and write about personal matters; I also have to overcome the innate linguistic confusion of remembering in Cantonese and classical Chinese, then translating memories into English. Most of all, I want to write in an English that is not an obvious translation of the Chinese and is different from the emotionalism in writings

by famous modern Chinese writers such as Bing Xin, Ding Ling, and even the woman soldier, Hsieh Ping-ying (Xie Bingying).⁵ I have to make a rhetorical choice. Traditional Chinese women's autobiographies in the May 4th era, a genre that I know well through leisure reading in Hong Kong and studying at the university, is a genre that "has often been viewed as representing insignificant life experience, transmitting self-indulgent voices, and lacking broad social scale and objectivity" (Wang 2). By implication, male writers write of significant life experience in an objective voice, thus providing the reading public with narratives of social relevance. However, even as I disagree with this patronizing view of modern Chinese women writing, and even as I have chosen to resist Confucianist patriarchal tradition, I remain under the influence, on the one hand, of Chinese prejudice against individual self-expressions and, on the other hand, of the analytical western tradition that privileges objectivity over subjectivity.

My western education has inculcated in me, from the very first class exercise in explication and the first analytical convent-school essay, the habit of looking at people and situations objectively, even if they might be one's relations and the situations are personal ones. Composition classes had demanded that I should propose a viable argument and then develop the argument by intellectual analysis. The rule not to use the personal singular pronoun in order to maintain the tone of objective inquiry has trained me to become suspicious of emotional writing. Thus, ironically, I react to Chinese women's autobiographies in the same way that is criticized by Wang in her book.

The convent education did more than teach me to control emotional indulgence in writing. Even as my mother was rigorous in educating me to become a good daughter and an eventual good wife, I found another set of female role models in the Catholic nuns at the Maryknoll school run by the American missionary order. At home, I had a strict, traditional Chinese mother against whom I rebelled. At school, I had educated, encouraging, forgiving mothers. How should I write about these various mother figures, on some of whom I developed adolescent crushes? How do I extricate the sense of sin and damnation and atonement a Catholic education inculcated from the sunny and happy memories I have of learning, of getting good marks, of being the teacher's pet? Accounts I have read of convent educations usually suggest a regime of disciplinary oppression, of western domination, of religious intolerance. Brian Tittle writes of the "sadistic nuns" (1) who ran the Good Shepherd Magdalen Asylum in the Irish Republic; the nuns maintained control through prayers, humiliation, and inflexible disciplining.

Karen Armstrong writes of her harrowing experience being trained as a postulant in 1962 “along the old lines of severe Victorian discipline” even as the Second Vatican Council was meeting in Rome (72). Eventually, her study of English literature liberated her from the prison house of the convent.

In contrast, my convent education liberated me from the prison house of Confucianist and traditional Chinese disciplines; it liberated me from thinking and values that I was already rebelling against. My convent upbringing gave me autonomy. In a recent UNICEF report, a child’s sense of educational well-being is rated as one of six categories essential in the child’s upbringing (Westcott). I rate my educational well-being very high, while I would be more critical of my family and peer relationships, another category listed in the report. It is true that the Maryknoll nuns had acculturated me to western art, western literature, and western values so thoroughly that I became a stranger in feelings and thoughts to my parents. But I didn’t and still don’t think of my convent education as a form of imperialistic domination. Otherwise, my many fellow students would also have rejected Chinese culture and become thoroughly acculturated in western aesthetics and values, which was certainly not the case. I have to find a “balanced” way to represent these formative years while writing against the grain. My ambivalent attitude towards the history of British colonialism in Hong Kong also makes me ask myself if I am still “working in anti-imperialist discourse,” as Rey Chow categorizes postcolonial critics in *Writing Diaspora* (53).

If I were writing this memoir in the 1970s, while I was still a teenager in Hong Kong, my experience of colonialism would have been very differently expressed. Certainly I remember racialized treatment and the social tension between the non-Chinese and the majority Chinese population in Hong Kong. But colonial relationships are mediated through class. The working class and the labourers in Hong Kong, who lived well away from the small and exclusive neighbourhoods of the expatriates, had very little knowledge of or contact with their colonizers, unless they were working as servants. Even the middle class, to which my family belonged, had very little to do with the western colonial presence. We had no western friends; we socialized only with Chinese by choice; and if our friends and relatives were oppressed, they were oppressed by their Chinese employers, by their greedy Chinese landlords and others in the social structure. One could say that the wealthy and the powerful Chinese were always friendly with the colonial authority; hence colonial oppression was maintained through the economic system. But, one could also say that some wealthy and powerful Chinese had very little regard

for the poor Chinese. In a city so motivated by commerce, the stock market, land development, and so on, race could at times be less important than one's bank account, the car one drives, the number of servants one can afford. As I was growing up, I was far more aware of which social class my family belonged to than what race.⁶ Thus, the first western friend I knew was rejected totally by my mother, not only because of race, but also because of class.⁷

However, now that I am making my living as an academic working in anti-imperialist discourse, my perspective has changed and my recounting of my life under colonial rule also requires a different narrative voice than the one I would have used regarding my convent education. Edward Said's *Out of Place* and Shirley Lim's *Among the White Moon Faces* offer two examples of autobiographies written by postcolonial critics. These accounts are worthy examples, both of the genre of autobiography and of the academic profession. *Simplified*, they are narratives of oppressed individuals who overcame economic, or political, or psychological obstacles within a specific historical context. Not only did these individuals refuse to succumb to the system; they become resistant fighters against the colonial system through their teaching and writing. These narratives are "victim" memoirs with a triumphant ending.

I admire these memoirs. But Said's colonized Cairo and Lim's colonized Malaysia are not the same political constructs as my colonized Hong Kong. As an individual, I was not victimized by the colonial system. If I were writing about Hong Kong and Chinese culture in general, I would resort to my postcolonial voice: the colonial system had suppressed Chinese autonomy; it had exploited Chinese labour and land; British colonialists, with their attitude of racial superiority, had treated Chinese with contempt. Exclusive enclaves, such as tennis and cricket clubs, had made Chinese presence unwelcome. There were never equal social interactions between the British and the Chinese. (Although not many Chinese of our social circles would want to have any interactions with the Brits either.) But if I were writing about myself, the obstacles I had to overcome were imposed by my own culture, which I consider anti-woman and anti-individual; and because my relatives and social circles eschewed contact with westerners, I consider them xenophobic. Yet I don't want to write a memoir of nostalgia for the good old days of colonialism. My personal narrative needs to be contextualized within the global phenomenon of postcolonial movements. I have to find the rhetorical space that intersects the personal specifics and the cultural/historical. Perhaps my representation of an experienced colonial culture is closer to Michael Ondaatje's in *Running in the Family*.

In her essay on *Running in the Family* in *Writing the Roaming Subject: The Biotext in Canadian Literature*, Joanne Saul attributes “the elegiac tone of much of the book” to the numerous ruptures and gaps in Ondaatje’s search for connection and belonging (53). I add uneasy nostalgia to the causes for Ondaatje’s elegy to a colonial culture. A colonized subject has to tread carefully when writing nostalgically of a colonized past—the voice of Frantz Fanon echoes as a warning bell. Like Ondaatje, I want to represent my and, by extension, my family’s experience of a colonial culture not as one of political opposition and struggle, but of acceptance, compliance even. More importantly, Hong Kong culture, as distinct from the colonial culture of Malaya and Ceylon, was a colonized culture that was forcefully mediated by the neighbouring presence of China. Furthermore, unlike the Malay Chinese, the Hong Kong Chinese constituted the majority. These Chinese practised with pride their culture and customs, with little intervention from the colonial power. As a matter of fact, to imply a strong political awareness of and hostility towards British colonialism in Hong Kong in the 1950s and 1960s would be inaccurate.

Yet, I am also aware of the fact that there are critics who believe that “‘responsible’ immigrant narratives should represent or be faithful to history; that they should engage with the structures of power; and that ‘visible’ minority writers should not only be ‘original’ but also ‘authentic’” (Saul 36). It is a critical position that I am familiar with in Postcolonial Studies; I myself have advocated an ethical representation in fiction that features ethnic minorities (see “Representing Chinatown”). However, while the theoretical position argues for a general policy towards ethnic representation, my own memoir has to do with an individual lived experience. This conflict between representation and the politics of reading argues for a contextual and nuanced culture of critical interpretation.

Similar to Ondaatje in *Running in the Family*, I want to evoke a landscape of tropical heat, lush landscape, blue sky merging with blue water, colonial architecture, and the multiple contact/non-contact zones between the west and the east. I want to write about the suddenness of monsoon rainstorms, the brilliant greenness of the palm fronds, the pervasive smell of frangipani in the summer, or the shapely silhouettes of women in cheongsams. My mother and I rode in a rickshaw when I was a child. I was eight and was on the same cross-harbour ferry when a scene from *The World of Susie Wong* was shot, a film that the family both enjoyed and laughed at. This was the culture I grew up in, the culture that nurtured me. Yet, this descriptive

approach could be critiqued as a “tendency to exoticize” (Saul 52). But if I were writing a realistic description of my childhood—not embellished with literary conceits, not conjured out of picture books or plagiarized from travel narratives; in other words, not an orientalist exercise—would it still be a form of exoticism, just because the Hong Kong weather is different from a Canadian winter or the cultural practices are different from those in Canadian suburbia?

In terms of identity profile, I share less with Ondaatje than I do with Shirley Lim. We are both women of Chinese ethnicity growing up in a British colony and educated by Catholic nuns. But, while colonial cultures are different, the colonized subjects also process experience as individuals, not as a generic group. Lim shared her childhood with siblings, while I grew up as an only child who wanted desperately to be in the company of other children. My only child status also made me into the sole object of parental discipline that I eventually found oppressive. However, a strict upbringing also taught me to become socially canny and, unlike Lim, I learned “the self-protective skill of silence” (Lim 71). This skill probably guarded me against the kind of harsh treatments from the teachers and nuns that Lim describes in her memoir with some bitterness. Not only did different family structures affect our social behaviours; different religious orders also meant that my Catholic nuns were, with a few exceptions, kind, intelligent, liberal-minded, and fun-loving.

The difference in our family backgrounds and structures also played a role in our differently perceived colonized selves. Lim’s father came from a merchant family, himself the owner of a shoe store while Shirley Lim was a young girl. The Lim family was part of the forty-five per cent of the Chinese population in British Malaya; Lim’s memoir gives the strong impression that the ethnic Chinese were not the dominant power (39-40). Although a colonized subject, Lim’s father was “trilingual” and comfortable with “British regulations and procedures” (52). In spite of his early affluence, he managed to get into financial troubles; his battered wife left him and the children, and his treatment of his children, according to Lim, veered between punishment and neglect.

In contrast, the Ng family were middle class folks in the banking business for at least three generations. My father didn’t depend on westerners for his livelihood and, overall, only tolerated the colonial culture in Hong Kong as a political reality. He was proudly confident of his Han ethnicity and considered the British mere barbaric interlopers. He was educated only in classical Chinese, but was considered by friends and colleagues as a scholar with a fine calligraphy. He was aloof, patriarchal, and uxorious. Like Lim, I

admired my father and resented my mother. However, this resentment was not a result of my mother's absence: she was *too* present. My father was the provider. My mother had the responsibility of nurturing me into a woman with social graces, with the ultimate goal that I should marry into economic stability. My own preference was never consulted.

Unlike the ethnic Chinese in colonial Malaya, the Chinese in Hong Kong constituted not only the shopkeepers and labourers but also the professionals and the elite.⁸ The non-Chinese in Hong Kong might feel racially superior; they also had to contend with the economic clout of the Chinese majority and treat them accordingly. The Hong Kong Chinese were proud of their Chinese heritage while wary of the Communist ideology of mainland China. According to Lim, as a Malay Chinese she felt that the mainland Chinese were "marked by an alien hieroglyphic script" and that they were "hostile to *peranakans*, whom they looked down on as degraded people, people who had lost their identity when they stopped speaking Chinese" (40). Thus, while both Hong Kong Chinese and Malay Chinese were diasporic subjects, the ninety-nine per cent Hong Kong Chinese who spoke Cantonese and wrote in Chinese were less marginalized than their counterparts in colonial Malaya. This might explain partly why the Maryknoll nuns were a much friendlier group of teachers.

The Maryknoll nuns didn't discriminate, as far as I can remember, based on class or race. They seemed to practise the idea of American democracy even within the school perimeters. Thus, I went to school happily, having said goodbye to my father who went off to the bank and to my mother who stayed home to plan the day's menu. It was an ordinary childhood without deprivation. I can theorize as a postcolonial critic, but not write as an oppressed colonial subject. Lim's experiences were different and provided her with an authentic and individual postcolonial voice. Hence, to presume that, because two Chinese women shared a similar profile in education and grew up in a superficially similar historical context, their perspectives would also be similar would be an act of critical erasure.

The more I write, the more apparent it becomes that no one particular narrative strategy would work for me, certainly not "the kind of coming-to-voice narrative that relies on a unified concept of the ethnic subject and a developmental narrative of assimilation or belonging" (Saul 37). My memoir project is intellectually facilitated by my identity as a Canadian ethnic woman academic and the academic culture in the 1990s that nurtured me. Shirley Neuman's contribution on life writing in *Literary History of Canada*

and other critics writing on autobiography as a “serious” literary genre (Saul 4-5); the inclusion of ethnic writers and their works within recognized area studies such as English; the distinctly different configuration of ethnic identities within the context of multiculturalism in Canada all form a productive backdrop for me, as well for other writers with ethnic backgrounds, to explore the ambiguities of belonging and of identity (Saul 6). Even as I write about a colonized past, my memories are informed by a postcolonial present. In *Writing Diaspora*, Rey Chow claims that “the goal of ‘writing diaspora’ is . . . to *unlearn* that submission to one’s ethnicity such as ‘Chineseness’ as the ultimate signified even as one continues to support movements for democracy and human rights in China, Hong Kong, and elsewhere” (25). Chow’s position is deeply connected to her identity as a Hong Kong Chinese growing up in the 1960s and 1970s, and to be a Chinese in Hong Kong during that period, when China was undergoing the turmoil of the Cultural Revolution and the United States the turmoil of the Vietnam War and the counterculture movements, was to be a Chinese caught in the matrix of conflicting and feuding cultural ideologies. Like Chow, I also nurture simultaneous affiliation with and resistance against both the centrism of Chineseness and the eurocentrism of the West.

But unlike critics who have critiqued the “diasporic” position, I suggest that it is enabling and empowering.⁹ As a matter of fact, I have no other viable position from which I can narrate. I am no longer a colonized subject. I am not in a postcolonial condition, having left Hong Kong and accepted Canadian citizenship. But, unlike Chinese Canadians whose ancestors settled in Canada in the nineteenth century, I am still affiliated to Hong Kong, although a Hong Kong that now belongs to China, whose official language of Putonghua I cannot speak and whose cultural ambassadors would have indexed me as a “Westernized Chinese woman from colonial Hong Kong, this cultural bastard” (Chow 26). Thus, I can say that I now suffer the same chauvinistic discrimination that Lim, as a Malay Chinese, writes about in her book. Yet, rather than feeling abashed as a serial non-belonger—not China-Chinese, not Hong Konger, not local-born Canadian, not Portuguese-speaking Macanese, I revel in this multiplicity of non-identities as the eventual norm of social identity of people around the world.

My narrative will have to reflect this multiplicity.¹⁰ The diasporic subject lives in a borderland existence while negotiating her colonial psychological repository and her postcolonial consciousness, anxiety-ridden as she confronts her past in order to reconstruct it for the present. The

autobiographical subject is not single and unified. As an ethnic Chinese woman academic writing her memoir, I work with my ethnic identity as a Chinese born in a Portuguese colony and raised in a British colony, as well as my professional identity as a woman working in a western field that still bears the traces of traditional patriarchal domination. This paper examines my various life scripts that are indexed to race, gender, and class, grounded in the Confucianist ethos that emphasizes discretion and restraint, and, paradoxically, also in the enlightenment ideal of individual self-expression. Similarly, writing the autobiographical subject requires a complex narrative strategy, so that the narrative reflects the ruptures and gaps in the subject's lived experiences. The challenge for the autobiographical subject in diaspora is to mediate between contesting identities and rhetorical strategies.

NOTES

- 1 Although I am in total agreement with the fact that women can write linear narratives just as men can write fragmented ones, there exists a literary tradition that privileges clarity, coherence, and logical development, a narrative structure that historically women writers could not adopt, due to lack of training or time, hampered and harried by domestic concerns, and that some contemporary women writers refuse to adopt as a strategy of protest.
- 2 The essay is intended as an analytical companion piece to my memoir, *Cultural Belongings*, which is in the final stage of writing. I am looking at my own life writing process the way a literary critic would: objectively and not confessionally.
- 3 I am aware that there are considerable discussions regarding the concept of Han ethnicity as a constructed identity and its political agenda. I am using the term as an indication that my parents were proud of our Chinese identity while living in British colonial Hong Kong, and that I was taught never to forget that to be Chinese was to be racially superior to the non-Chinese minority.
- 4 While Chinese women growing up in the 1980s and 1990s (post-Mao, postcolonial, post-structural) might find the voice to express such discontent, Chinese women brought up with more traditional values or of older generations would be tempted to take the conventional way to write (or not write) about childhood trauma, family, parents.
- 5 See Wang Lingzhen's *Personal Matters: Women's Autobiographical Practice in Twentieth-Century China*, which recuperates the value of emotionalism and excessive subjectivity in writings by Bing Xin and others from the May 4th era.
- 6 I do remember moments of racial conflict in public interactions in Hong Kong in my childhood. For instance, my father was chastised by the Brits in a theatre when he didn't stand up for the British national anthem. Or the humiliation one could feel when a westerner spoke to one condescendingly and one's English was not idiomatic enough to provide a retort. Or the automatic deference Chinese showed to the colonialists in western enclaves, such as Lane Crawford (an exclusive department store) or the Peninsula Hotel. But overall, in the 1960s and 1970s, the property-owning Chinese in Hong Kong were as much against Communist China as the British colonial government out of self-interest. Thus, the Brits were seen as a benign presence that would protect the Hong Kong Chinese, who desired above all else to continue maintaining a comfortable, or even better, an

- affluent lifestyle. I have to see a film such as Ken Loach's *The Wind that Shakes the Barley* (2006) to be reminded of historical British colonial atrocities.
- 7 My mother's outright rejection of interracial relationships and her willing embrace of the Catholic Church and its western representatives (nuns, priests, the Pope) is an example of the paradox inherent in the colonial culture of Hong Kong, and illustrates a kind of cultural pragmatism that most Hong Kong Chinese practised, consciously or subconsciously. A Westerner without money was not desirable; but powerful western religious institutions were acceptable, especially when they provided the children with a solid education.
 - 8 It should be mentioned that Lim was growing up in the 1940s and 1950s while I was experiencing British colonization in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s. However, the different racial profiles of the populations in Malaya and Hong Kong certainly contributed to the formation of diasporic subjectivity.
 - 9 In a paper given at the University of British Columbia, which forms an extract of a forthcoming book, *Visuality and Identity: Sinophone Articulations Across the Pacific*, Shih Shu-mei objects to the concept of "the Chinese diaspora," which "stands as a universalizing category founded on a unified ethnicity, culture, language, as well as place of origin or homeland" ("Against Diaspora: The Sinophones as Places of Cultural Production"). The argument does not take into consideration the Chinese who have been emigrating from China but continue to maintain very strong cross-generational ties to the mainland; or the fact that many Chinese around the world, whatever category they say they belong to, continue to do business in China and it is to their advantage to maintain their Chinese ethnic identity. There is also the fact of ethnic embodiment. While a Chinese in Canada might be third-generation Canadian, she will still look Chinese to the non-Chinese communities.
 - 10 I should be outlining my narrative strategies at this point. However, the memoir is still a work in progress and it is being changed each time I review what I have written.

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Cryptic Species

(1) **morphology**/ *n.* the study of the forms of things, esp. 1 *Biol.* the study of the forms of organisms. 2 *Philos.* a the study of the forms of words. b the system of forms in a language.

For most the body. *Her body*, bends backward, U-shaped and supple. She is capable of being flexible. Gumby to his pokey. She is a flexible woman. If anything is said. Let it be said. She was never inflexible. Foremost. The body. A complex system of joints and limbs. The organs are discreet. Secretions. (Secretive). Until a failure, a cascade of complications. The metaphor fails us when a part signifies the whole. The entire system can be breached. Synecdotal. She will not question her organs until they begin to fail. This is known as betrayal. *She feels betrayed by her body.*

Askew. A loose cannon in a quiver. A screw loose in an empty house. Shutting the door before the hoarse cries. Spilled. Pooling on the kitchen floor. The body. Supine. The spine and legs curved back, S-shaped. Milk. The carton tipped on its side.

Her hair's punctuation. Black on white. The strands, strong, her mane of hair, from somewhere a breeze suggests. Her hair slithers, dry like sand. We are suspicious. *Something is wrong with this picture.* Each part creates a whole. Observe. What cannot be quantified will be qualified. *She met his qualifications.* There is a procedure.

The forms were filled.

(We look for the beginning. The source. The tumour, the lifestyle, the diet, the inheritance, the cell, etc. The world is filled with forms and nouns. Each has a capacity. A cavity. Caveat.)

She can often be found in the kitchen. The lock, she thinks, is insufficient, but then so is a single pane of glass. A simple hammer-blow, even a sharp jab of elbow and the entire house. Breached. The house is emblematic of security. Most people accept this representation. She knows that it is a construction.

She does not like the *dead* in bolt.

She loves the whisper of her hair across the skin of her back. Susurrus. Between the blades of her shoulders. The shiverslide, cool and delicious. When she wears a halter top she swings her hair as a form of self love. Kimochi ii. Ii kimochi. It works either way. Though it is not the same. As touching herself with her hands. When she can feel herself touching and feeling. But her hair. She can only feel the hairs' touch, being touched, not her own touching. Gentle. Cool. Silky. Her own touch, other, but—

She loves it.

She swings her hair, a side-to-side motion. The sound of whispering. Sand. The desert's startling of night.

Night.

She turns the deadbolt. Solid click. She unlocks it to repeat the action. To repeat the action. Like a cartridge in a barrel. She can't be too sure. She can't be certain. Enough. The solid click of a cartridge in a barrel. She turns.

The deadbolt.

Click.

The window. Catches.

Her self.

Looking.

(Slow pan, receding. The bubbles dissolve into dirty water. Cooling. The deadbolt signified. The window left unlatched.)

Time passes.

“Streets are the dwelling place of the collective”¹

Public Space and Cosmopolitan Citizenship in Dionne Brand’s *What We All Long For*

In Dionne Brand’s novel *What We All Long For*, the identity of diasporic characters in the hostland (Canada) continually oscillates between belonging and non-belonging; this psychological oscillation is spatially enacted in Toronto. Here, members of diasporic communities (along with the city’s other inhabitants) must move between different social, ethnic, and gendered areas in the city. These material places are sites of complex social relationships which offer varying and unstable levels of permeability based on class, gender, ethnicity, and a host of other axes of identification.² Negotiation of this uneven terrain ensures that self-definition is never stable for the first-generation migrating diasporic characters (Cam, Tuan, and Jackie’s and Oku’s parents) who do not possess a firm foothold in the hostland because it is not the homeland—a place which is always elsewhere if it exists physically at all and with which these characters have a fraught relationship that effectively precludes return.³ The process of self-definition is even more precarious for the second-generation characters (Tuyen, Carla, Jackie, and Oku), however. The second generation occupies an uneasy position in relation to the hostland, their country of birth and primary place of residence, yet the bureaucratic officers of the state do not fully recognize their right to access all the practices of citizenship (Oku, for instance, is continually read as a criminal by the city’s police force). As well, they are unable to fully connect with the homeland and traditions of their parents. This paper considers some of the myriad ways that this process of self-definition is imagined and complicated in Dionne Brand’s *What We All*

Long For. I argue that the characters in Brand's novel negotiate their subjectivities in public places, creating what I call "territorialized cosmopolitan" subjectivities—subjectivities with multiple affiliations across axes of gender, ethnicity, class, and sexuality which are not unrooted or free-floating but are principally and firmly located in the physicality of Toronto.⁴

In *What We All Long For*, Dionne Brand takes issue with a model of defining national identity that is unbalanced in favour of those possessing hegemonic Canadian subjectivities (i.e. white, anglo- or francophone, and male). First, Brand dramatizes moments of misrecognition where migrants to Toronto (whether from other countries or other regions of Canada) are recognized by the hegemonic inhabitants of Toronto in a way that does not truly acknowledge them as real people rather than stereotypes. For the first-generation characters of this novel, the dialogical process of identity is always weighted in favour of narrow, confining definitions of gender and, particularly, ethnicity—such as Cam's and Tuan's inability to find work outside of Vietnamese restaurants. Second, Brand depicts the possibility of refusing these misrecognitions and of actively engaging with recognition. The second-generation characters actively move into the city's public places to find and create new and different dialogues about what it means to be a citizen of the metropolis—for instance, Oku's quasi-friendships with the Rasta and the composer, two homeless men he encounters in Kensington Market and throughout the city, and Tuyen's, Oku's, and Carla's delight in the pandemonium surrounding Korea's World Cup win. They demand, through their reinvention of Toronto's public places, new terms for this dialogue that acknowledge their position as citizens of the city. Whereas the first-generation characters try to work within the discursive limits of multicultural citizenship which emphasize certain expressions of ethnicity such as food and are overly reliant on notions of "authenticity," the second-generation characters begin to sketch out the possibilities of a territorialized cosmopolitan that allows for a connection with the diasporic cultures of their parents and the multi-ethnic cultures of the globalized city, and that emphasizes mutability over authenticity.

For the first-generation, migrating characters, Toronto is a site of marginalization where the places open to them are predicated upon invisibility and separation. They occupy what Nancy Fraser calls "subaltern counterpublics." Fraser argues that, in response to their invisibility, "members of subordinated social groups . . . have repeatedly found it advantageous to constitute alternative publics" and that "these *subaltern counterpublics* . . . are parallel

discursive arenas where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counterdiscourses, which in turn permit them to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs” (Fraser 210; emphasis in original). For the first-generation characters, then, Toronto is an essentially unwelcoming place where their difference becomes insurmountable and isolating. In contrast, their children (all but one are born in Toronto) struggle to bridge the gap between the world of their parents—a world which seems obsolete and static to them—and that in which they were born and grew up. Tuyen, Carla, Jackie, and Oku resist their imposed invisibility in the city and stake out their own public spaces on their own terms. These second-generation characters forge new, territorialized cosmopolitan identities that encompass multiple positionalities but which remain rooted in the physical place of Toronto; these cosmopolitan identities can be seen in the celebration of Korea’s World Cup victory and in the graffiti crew’s mural seen in the final pages of the novel, among other moments.

Making Visible an Invisible Toronto

With the movement of these second-generation characters throughout the city, Brand decentres the dominant economic and cultural places of Toronto and brings the so-called margins into a central position. Saskia Sassen suggests that

The city concentrates diversity. Its spaces are inscribed with the dominant corporate culture but also with a multiplicity of other cultures and identities. The slippage is evident: the dominant culture can encompass only part of the city. And while corporate power inscribes these cultures and identities with “otherness” thereby devaluing them, they are present everywhere. (188)

Brand reveals this slippage by concentrating on those places in the city which are othered by dominant corporate culture, and by creating new nodes of power. Kensington Market, for instance, becomes a central hub in the Toronto of *What We All Long For*—this is where Oku spends his days away from his parents, close to where Jackie’s clothing store is, where Carla’s stepmother buys her groceries. While it ostensibly mirrors the consumer thrust of places like Bloor Street, Kensington Market is a place that offers different ways of consuming with its independently owned stores and its emphatic publicness where storefronts open up and spill out onto the street instead of the privatized opening inwards of most shopping areas where goods are kept orderly and behind glass. For the Situationists and other political revolutionaries who advocate against consumerism, “the best urban

activity [is] human, unmechanized, and non-alienating, and their texts, films, and maps indicated some possibilities, variously idealizing the marketplaces . . . the traditional cafés . . . and the places of student congregation” (Sadler 92)—something that is reflected in the centrality of a public marketplace which is filled with cafés and second-hand clothing stores in the novel. Brand’s refocalizing of Toronto with an emphasis on a public marketplace has a similarly political purpose. While this novel hardly foments revolution, it does begin to outline a vision of Toronto that is not exclusively centred on corporate power.

In contrast to this new prominence of Kensington Market, the traditional (white) power centres of Toronto—Bay Street, Queen’s Park, and City Hall—disappear except through their law enforcement arm—the Toronto Police and Mimico Correctional Institute.⁵ Brand re-presents Toronto as a place where “lives . . . are doubled, tripled, conjugated” (5) yet remain invisible except to the repressive apparatuses of the state: the police and the prison system make the city’s non-white inhabitants all too painfully visible.⁶ Oku and Jamal, as well as the other young black men in the text, can never be truly invisible to the police as they are misrecognized as always already criminal, regardless of their actions; their criminality is inscribed onto their very bodies.⁷ In *The Map to the Door of No Return*, Brand posits that the “courtroom is a rite of passage for . . . diasporic children” (107). This statement proves true for many of the men in *What We All Long For* and is a statement that Oku echoes: jail is a “[r]ite of passage in this culture, girl. Rite of passage for a young black man” (46).

However, while law enforcement appears repeatedly, the sites of corporate power are strikingly absent. While Saskia Sassen argues that the buildings of Bay Street and of all financial districts in global cities have large invisible workforces of visible minorities (193), this workplace invisibility is inverted in *What We All Long For*. Of the four main characters, only Carla works in any proximity to the centres of corporate power.⁸ However, her job as courier is one in which she does not truly belong to this economic world. She shuttles between workplaces without actually belonging to one (besides the courier company that she works for). Carla is part of this invisible workplace of secretaries and cleaning staff that the business world is dependent upon but who are dismissed as unimportant. Carla is thus the only visible member of the corporate world, yet she occupies a liminal space as she is both within and without the corporate world—she delivers packages to corporate offices but is not part of one herself. The economic centre of Toronto is, thus, doubly

effaced: its invisible workforce (in the form of Carla) is made visible in place of bankers and lawyers, and the buildings themselves are never mentioned and, thus, disappear in the shift to different public places such as Kensington Market and Little Korea where Binh's store is located. To be situated in only one world, either as unassimilated first generationer or corporate executive is to be rendered, ironically, most optically regulated or even unavailable in this vision of urban space.

The only other member of the corporate world present in the text is Binh, Tuyen's brother, who has an MBA and runs a small electronics store. However, as a small business owner, he is not fully immersed in corporate capitalism. For while he participates in the corporate economy—he trades and invests capital—this participation is primarily related to goods that bourgeois capitalism wishes to ignore, such as stolen and counterfeit electronics and illegal workers. Binh's primary role in the city's economic system, then, runs parallel to the world of Bay Street but remains widely undetected or disavowed; he is an active member of the city's shadow economy.

Subaltern Counterpublics and Spaces of Prescribed Ethnicity

Into this context of the deterritorialized traditional centres of white Toronto and the revelation of a veiled parallel economy of bike couriers and the non-authorized exchange of goods, Brand depicts the generational striations among this newly central group of diasporic individuals. The stories of the first-generation characters in *What We All Long For* show the multiple ways in which bureaucratic authorities and stereotypical assumptions about immigrants' skills make them invisible or reduce them to broad categories. These characters are limited to set discursive spaces that make confining assumptions about what it means to be an immigrant or to belong to a specific ethnic group, which shape how these first-generation characters access physical places. In her theorization of subaltern counterpublics, Nancy Fraser suggests that these are not utopic spaces but ones which remain internally stratified—reflecting the stratification of the society in which they are formed. Nonetheless, she suggests that “they help expand discursive space. In principle, assumptions that were previously exempt from contestation will now have to be publicly argued out. In general, the proliferation of subaltern counterpublics means a widening of discursive contestation” (210).

The clearest subaltern counterpublic in *What We All Long For* is the Paramount. This club, which was known only by a “select group. Black people and a few, very few, hip whites—whites who were connected” (95),

becomes a counterpublic space where members of the Black diaspora in Toronto can go “to feel in their own skin, in their own life” (95), to regroup after the degradation of the city. This counterpublic space is one in which to re-imagine the city and invert its social stratifications because in it blackness becomes central rather than marginalized. The Paramount also reveals the heterogeneity of blackness—something which is elided by the city. Thus, the Scotian and the West Indian communities demand the recognition of their differences in the Paramount. These differences lead to occasional violence; however, the Paramount and the other counterpublic spaces/clubs are sites where heterogeneity—expressed through style and sexuality for the most part—creates alliances between the different groups (96, 179). These are places where difference (from both one another and, perhaps more importantly, the white bourgeois inhabitants of the city) is validated: “What’s life . . . if you couldn’t see yourself strutting into the Paramount to the appreciation, the love of other dreamers like yourself? If no one else could verify your state of cool existence” (179)? Jackie’s parents feel at home in the Paramount: something that they do not feel in the rest of the city. These clubs resist the dominant Canadian gaze—something a Ghanaian man draws Jackie’s mother’s attention to when he asks her to “come and go with me back to my country. . . . You are lost here. No one loves you here. In my country you will be a queen” (179). Indeed, the closing of the Paramount and all the other clubs Jackie’s parents frequented, with the key exception of the seedy and degrading Duke, is experienced as a deep loss which is in excess of the loss of a nightclub: “When the Paramount closed, Jackie’s mother and father were lost. Everyone in Alexandra Park was lost. Even some up on Bathurst Street and Vaughan Road and Eglinton Avenue. As far out as Dawes Road and Pape Avenue. All the glamour left their lives” (178). For Jackie’s parents, “the thought of hard times without even the relief of the Paramount was unbearable” (179). This loss is a form of dislocation which further compounds Jackie’s parents’ sense of dislocation within Toronto.

Tuyen’s parents and Carla’s mother also feel a similar invisibility in Toronto; Tuan and Cam cannot practise their professions (engineering and medicine, respectively) and Angie is cut off from her family and friends because of her interracial affair with Derek. Yet neither Tuan and Cam nor Angie are able to access the kind of counterpublic sphere that Jackie’s parents are—suggesting that the ability to form or join subaltern counterpublics marks a privilege within marginalization.⁹ Instead, Tuan, Cam, and Angie occupy spaces that are defined by prescribed visions of ethnicity and gender.

Tuan and Cam resign themselves to the fact that the city has a particular view of them that they will be unable to transcend and so they become who they are imagined to be:

They had come thinking that they would be who they were, or at least who they had managed to remain. After the loss of Quy, it made a resigned sense to them that they would lose other parts of themselves. Once they accepted that, it was easy to see themselves the way the city saw them: Vietnamese food. (66-67)

While Tuan and Cam become very successful financially, this is at the expense of their own particular desires and talents—significantly, neither Tuan nor Cam are able to actually cook the food that they are defined by.¹⁰

Like Tuan's and Cam's restaurant, which is a place defined by expectations about ethnicity, Angie's apartment is defined by gendered expectations. Her apartment is described by Carla as a site of either complete maternal love—it is "exhilarating[ly] domestic" (239)—or of illicit sexuality—it is here where Derek visits to make love to Angie (240; 245). Just as her roles of mother and mistress enacted in the apartment are conventionally gendered (re-enacting a madonna/whore dichotomy), so to is Angie's public persona. Prior to her death, Angie takes on the public role of the "spurned woman" when she takes her children to stand across the street from the home where Derek lives with his wife (107-09; 240-41). She is at the mercy of Derek's mercurial interest in her and their children. While the chronology of events is somewhat unclear, Derek's anger at Angie's visit to his home is connected in the narrative to Angie's suicide (108). Because her involvement with Derek means that she is shut out of her own ethnic community, Angie is in an even less enviable position than either Jackie's or Tuyen's parents—she is effectively abandoned by any potential community.

These various spaces of codified difference—the Paramount and other clubs, the Vietnamese restaurant, and the apartment where Angie lives—show two different responses to the city's intransigence to its inhabitants who occupy positions of difference: temporary resistance through a counterpublic space or surrendering to prescribed expressions of difference. For all these first-generation characters, the public sphere is denied them because they are not *of* this place and, thus, separate from the dominant life of the city. All the places and spaces they occupy are predicated on their own marginalization from the sites of bureaucratic and political power in the city. For, while subaltern counterpublics have an emancipatory potential, they necessarily stem from a peripheral position. White bourgeois Toronto remains separate from their activities throughout.

Cosmopolitan Places in the Global City

The children of this first generation have a different sense of their position in Toronto. The cosmopolitan second-generation characters move fluidly between these different worlds instead of seeing only rigidly demarcated worlds with strict rules for entrance. While the white power centres of Toronto do not appear in the characters' movement through the city, the implication is that it is because these areas are of no interest. The *real* life of the city for these characters takes place in areas that would be rejected by the white elite of the city as dirty and dangerous. In these abandoned areas of the city, these characters are able to reassemble and recombine parts of the city in ways that acknowledge their own presence and force recognition of their experience of Toronto. Tuyen and Carla's apartments become a microcosm of this process. These "slum apartments" (25) are liberating places where they are able to break out of the confines of their parents' homes—Tuyen has even "surreptitiously broken down the wall between her bedroom and the kitchen . . . she had virtually destroyed the apartment" (25). Indeed they tolerate some of the problems of these apartments because "anything was better than home" (22). For Tuyen and Carla, their parents' homes are spaces that exist in an uneasy relation to the past—in Tuyen's case, the omnipresence of the lost son, Quy; for Carla, the attempts to forget Angie by Derek and Nadine. Thus, they are locked into certain set patterns. Particularly for Tuyen, the past in her parents' home is static—everything is laminated and covered in protective plastic to preserve it (63)—whereas in her apartment the past becomes intertwined with the present in her art. Tuyen memorizes and recopies the only letter her father wrote to try and find Quy with the intention of including it somehow in a project (24). Her *lubaio* reflects her desire to make the past useful but to avoid becoming marooned there as her parents and older sisters seem to be.

Tuyen's decision to make art that draws from Vietnamese tradition mirrors the dialectical and dialogical process of self-definition that all the second-generation characters undertake; "they all, Tuyen, Carla, Oku, and Jackie, felt as if they inhabited two countries—their parents' and their own" (20). While these characters must come to terms with these opposing national affiliations, they remain rooted in Toronto in a way that their parents cannot be. Tuyen, Carla, Oku, and Jackie "ran across the unobserved borders of the city, sliding across ice to arrive at their own birthplace—the city. They were born in the city from people born elsewhere" (20). They locate Toronto as a provisional homeland yet "they'd never been able to join in what their parents

called 'regular Canadian life.' The crucial piece, of course, was that they weren't the required race" (47).¹¹

This conflict between the place where they situate their sense of belonging and that place's refusal to allow full identification pervades the lives of all the second-generation characters. The text, however, offers many moments where these characters attempt to bring some of the resistance of the counterpublic (such as the Paramount) into the heart of the public. These moments are particularly preoccupied with the characters' movement through place in the city. In *A Map to the Door of No Return*, Brand describes the black driver of a Vancouver bus as "driving across a path which is only the latest redrawing of old paths. . . . He is the driver of lost paths" (220). These characters undertake a similar process; however, instead of finding lost paths, these characters create new paths, paths which suggest a different orientation to the city.

These new paths are a kind of *flânerie* or psychogeography that interrupts the patterns of the city. Walter Benjamin's figure of the *flâneur* "did not know where his thought should alight or what end he should serve, [so] his detached strolling, sitting, and reflecting, itself a type of intellectual consumption, yielded no identity . . . he was allied entirely neither with the middle class nor yet with the metropolis" (Amato 174). While this in-betweenness (like that of the diasporic individual) suggests the difficulty of belonging, since the person does not fully belong to one place or another, the Situationists' conception of "psychogeography offered a sense of violent emotive possession over the streets" (Sadler 81) which then allows for a claim of belonging. Both ways of walking—the detached observation of the *flâneur* and the possessive drift of psychogeography—create a new way of thinking about metropolitan citizenship that is based on a re-imagining of public space as a place for more than just consumption and transportation.¹² Both Benjamin and the Situationists see walking as a potentially emancipatory act that reclaims the city for its inhabitants rather than its business interests. Unlike subaltern counterpublics, *flânerie* and psychogeography move into the city proper and are, therefore, a more visible inscription of resistance onto the city itself. Fraser suggests that "the concept of a counterpublic militates in the long run against separatism because it assumes an orientation that is *publicist*. In so far as these arenas are *publics* they are by definition not enclaves—which is not to deny that they are often involuntarily enclaved." (210; emphasis in original). This involuntary construction of counterpublics as enclaves is more easily avoided through *flânerie* and psychogeography, as

these are activities which take place in highly public places—sidewalks and highways—and therefore facilitate individual recognition of the city’s multiple places and spaces; as counterpublics are often driven by the development of a particular community, this recognition may not be as central to their development.

Brand is cautious in her claims about the possibility of movement inspired by *flânerie* and psychogeography. Jamal’s journey through the city towards the moment of Quy’s murder echoes Benjamin’s and the Situationists’ movement without a specified endpoint (316-18)—Jamal and Bashir know they want to steal a car but they do not know from where exactly. However, Jamal’s movement is tied explicitly to capitalist consumption—they travel past “used-car dealerships, dollar stores, cheap, ugly furniture stores, food stores, banks, and panicky ‘stop and cash’ booths” (316-17), discussing the relative merits of different luxury sports cars and car audio systems.

However, one instance of potentially emancipatory movement through the public places of the city occurs when Carla leaves Mimico Correctional Institute after visiting Jamal: she races through the city on her bicycle, going through Etobicoke, Runnymede, High Park, Bloor and Keele, Dundas, and by the lake. The unplanned course of this route echoes the psychogeography of the Situationists as “the drift [the physical action of psychogeography] was a combination of chance and planning” (Sadler 78). This non-linear journey at breakneck speed marks Carla’s attempt to write the city as she experiences it through her eyes and feet. Carla writes an urban text which contradicts the text the white bourgeois elite of the city has written for itself; she states that the “neat little lives” of those who live in the “upscale region of High Park” “make her [sick] to her stomach . . . [with] the cute expensive stores, the carapace of wealth” (29). Implicitly unlike Angie who, on her parallel walk (246-49), needs, but will not ask for, acknowledgement from those who hold power of whatever sort—the bus driver, the bank teller, the woman who runs the corner store (246-47), Carla is indifferent to the other inhabitants of the city on her ride and emerges feeling “a small *hopeful breeze*” (30; emphasis mine). Carla makes the city and its inhabitants acknowledge her, in a sense, through her incredible speed—it is hard to avoid noticing someone who moves through a place that quickly. For Angie, the other inhabitants of the city and the city itself have the agency to determine the course of her life to the extent that when they refuse to recognize her in ways to which she can respond, she kills herself. Carla, on the other hand, is the agent and the city is what she moves through. The city does not determine her actions the way

it does her mother's. Angie remains the object of the urban gaze whereas Carla situates herself as a fluid subjectivity who cannot be contained by the gaze because of her speed.

Angie's and Carla's different ways of seeing the city also draw attention to how the city is not just an assemblage of architectural and natural places but also consists of other, unknown inhabitants; the city is both a collection of human beings and buildings. Angie along with the other first-generation characters seems far more attuned to the human presence in the city and understands herself in relation to them and the recognition this human presence does or does not extend to them. Conversely, Carla (along with the other second-generation characters) understands the city primarily in architectural-spatial terms, an understanding of the city which reflects that of Benjamin and the Situationists. As Carla recognizes, Angie dreams of going elsewhere, whereas Carla herself "loved the city. She loved riding through the neck of it, the triangulating girders now possessed by the graffiti crew. She loved the feeling of weight and balance it gave her" (32). Carla's love of the city is thus tellingly understood in spatial terms. However, while Carla is aware of the impact of the material city on her understanding of herself, she along with the other second-generation characters find a community within which to recognize themselves. In celebrating a Korean win in the World Cup, the text depicts this community. Carla, Tuyen, and Oku celebrate alongside Korean, Brazilian, and Japanese fans (among others)—something which is impossible for the first-generation characters who are isolated along clearly defined ethnic lines. Unlike Angie, who is rejected by her family for her interracial relationship, Carla "wav[es] a Korean flag and sing[s] '*Oh, Pil-seung Korea*'" (219). While the World Cup can be an occasion of resurgent nationalisms that emphasize borders and boundaries, it also offers an opportunity for an expression of exuberant cosmopolitan citizenship—a form of citizenship that the second-generation characters all eagerly embrace. Moments like these during the World Cup are ones which make visible the interface between the human and spatial elements of the city as they break down, however briefly, the ghettoizing boundaries of the city. "The social order relies on boundary maintenance (of the body, identity, community, the state)—and the social order is, in so many ways, spatialized, and certain bodies make this process visible" (Holliday and Hassard 13); the bodies celebrating the World Cup make visible a moment where these boundaries are, at least temporarily, broken down. Nonetheless, while this World Cup celebration marks a moment of exuberant cosmopolitanism, it is temporary.

Once the World Cup tournament is over, the social order returns to “normal.” This end is made even more final when Jamal and Bashir murder Quy. While the novel finishes with this murder (Quy is presumed dead—though there is no authorial confirmation of this), the consequences of it are left unclear yet one might assume that the social boundaries broken down by the World Cup will be resurrected in some fashion.

Jackie’s clothing store, “Ab und Zu,” is another instance in the text which shows the uncertain longterm outcome of breaking down boundaries. The store is located “just on the border where Toronto’s trendy met Toronto’s seedy . . . and [she] had had the foresight to think that the trendy section would slowly creep toward Ab und Zu and sweep the store into money” (99). Like Jackie herself and her friends, the store is a porous interface between the past and the future (something which is only further highlighted by the store’s name—German for “now and then” (133). It acts as a physical manifestation of their sense of themselves in the metropolis yet also points to the constant potential for capitalist co-optation of liminal spaces and subjectivities—something which Jackie, in fact, desires.

The store is one place where Jackie leaves a trace of her existence as a black businesswoman; however, in her mind, she also re-imagines the city into a more beautiful place—leaving an imagined and idealistic trace of her desired existence. Jackie sees the lack of beauty and openness in the public housing where she lives and grew up as something which further exacerbates her parents’ (and the other inhabitants’) sense of loss over the Paramount and the people they once hoped to be. The apartment buildings with their narrow and dark hallways and the grounds that are covered in cement and asphalt contribute to the sense of hopelessness that Jackie does not want to become mired in. Sherene Razack suggests that “such spaces are organized to sustain unequal social relations and [such] relations shape space” (1)—something which Jackie echoes in her sense that “space [in the apartment buildings] might have triggered lighter emotions, less depressing thoughts, a sense of well-being. God, hope” (262).

To resist the lack of hope these buildings create, Jackie replants the city in her mind: “Between her parents and Vanauley Way, she wondered what she was going to do. She did them all a favour by making a plan. If the city didn’t have the good grace to plant a shrub or two, she would cultivate it with her own trees and flowers. And so she did. In her mind” (265). Jackie makes the city over in her mind, allowing herself to see the possibilities of the city, but she does so in a way that shifts these possibilities from a politics of struggle

to a more compromised politics of aesthetics. The newly planted city is a different city from that which her parents live in; it is a world where she sees possibilities instead of ever-narrowing realities. Yet this newly landscaped city exists only in Jackie's imagination. It cannot, therefore, be taken away like the Paramount was taken away from her parents nor can it provide a moment of real emancipation. By looking at the city in a new way and leaving imaginary traces of herself on it, Jackie imagines a vision of the city where she is a fully recognizing *subject*, not just a recognized *object*, yet this change remains imaginary. The graffiti crew, however, bring that vision to life through their various images painted throughout the city and, most explicitly, through the mural they create at the end of the novel where jungles co-exist with the CN Tower and elephants drink from Lake Ontario (302). Kumaran and his crew make physical images that echo Jackie's flowers yet, in physically representing these images, they cultivate the city in ways that Jackie only imagines.

Indeed, the way the graffiti crew in the text understands their work—“painting radical images against the dying poetics of the anglicized city” (134)—is equally true for all the work done by these second-generation characters: they all radically interject their own belonging into the sterile anglicized city. Instead of relying solely on counterpublic spaces which are predicated on their own marginalization, these second-generation characters radically reimagine public space, resisting the colonizing hegemony of the city's white bourgeois elite. Saskia Sassen suggests that

the global city is . . . the new territory where the contemporary version of the colonial wars of independence are being fought. But today's battles lack clear boundaries and fields: there are many sites, many fronts, many forms, many politics. They are battles being fought in neighborhoods, schools, court rooms, public squares. They are fought around curriculums, rights, identity. Their sites of resistance are streets, parks, culture, the body. (197)

The second-generation characters of *What We All Long For* are part of Sassen's battle to decolonize the city. They fight their colonization by both the white hegemony in the city that others them, and their parents' desire for them to remain tied to a homeland to which they have no physical connection. That Quy is murdered in Toronto rather than in the more unstable settings of displaced peoples' camps and the Thai criminal underworld suggests the impossibility of the return to the homeland that the first generation desires. The city acts as an interface between the individual and cultural representation and, therefore, displays received cultural values, yet the city

is where these values are most conducive to being subverted as we go about our daily business (Savage, Warde, and Ward 145). Tuyen, Carla, Oku, and Jackie work to make public spaces ones where hegemonic cultural values are not imposed, but where new, cosmopolitan identities can be forged.

NOTES

- 1 Benjamin 423.
- 2 In this article, I will be using “place” to denote sites determined primarily by materiality or fixed location. I will be using “space” to refer to sites that are either primarily symbolic, or simultaneously symbolic and material.
- 3 This fraught relationship is most clearly dramatized in Cam’s and Tuan’s relationship with Vietnam—a place which is the homeland and to which they feel a certain degree of commitment but is also the place where Quy, their eldest son, is lost and which is, therefore, the site of traumatic alienation.
- 4 Kit Dobson suggests that the power structures of Toronto seek to “reterritorialize drifting bodies, and ensuring their ongoing motion becomes a key concern in Brand’s novel as her characters mix and merge within Toronto” (90). The second-generation characters in the novel form “communities from below” (89) through this deterritorialized movement. I suggest, instead, that Brand’s characters territorialize themselves in ways that disrupt these “proper” forms of reterritorialization—homes in the suburbs, quiet, disciplined bodies in public places, and so on—that are imposed upon them.
- 5 A place whose invisibility in Toronto Brand foregrounds: it is “a prison kept like a secret” (28).
- 6 One place where the characters are not invisible is on the subway in the opening pages of the novel. However, they are shown to be violating conventional behaviour on the train—they are noisy and talk about love (2-3). The weight of this convention—silence in public spaces—eventually leads them to stop speaking altogether. They are, thus, taken from a moment of great visibility to one where they are as invisible as every other person in the train: they’re “common like so many pebbles, so many specks of dirt” (3).
- 7 Beverley Skeggs argues about this embodied (perceived) criminality that bodies “are the physical sites where the relation of class, gender, race, sexuality and age come together and are embodied and practiced” (quoted in Holliday and Hassard 3).
- 8 Carla, while the daughter of a white mother and black father and thus of mixed race, is also the only main character who can “pass” for white. Indeed, when she is first described in the novel, the narrator speculates that “she might be Italian, southern” (3).
- 9 Yet, as Molly McKibben suggests in an article about the possibilities of feeling at home in public places, “Tuyen is of Vietnamese ancestry, and Carla is described as so pale she is virtually unrecognizable as a Black woman, whereas Jackie and Oku are unmistakable Black, the novel further suggests that despite Toronto’s cultural diversity, Blackness is the least ‘normal,’ the least ‘at home’ in the Canadian city” (518). Tuyen’s Vietnamese parents are the only parents who are financially successful; Carla’s father, Jackie’s and Oku’s parents are apparently less financially successful.
- 10 Tuan is able to make use of his engineering training in the layout of the restaurant (67). Cam’s professional skills, however, remain unused—suggesting that the opportunities to resist assimilation (however infrequent or small) are even less accessible to her than to him.

- 11 Toronto as a cosmopolitan city in the novel seems to be separate from Toronto as a Canadian city. The city, for the most part, seems like an urban island unto itself with very little mention given to the country within which it is situated. Thus while the characters in the novel clearly territorialize their cosmopolitan subjectivities in the physical place of Toronto, the novel itself reiterates a common vision of the global cosmopolitan city as de-nationalized and even de-territorialized.
- 12 Marlene Goldman argues that Brand posits “drifting” as “an alternative to the boundedness of home and the nation-state.” However, in Goldman’s article and in Brand’s work, drifting is connected with identity construction and is also more suitably synonymous with Deleuze’s and Guattari’s notion of deterritorialization. It is, therefore, somewhat more metaphorical and abstract a practice than the Situationist’s practice of drifting which refers to a specific action in urban centres and is less about identity construction *per se*.

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<http://www.sinoreel.com/blog/fengyan/3>

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<http://www.baiji.org/start.html>

A Newfoundland Diaspora?

Moving through Ethnicity and Whiteness

In her narrative *Memoirs from Away: A New Found Land Girlhood*, published as part of Wilfrid Laurier University Press' Life Writing Series, Helen M. Buss/Margaret Clarke¹ recounts a trip back to the island of her birth, some four decades after she first left it. She describes exploring a now-deserted Newfoundland outport and reading "its story in the language of the graveyard's headstones" (13):

These bleached-white testaments tell the history of so much of Newfoundland, the brave, tenuous communities of interconnected families, the generations of lives spent in these small worlds of the coves, their ultimate diaspora. It would not be surprising if we were to meet someone from Sudbury or Seattle or Singapore climbing up through the underbrush to see her ancestor's graves. (14)

In this moment of reflection, Buss/Clarke locates her own migration from Newfoundland within the history of Newfoundland as a whole; what she calls the "ultimate diaspora" of Newfoundlanders from these small outports to St. John's, and the mainland beyond, is the almost teleological conclusion to a history of settlement and hardship. The imagined narrative of this one place becomes representative of Newfoundland as a whole and, for a moment, in the bleak atmosphere of the graveyard, it as though the entire island has emptied.

For over a century, Newfoundland has experienced a staggering amount of out-migration to other parts of North America, with the flow reaching new heights in the years leading up to and following the 1992 cod moratorium. Between 1971 and 1998 net out-migration amounted to twenty per cent of the province's population (Bella 1). This out-migration has become a significant

part of Newfoundland culture. In his review of Buss/Clarke's memoir, Malcolm MacLeod also refers to this massive outflux as a "diaspora," noting that a whole body of Newfoundland migrant literature describes experiences of "displacement, adjustment and nostalgia for a distant, past homeland" (98). Many writers and critics have used the term "diaspora" to describe Newfoundland out-migration and its accompanying literature (e.g. Dragland, O'Dea). But almost all have done so in passing. They do not address the full theoretical intricacies of the term as a word once reserved for the Jewish diaspora, which has taken on the loaded and emotional connotations of victimization, mass trauma, and the legacies of colonialism. Is this usage appropriate to describe the significant impact that out-migration has had on Newfoundland's individuals, communities, and culture? Or is it merely an example of what Khachig Tölölyan calls the "promiscuous" proliferation of the term "diaspora" in both popular and academic discourses, a proliferation that empties the term of its traditional meanings of "exile, loss, dislocation, powerlessness and plain pain" (8-9)? Clearly Newfoundland out-migration is both statistically and culturally significant. But can Newfoundland out-migration, as a predominantly white, economically motivated movement that occurs mainly within Canada, legitimately be considered "diasporic?"

In this paper, which is part of a larger project on the idea of a "Newfoundland diaspora," I first suggest that diaspora does usefully describe the phenomenon of Newfoundland out-migration, because of the connotations that diaspora traditionally carries, and because applying the term in this context necessitates a careful examination of the place of Newfoundland identities within the Canadian nation-state. Secondly, I interrogate the assumptions about the concept of diaspora that make this move so controversial, working through the complex and often contradictory relationship between diaspora and the slippery concept of ethnicity. Using Buss/Clarke's memoir as a case study, I suggest that Ien Ang's concept of "postmodern ethnicity" usefully articulates the strategic process of identification involved in the construction of a Newfoundland diaspora. Finally, I examine the connections between diaspora and race, asking whether Newfoundlanders' predominant "whiteness" ultimately disqualifies them from diasporic identification.

The Newfoundland Diaspora

The concept of diaspora has several connotations that helpfully illuminate the complexities of Newfoundland out-migration. As Tölölyan reminds us, "diaspora" suggests painful and coercive displacement, a connotation that

demands a careful re-examination of the experience of labour and economic migrations. While privileged compared to the violent displacement of refugees, such movements can still involve trauma and lack of choice. The final report of the Newfoundland and Labrador Government's Royal Commission on Renewing and Strengthening Our Place in Canada, released in 2003, states that "with job losses in many parts of the province being so severe, and without sufficient growth in employment opportunities elsewhere in the provincial economy, people have been forced to choose between unemployment and out-migration" (35). When faced with the inability to support oneself or one's family, unemployment versus out-migration is not much of a choice at all. Newfoundlanders who make the *decision* to leave may not feel as though they had a *choice*. Not all migrants are placed in this extreme position. But together they reflect a culture of out-migration wherein leaving becomes almost inevitable for people of all classes, ages, and regions of Newfoundland. This pervasive pressure to leave is often experienced as a painful rupture from home and identity, and this loss is reflected in much Newfoundland literature.

The title of Buss/Clarke's *Memoirs from Away* immediately identifies the disjuncture between the two poles of diaspora, that of the Newfoundland homeland, which the author left with her family at the age of fourteen, and the current location "away." She recognizes that she "cannot return to my homeland. After four decades of living on the Prairies I am from 'away' and therefore cannot come home" (9-10). She explains that "in Newfoundland 'away' is the word they use to explain the crass, the ignorant or the merely mysterious acts inevitable to the condition of being foreign to a place" (10); drawn out of the perceived threats of Canadian assimilation, the label "Come From Away" prevents her from a homecoming. For Paul Gilroy, Cho, and others, this inability to return easily is a defining aspect of diaspora (Gilroy 124; Cho "Turn" 19).

Despite this rupture from the homeland, a strong connection to home or the idea of home is also key to most definitions of diaspora (Safran). For James Clifford, this connection "must be strong enough to resist erasure through the normalizing processes of forgetting, assimilating, and distancing" (310). As sociologists Leslie Bella, Harry Hiller, and Tara Franz have found in their studies of Newfoundland out-migration, migrants often maintain connections to Newfoundland and Newfoundland culture by preserving ties with people back home, by maintaining a strong desire to return, by consuming Newfoundland products, and by establishing diasporic communities

abroad. For Buss/Clarke, the connection to home is maintained through more personal and intangible means in her drive to revisit her memories and identity in her writing. But even her most sentimental recollections are always tinged with loss.

William Safran identifies feeling “partly alienated and insulated” from the new “host society” as one common characteristic of diaspora (83). Although Newfoundland is a part of Canada, many migrants to the mainland both feel different from other Canadians and find themselves the brunt of “Newfie” jokes and stereotypes (Bella xiv). While Buss/Clarke has spent most of her life away from Newfoundland, she remarks on the first page of her memoir that in her own country she “often find[s] [her]self uncomfortable” (1). While she considers this discomfort with her own identity a quintessential part of being Canadian (2), there is a suggestion that it is her Newfoundland origins that, in part, make her identity feel fraudulent and isolating. Later, she reflects briefly on her experiences in school as a young diasporic Newfoundlander: “we were way ahead of the prairie kids, but lost out in the end because they laughed at our Newfoundland accents and we felt inferior” (126). She does not dwell on this moment of prejudice as an audible minority, but it effectively evokes the alienation that members of diasporas feel in the new host society, the feeling that they are not “fully accepted” (Safran 83).

“Diaspora” has a complex and often contradictory relationship to nation. As Jonathan and Daniel Boyarin argue, diasporas challenge the notion that the modern territorial nation-state is the “unchanging ground of identity” (31). But at the same time, Ien Ang persuasively argues that “the transnationalism of diaspora is actually proto-nationalist in its outlook, because no matter how global its reach, its imaginary orbit is demarcated ultimately by the closure effected by the category of the diasporic identity itself” (“Together” 144). As a concept that constantly problematizes nationally drawn boundaries and identities, diaspora is particularly useful to articulating Newfoundland’s vexed relationship to the idea of nation. While the current migration of Newfoundlanders occurs primarily within Canada, this movement often highlights the uneasy fit between the province and the state. Prior to Confederation in 1949, Newfoundland was a dominion with a distinct history, and many see Confederation as the loss of the Newfoundland nation. Confederation was won with a mere fifty-two per cent of voter support, and has been the subject of ongoing conspiracy theories. Today, the same economic struggles that have propelled out-migration lead many Newfoundlanders to feel discriminated against, economically exploited, even “colonized” by

Canada, which is blamed for the destruction of the fish stocks and resented for continuing battles over oil revenues. Newfoundlanders, then, do not always easily assimilate into new homes in Ontario or Alberta, even though they are moving within the nation of their citizenship. In works by David French, Wayne Johnston and others, the individual alienation that the expatriate feels in mainland Canada mirrors the larger alienation of the province within the Canadian state. Both French's 1988 play *1949* and Johnston's 1999 memoir *Baltimore's Mansion* depict the Confederation moment through the eyes of displaced Newfoundlanders, emphasizing the loss that these characters feel as Newfoundlanders doubly divided from their nation.

Buss/Clarke begins her narrative with the memory of Confederation, an event that, in contrast to Johnston and French's characters, her family supported, but that also becomes distilled into a key moment in her construction of self. She describes standing as a little girl on the eve of Confederation beneath the maple trees in her backyard (the symbolism of the maple is noted), ritualistically declaring "I am a Canadian; I am a Canadian; I am a Canadian; I am a Canadian" (2), as though the performance will close the gap between the words and the personal experience of identity. From the second page, then, we are made aware of the contingency of, and invention of, Buss/Clarke's Canadianness. While she is Canadian by citizenship, she is not Canadian by birth. This moment of "coming to Canada" (1) introduces the narrative; she uses rhetoric of immigration to forecast her later physical immigration to the mainland and the "awayness" that qualifies her voice.

Newfoundland, then, is not just a province of Canada but, in poet and novelist Michael Crummey's words, a "lost nation" and a place with a unique cultural history that maintains a powerful hold on the formation of identity. The concept of diaspora invites us to consider how Newfoundland identity is constructed, both within and in opposition to the Canadian state. Clearly, Newfoundland identity is not dependent merely upon place of residence, but is rather a more complex affiliation involving nationalism, genealogical kinship, cultural heritage, collective memory, and feelings of marginalization in relationship to other Canadian identities.

Are Newfoundlanders "Ethnic?"

Frequently, diaspora connotes "ethnic" identification. In her influential 2000 book, *Scandalous Bodies: Diasporic Literature in English Canada*, Smaro Kamboureli does not in fact differentiate between "diaspora" and "ethnicity" as concepts. As she writes in her preface, "although they are different,

their genealogies overlap, and I have decided to work with their intersections rather than to offer definitions that could at best be provisional” (viii). While many diaspora theorists have proposed definitions of diaspora that are not dependent upon ethnic identification, in Canadian contexts the terms are often inextricable. If Newfoundland out-migration can helpfully be considered a “diaspora,” are Newfoundlanders “ethnic?” How is Newfoundlandness defined and demarcated if not by place of residence?

Applying the term “ethnic” to Newfoundlanders does create some discomfort amongst both academics and Newfoundlanders. Such a claim to ethnicity threatens to confuse the history of colonization. For some, it suggests homogeneity and ethnic absolutism, erasing the presence of Aboriginal peoples and recent immigrants, as well as the long conflicts between classes, religions, and rural and urban dwellers. It could be interpreted as the appropriation of ethnic identity in order to increase the cultural capital of members of a perceived dominant white majority. As James Overton warns, the idea of a Newfoundland ethnicity has been largely invented and commodified by a growing tourism industry (49). It thus often allows what Kamboureli calls the “performative manifestations of heritage” (106)—the exotic cod-tongue-eating, kitchen-partying performance of “Newfoundlandness”—to stand in for actual experiences of identity.

Despite these dangers, for those who study Newfoundland out-migration, “ethnicity” has been a helpful concept for articulating Newfoundlanders’ community formations and sense of difference in the hostland. Bella argues that

Newfoundlanders “away” in Canada are a distinct ethnic group. Many Newfoundlanders can trace their roots in Newfoundland further back than most mainland Canadians. Newfoundland has its own dictionary. The Newfoundlanders participating in this study belong to a “true ethnic group,” associating together because they view themselves as alike in important ways, such as common ancestry, experience and culture. However, Newfoundlanders are invisible in Canadian literature on ethnicity and multiculturalism. (vi)

While the criteria that Bella uses to define ethnicity here may be contestable, clearly Newfoundland ethnicity is, for her, a helpful and important claim to make to further her understanding of the experience of out-migration. Similarly, Hiller and Franz, in their study of online “diaspora” communities, claim that

The intense loyalty which Newfoundlanders feel to their homeland has produced a nascent or emergent ethnicity that is rooted in distinctive speech patterns and word meanings, vibrant myths and folklore about the past, a strong sense of

history and a pervasive group consciousness . . . All of this has occurred in the context of economic underdevelopment and dependency and frustrations over political and economic control. (736)

For Hiller and Franz, Newfoundland ethnicity is demarcated not only in diaspora, but also at home, in Newfoundland's relationship to the rest of Canada. Ethnicity, then, is a way of articulating Newfoundlanders' sense of difference. In her study of the large Newfoundland expatriate community in Cambridge, Ontario, Karen Dearlove quotes Dick Stoyles, known as the "mayor of Newfoundlanders in Cambridge." "Some people think Newfoundlanders aren't an ethnic group. But we are," Stoyles argues. "We have our own language, our own food, our own music" (qtd. in Dearlove 10).

At this point, then, it is necessary to consider exactly what is meant by the term "ethnicity." "Ethnicity" has been used almost synonymously with "minority" or "race," suggesting experiences of prejudice and marginalization. But elsewhere, "ethnicity" has been regarded as a term co-opted by the discourse of multiculturalism in order to circumvent issues of race; it has been associated with delineations of whiteness and, therefore, privilege. As Sneja Gunew notes, "'ethnicity' as a defining category was initially employed as a differential term to avoid 'race' and its implications of a discredited 'scientific' racism. Ethnicity was more easily attached to the European migrations which proliferated around the two world wars" (16). In still other contexts, "ethnicity" is meant to reference neither privilege nor marginalization, but rather the cultural heritages to which everyone may lay claim, so that English is just as much an ethnicity as, say, Chinese. Kamboureli argues that under the Multiculturalism Act (1988), "treated as a sign of equality, ethnicity loses its differential role. Instead, it becomes a condition of commonality: what 'all Canadians' have in common is ethnic difference" (100). This false image of ethnicity as equality "dehistoricizes the social and political conditions that have discriminated against many Canadians" (101), and hides the fact that a white majority still dominates the country.

I want to locate my analysis of the Newfoundland diaspora at the juncture of these conflicting meanings of ethnicity. By straddling these contested and contradictory connotations of marginality, privilege, *and* equality, I am able to reference the prejudice and feeling of difference that many Newfoundlanders experience in relationship to the rest of Canada, and their desire to articulate their feeling of difference within the dominant discourse of Canadian multiculturalism, while simultaneously acknowledging the ethical difficulties with marking a settler culture and province of Canada as

“ethnic.” What I am moving towards, then, is a strategic ethnicity, marking a *process* of identification, in Stuart Hall’s terms, rather than a biological or cultural certainty (“Diaspora” 392). What I have in mind is Ang’s concept of a “postmodern ethnicity”:

This postmodern ethnicity can no longer be experienced as naturally based upon tradition and ancestry. Rather, it is experienced as a provisional and partial “identity” which must be constantly (re)invented and (re)negotiated. In this context, diasporic identifications with a specific ethnicity (such as “Chineseness”) can best be seen as forms of “strategic essentialism” (Spivak 1987: 205): “strategic” in the sense of using the signifier “Chinese” for the purpose of contesting and disrupting hegemonic majoritarian definitions of “where you’re at”; and “essentialist” in a way which enables diasporic subjects, not to “return home”, but, in the words of Stuart Hall, to “insist that others recognise that what they have to say comes out of particular histories and cultures and that *everyone* speaks from positions within the global distribution of power.” (36)

I strategically invoke postmodern ethnicity, then, as a means of theorizing the Newfoundland diaspora and its complex relationship to the rest of Canada as a particular position of power.

While the phrase “postmodern ethnicity” is Ang’s, in her important 1988 work *Canadian Postmodern*, Linda Hutcheon argues that the postmodern takes a unique shape in Canada, citing the country’s ethnic diversity as an “ex-centric” impulse that leads naturally to a postmodern aesthetic (3-4). Kamboureli critiques Hutcheon’s privileging of “ex-centricity” for appropriating marginalized identities into a new master narrative of postmodernity itself, erasing ongoing conditions of violence and grievance (168). I agree with Kamboureli’s concerns, but Kamboureli’s recourse, to reserve “ethnicity” for groups who feel marginalized by a dominant white majority, is also problematic. As Margery Fee writes, while “Anglo-Canadians are seen as without ethnicity, as possessed of a ‘Canadian’ ethnicity, ‘ethnic minorities’ are limited to ‘ethnic writing,’ [which] is instantly devalued as both less than national and therefore, less than literature” (270). As Fee sees it, “the assumption of ethnicity may indeed be deployed to add to the privilege of the already-privileged, but it also has the potential to lead to an understanding of how that privilege has been ideologically constructed” (272). The universal application of ethnicity is crucial to acknowledging, rather than erasing, the differences between ethnicities in terms of hierarchies of power. Ang’s linkage of ethnicity with the postmodern, with its connotations of historiographic metafiction, fragmentation, invention, and fluid or hybrid identities, becomes a useful discourse within which to think Newfoundland identity and diaspora.

Buss/Clarke's Diasporic Double Consciousness

Buss/Clarke's two names are emblematic of a fragmented postmodern identity. While she signs off her foreword with the statement that a "desire for the self that is joined to all the others and the otherness that makes me who I am, leads me to sign myself . . . Helen Buss / Margaret Clarke" (xiii), the effect of the slash is not one of fusion, but rather places emphasis on the fissure. The origins of her names—the maiden name of her childhood versus the married name of her adopted western home—also identifies the slash between them as the rupture of diaspora.

Diaspora enables both identities to exist simultaneously, divided by space as well as the passage of time, so that Buss/Clarke imagines that returning to Newfoundland space as one point in "the territory of [her] life," (6) will also enable a return to a past identity. As Susanna Egan argues, "autobiographers of diaspora privilege space over time in order to retain all their possibilities. Space, as realized in these narratives, enables plural identities to coexist simultaneously despite their being contra-dictory [sic]" (158). For Buss/Clarke, once those spatial distances are collapsed, her careful demarcations of identity are threatened. She writes "the idea of walking in my old neighbourhood has, over the years, become mysteriously fearful. The memory of feeling like a ghost when I went there in my twenties, my refusal to set down my foot there when I had come a few years ago, had built a kind of anti-nostalgia in me: the dread that some carefully shaped identity would disintegrate by the very act of touching the ground" (15). Her identity as a Newfoundlander, (re)constructed from "away," depends upon that spatial distance, that diasporic location.

For Buss/Clarke, the condition of diaspora makes her at home nowhere. She feels "unreal" in Newfoundland, like "a woman haunted by unmade stories" (5). She can only lay claim, then, to a *postmodern* version of Newfoundland ethnicity, which allows her multiple identities to coexist. As Buss writes in her 2002 study of women's memoirs, *Repossessing the World*, "[m]emoir's acts of survival are restoration, reformation, and reinvention. Through making the old alive in the new, we can perform acts of repossessing the self and the world" (34). Instead of being "haunted" by her precarious identity and lack of stories, Buss/Clarke finds that a postmodern "reinvention" or reconstruction of a "New Found" identity and history is an important way of repossessing her homeland. She is therefore able to claim a sort of Newfoundland ethnicity and a diasporic connection to homeland without committing to origins as the only or main source of identity.

Buss/Clarke locates her own constructed and self-reflexive Newfoundlandness within the context of Canadian multiculturalism. At the end of the memoir, she visits the Museum of Civilization in Ottawa. She notes that the European settlement of Newfoundland is absent from the display:

I was beginning to feel the loneliness of my Canadian identity again. My ancestors—unlike the First Nations peoples, unlike the Basque fishermen, unlike the Acadians, unlike the Québécois, my ancestors—with their fish flakes and their cabbages—were not part of the origins this national museum chronicles. (152)

While Buss/Clarke's Canadian identity includes her Newfoundland history, it is a "lonely" identity; the official Canadian histories described by the national museum exclude her origins. Newfoundland does not enter into the museum's "story of Canada" until Confederation. The phrase "my people" immediately references Buss/Clarke's own ancestors, but it also asserts that Newfoundlanders as a group form an identity equal in importance to the Acadians or the Québécois. Buss imagines an alternative set-up for the museum, in which a plethora of diverse voices are collected in multimedia memoirs, and fantasizes about her niece, who is also named "Margaret Clarke," attending:

I think she should be able to take up all the threads of her history and pattern them as she wants with the history of many others in the museum. And as she does so, she should be learning a way to make an identity that does not portray women's lives as merely a backdrop to the histories of men. She should be given many possibilities of identity so she can make her own story. (153)

In this moment, Buss/Clarke privileges her memoir as having the potential to locate Newfoundland heritage within the larger narratives of Canadian history and multiculturalism. As she theorizes in *Repossessing the World*, "The memoir is increasingly used to interrogate the private individual's relationship to a history and/or a culture from which she finds her experience of her self and her life excluded" (3). Buss thus privileges memoirs as giving voice to marginalized or "excluded" subjects, and equates her marginalization as a woman with other forms of exclusion, such as the marginality of her home province. But her references to "seaming together" an identity out of many "possibilities" is a decidedly postmodern vision of how Canadian identity might be both performed and represented.

For Sara Ahmed, the feeling of being at home is like inhabiting a "second skin," and thus the ruptures of migration are often felt as physical discomforts. Diaspora entails a split between home as place of origin, and home as "the sensory world of everyday experience" (90). Buss/Clarke's inability to

place her foot on the ground in her childhood neighbourhood emphasizes the irreconcilable rupture that diaspora has caused between the homeland and the physical body. This rupture becomes a driving force behind her writing. Reflecting on an earlier trip to Newfoundland, she writes that she “felt like a ghost haunting a former life. I remember not liking that feeling. It was the beginning, I think, of being overly conscious of my disconnectedness from my own lived life, the uneasy way you have to feel in order to be driven to words, driven by desire for those small moments when, writing, you live inside your own experience, your own body” (4). The moment of writing becomes a moment of reconnection between her body and her homeland, a resolution of the multiple and “unreal” identities that occupy her. But these moments of reunion with the body are fragmented, experienced as temporary sensory memories rather than a coherent narrative where home and body coexist in perfect union.

Often, such feelings of diasporic homelessness are attributed to the alienation of the racially marked body. But how do migrants who are racialized as “white” understand their own experiences of homelessness? It *could* be argued that Newfoundlanders like Buss/Clarke, who describes being laughed at for her accent, are victims of racism despite their prevailing visual “whiteness.” Bella tentatively makes this move, pointing out the negative impact of “Newfie” jokes and stereotypes, which sometimes results in migrants not being able to find work or being denied credit (xiv). Bella also cites many Newfoundlanders’ deliberate attempts to lose their accents as possible “internalised racism” (xv). Clearly these examples constitute prejudice and discrimination, but are they “racism?” Is the postmodern ethnicity that I have laid out merely a euphemism for racialization? And if not, how do “white” identities fit within the phenomenon of diaspora?

Postmodern Ethnicity and the “White Diaspora”

Newfoundland is characterized by an overwhelming whiteness and Anglo-Celtic heritage; a mere 3,800 people in the province, less than 0.8 per cent of the population, considered themselves “visible minorities” in the 2001 census.² I do not want to suggest by any means that Newfoundland identity is exclusively or definitively white, but the movement’s demographic makeup raises some important questions.

When “White Diaspora” as a category is considered it is usually as a form of colonial expansion, such as Gillian Whitlock’s definition of “white diasporas” as the “distinctive and highly organized programmes of migration

which were a feature of nineteenth-century Anglo imperialism” (91),³ or Catherine Jurca’s “ironic” usage of the phrase to highlight white American suburbia’s self-representation as victims. These usages, regardless of their intended ironies or awareness of privilege, for me, problematically obscure diaspora’s connotations of uneven power relationships with the new “host” society. Canadian historian Donald Harman Akenson carefully works through the etymology and theoretical development of the term “diaspora,” yet he also abandons many of the useful definitions that have developed in recent decades in order to locate the colonial settlement of English-speaking Canada within a wider British ethnic and cultural nexus. This usage seems to form the opposite of the precise and “textured” view of history that he advocates (395), by suggesting that the migrations of every group to Canada can be considered in parallel terms. If the category of diaspora were so capacious, why not simply call it “dispersal?” At what point does the term become meaningless? Akenson cites the Armenian diaspora as an example proving that the term can apply to “white” groups, but by considering “diaspora” merely as a label to be applied rather than as, in Cho’s useful terms, a “condition of subjectivity” (11), he quickly slides down a slippery slope to the conclusion that any movement, including the colonial invasion of Canada, can and should be considered diasporic. The “whiteness” of the Armenian diaspora cannot be easily compared to the “whiteness” of British imperialism.

Cho convincingly maintains “that there is an important relationship between diaspora and race which must be attended to whenever diaspora is invoked” (personal communication). Given this relationship, an in-depth analysis of the ways in which diasporas and *whiteness* may clash or intersect needs to be done. On the one hand, the usages of writers like Akenson, Jurca and Whitlock raise troubling questions about how not only the word “diaspora” but the word “white” should be defined. On the other hand, as Lisa Grekul notes, many other diaspora scholars “implicitly collapse racialized [as not white] and diasporic identity” (xvii). In contrast to the unsettling idea of an “imperial diaspora,” then, traditional diasporas such as the Irish are often discussed in terms of their racialization, their tenuous and shifting relationship to whiteness (Ignatiev). Certainly many “white” ethnic groups have long histories of traumatic mass displacement. But is placement outside of whiteness necessary to consider them in diasporic terms? Where “whiteness” is usually a code for “privilege,” what tools do we have for understanding these movements that account for both their whiteness and their dislocation?

I want to linger on the definitions of “whiteness.” It is, as Gargi Bhattacharyya, John Gabriel, and Stephen Small argue, a shifting and self-contradictory concept, an “imaginary” rather than an ontological state (12). As Daniel Coleman argues, whiteness has been tied to a Canadian national project of “white civility,” which manages different identities through the learned performance of normative colonial manners and behaviours. While whiteness *suggests* the biological markers of skin tone, it is for most theorists a marker of privilege. It is therefore possible for a diaspora to “become white,” as Noel Ignatiev famously argues in his study of Irish immigrants to the US, or as Myrna Kostash describes as a Ukrainian Canadian who has been differently racialized within her lifetime.⁴ As David Roediger outlines, historically there has been a lot of anxiety about the racial identity of the Jewish diaspora as well, despite the group’s diversity. If whiteness is pure privilege, then we are forced to either consider marginalized “white ethnic” groups as being somehow outside of whiteness, or else, to simply include them in a homogeneous category of privilege. Himani Bannerji makes the latter move in an essay on Canadian multiculturalism. She writes: “In the presence of contrasting ‘others,’ whiteness as an ideological-political category has superseded and subsumed different cultural ethos among Europeans. If the Ukrainians now seek to be ethnics it is because the price to be paid is no longer there” (144). This kind of homogenizing of European identities as white privilege and supremacism undermines Bannerji’s otherwise important anti-racist intervention. Ironically, if part of the power of whiteness is its very invisibility or, as Bhattacharyya, Gabriel, and Small put it, its “naturalization” as being not a race but a norm, then Bannerji’s move to homogenize whiteness merely reinforces this naturalization. I think we must both acknowledge the privileges of whiteness, and highlight the fact that whiteness is a shifting, arbitrary, and constructed category that does not always guarantee that privilege. We must acknowledge that white people are not *naturally* white, but rather also undergo a process of racialization, a process of attributing white racial characteristics to groups (Bhattacharyya, Gabriel, and Small 1). By defining whiteness exclusively as a form of natural privilege we not only ignore real experiences of “white ethnic” subjugation, we also reinforce the ability of white people to appear, in Patricia Williams’ words, “un-raced” (qtd. in Bhattacharyya, Gabriel, and Small 24).

Yet as Robyn Wiegman persuasively writes, in response to studies like Ignatiev’s and Roediger’s, history “rescues contemporary whiteness from the transcendent universalism that has been understood as its mode of

productive power by providing prewhite particularity, which gets reproduced as prewhite injury and minoritization” (137). Wiegman thus warns against the manoeuvres that Ignatiev and Roediger make as they seem “unable to generate a political project against racism articulated from the site of whiteness itself” (139). The project of making whiteness particular, then, must not simply make claims to marginality or victimization, a kind of “empathetic otherness” (Fee and Russell 188), but must acknowledge the privileges of whiteness even as it attempts to explode white universalism and invisibility.

It is crucial to carry this work of making white identities visible into the realm of diaspora studies. I argue that equating “diaspora” with “racial minority” in Canada serves to reinforce the notion of a homogeneous, dominant white majority, so that racialized “others” are always outsiders, always from elsewhere. This move threatens to refigure experiences of racism as a problem of integration, rather than of systemic, institutionalized racism. By beginning to disentangle race from diaspora we expose the fact that racism is endemic in Canada, and that marginalization does not hinge upon identification with an origin elsewhere. I therefore propose the “Newfoundland diaspora” as one means of resisting the ways in which the term can reinforce a false binary between an indigenized, universalized white monolith, and racialized others perpetually asked “where are you *really* from?” I hope to engage in a project of, in Wiegman’s terms, “not simply rendering whiteness particular but engaging with the ways that being particular will not divest whiteness of its universal epistemological power” (150).

Buss/Clarke’s contradictory relationship to identity illustrates how I want to deploy the concept of Newfoundland diaspora as a particular but sometimes powerful whiteness. Buss/Clarke reveals anxiety about her whiteness, suggesting that her feeling of homelessness in her own body may be derived in part from the disturbing connection between the whiteness of her skin and her homeland as a site of colonization. In a striking scene near the end of the memoir, she describes her childhood fantasy of living in mid nineteenth-century Newfoundland, and rescuing Shanawdithit, the last Beothuk, from domestic service before she dies of consumption. In this fantasy, “we live in a teepee of course and hunt in the winter and live off berries in the summer. . . . In my stories we never seem to make much effort to find her people or mine. We live outside of history” (134-35). Buss/Clarke admits that “nowadays I realize that this fantasy is merely an appropriation of someone else’s tragedy, honed into story to make me feel less shame” (135). But despite this self-consciousness, the moment nevertheless reinforces

stereotypes and a problematic power relationship between the white woman and the colonized Beothuk. By indigenizing herself into a constructed matriarchal tribe, Buss/Clarke denies Shanawdithit's history as a victim of colonial invasion, and appropriates her into a story that serves Buss/Clarke's own feminist agenda. Buss/Clarke's narrative, then, reveals anxiety and self-consciousness about her own whiteness, even as it reinforces the privileges of whiteness; she, and not Shanawdithit, is in a position in which she is able to re-imagine (and "repossess") the outcome of history. I argue that refiguring Newfoundland ethnicity as an identity that, like turn-of-the-twentieth-century Irish immigrants to America, is sometimes excluded from whiteness, dangerously obscures the privileges that Newfoundlanders and diasporic Newfoundlanders do enjoy as a predominantly white group.

Diaspora as a concept, then, must be able to accommodate both the pain and marginalization of the Newfoundland migrant in displacement, and the relative advantage of Newfoundlanders in relation to groups that do not benefit from the privileges and histories of whiteness. Buss/Clarke's memoir is emblematic of the contested positionings of postmodern ethnicity. She embodies both the marginalization of diasporic location and the privileges of whiteness, often occupying both positions simultaneously. Her diasporic condition, then, does not necessitate an essentialized identity racialized outside of whiteness, but rather enables the postmodern invention and multiplication of identities as she moves between various spatial and conceptual "homes."

Conclusion

I argue that we need an understanding of diaspora that can accommodate whiteness, taking into account the complexities of race and whiteness, the way in which the application of whiteness may shift over time, and the different definitions of whiteness as a state of privilege, a racial category, or an affiliation with imperial histories. My suggestion of a postmodern Newfoundland ethnicity is one means of playing with the shifting borders of diasporic definition, allowing me to think through Newfoundland out-migration alongside other Canadian diasporic identities, without falsely homogenizing their experiences. I think that the complexities and inherent contradictions of diaspora helpfully reflect the complexities and inherent contradictions of Newfoundland out-migration, and that with a careful, nuanced examination of the term, its application to Newfoundland can be helpful to both studies of Newfoundland literature and to diaspora studies in general.

NOTES

I am grateful to Margery Fee, Laura Moss, and *Canadian Literature's* anonymous readers for helpful suggestions on various versions of this paper. Thanks also to Daniel Coleman for pointing me toward several useful resources, and to Lily Cho for sharing her thoughts on diaspora and race with me. Portions of this paper were presented at TransCanada Two at Guelph University in October 2007; thanks to the conference organizers, and to conference attendees who provided helpful feedback.

- 1 As she informs us in the foreword, "Helen Buss," her first name and her married name, is the name she has given her "sensible side," which she uses in her academic writing. "Margaret Clarke," her middle name and her maiden name, is the name she gives her "inner child" (xii), and is the pen name she has used as a creative writer. In her memoir she finds these two separated identities coming together, hence the dual authorship of the book. These two identities are in constant dialogue throughout the memoir; I therefore refer to her as "Buss/Clarke" throughout this article in order to acknowledge this duality.
- 2 Statistics on visible minorities from the 2006 census have not yet been released.
- 3 Robin Cohen, in his 1997 study *Global Diasporas: An Introduction*, traces the word's etymological origins to Greek imperialism, justifying a category of diaspora that he labels the "imperial diaspora." Yet the predominance of the Jewish diaspora, and the term's appropriation by postcolonial theory, has shifted it from its Greek imperial origins to a very different meaning, with hundreds of years of experiences of persecution, slavery, and indentured labour behind it. I don't think that this history can be easily erased.
- 4 Interestingly, FLQ leader Pierre Vallières removes the connotations of privilege from whiteness in his claim that the Québécois are the "white niggers of America." His usage of the racial term "nègres" further complicates the relationship between the seemingly biological markers of colour and the place of particular ethnic groups in Canadian society.

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underground

little sapling girl you hide your mother's wounds, wear
your father's shame. pain is yesterday's news. your skin's
untorn thickened knotted fibers of yarn, already aged,
weighted by memories, stories you have yet to learn.
your limbs fold over, your body bends into itself, arches,
reflexively, into the ground, an indentation, a question
gone unanswered. you hold onto everything you know in
your stone heavy belly. unaccustomed to sun, you forget
to grow language or roots. you are mistaken for the armour
you've become but don't know how to carry. and you
think you can't be seen, accidentally.

On Becoming an Indian Starboy

Given my own coordinates, transnationalism seems to have been bred in the marrow. It and various forms of queerness swing hand in hand. The stories I write, the art I make all speak of the desire to break and simultaneously to braid given identities, to make transformative leaps into, as optimistic as this may be, a self-defined “other.” But if this breaking and braiding of identity is a sword, it is not mine only—it is, I believe, the way of the Trinidadian living abroad.

For Indians crossing the Kala Pani to work as indentured labourers on the sugar cane estates of the Caribbean where slavery of African peoples had just been abolished—1834 and onwards—an opportunity existed to reinvent themselves in new landscapes where their histories were unknown, where caste, for instance, could be shed or, for the enterprising and daring, changed. When prospective Indian labourers just off the boats from India were asked by the British officers at the port of entry in Port of Spain, the capital city of Trinidad, what their names were, many hadn’t understood the question and had answered with the name of the place in India from which they had come, and others, indeed understanding the question, decided, why not?—in a new land they might as well become whatsoever and whosoever they fancied, and in clever moves gave answers like Maharajah and Rajkumar, and these words became their surnames. I suspect that once an Indian from India stepped foot on one of those boats in the nineteenth century, bound for the islands of the British Empire, in leaving behind language, family ties, community, the village, tradition in general, very specific religious rites, he or she was transitioning into a queerness of no return. Those of us

in more recent times, responding to a restlessness no doubt provoked by that earlier rupture, have migrated elsewhere yet again. And, now, far from Trinidad, we continue to invent entirely new ways of being. Yet by dint of the original displacement, we seem destined to limp along in a limbo of continuously changing and challenging queerness. It is the how and the why of the stories that are written.

Contrary to the official narratives in history books on the origins of Indians in Trinidad and Tobago, my family's account was that our ancestors had not worked as indentured labourers as had the ancestors of other Indo-Trinidadians who had arrived during the same period. Knowing that the stigma of being the descendant of cane field labourers still sting many, and curious about how stories of origin are massaged, I have spent years asking for clarification.

My grandmother's sister, in her early nineties, was fully *compos mentis* when, fortified by a glass of brandy and an eager listener with a notebook and a pen in hand, she spun, or rather related, the following story. In good Indo-Trinidadian fashion, it involves a pumpkin vine of family relations, a lost inheritance, troubled love, a get-away boat, and a gun.

My grandmother's grandfather was a pundit who, for an unknown reason, was interested in making the journey from Calcutta to Trinidad in the late 1800s. As part of my great-great-grandfather's contract of travel to that island, he did indeed work as an indentured labourer in the sugar cane fields. But it had been quickly revealed, not a month after his arrival in Trinidad, that he was a pundit and he was consequently immediately relieved of his labourer duties and pressed into service as a pundit for the community of Indians on the estate he had been assigned to. Apparently, a month of indentured labour does not necessarily an indentured labourer make.

Bulaki Pandit, this great-great-grandfather of mine, performed religious duties for people who often paid him in kind, for example with vegetables grown on the meagre plots around the barracks in which they were housed. His wife, my great-great-grandmother, apparently set up a roadside table on which she sold the excess gifts. If this reminds you of Ganesh and his wife Leela in V.S. Naipaul's *The Mystic Masseur*, it is not a coincidence. Stories come from somewhere. With savings from this enterprise, that great-great-grandmother was in time able to purchase a pair of cows. From the sale of cow's milk, she saved enough money to have a shed built, a shed with a window, and a door that could be locked. This shed replaced her roadside table. Soon enough, her sons were involved in this little shopkeeping business.

More milk cows were bought, and eventually, in a particularly creative jump, one car, a Ford with the license plate number H24 was acquired, and a man was hired to run the car from a town named Tuna Puna to Port of Spain and back. It was the beginning of a little early twentieth-century Trinidadian-style empire that would, in no time at all, include the first bus service company on the island, orange estates, and a full-fledged dairy farm.

One of Pandit's sons, Sookdeo Misir, married a poor girl who came from Nepal. Perhaps it was because Sookdeo had been brought up by an enterprising mother that he had the foresight to imagine a formal education for the girls within his family.

But before his daughter Basdevi, later to be my grandmother, could finish high school at St. Joseph's Convent in Port of Spain, she eloped, to the utter horror of the other students, the nuns, and, naturally, worst of all, her family. She ran off with a man from a different class background, a taxi driver, and although he was of Indian origin his family had come not from the north like themselves but from the south of India, from Madras, and *his family* had indeed worked in the cane-fields as labourers. For some reason that grandfather's entire family, including his mother, my *aji*, who never spoke any English, had all converted, not long after their arrival on the island, rather queerly, from Hinduism to Catholicism. With this elopement, Grandma was disowned from her family, cut off from the inheritance of a massive wealth that she would watch her cousins enjoy in later life.

And, ah, there was indeed a gun. Apparently it was aimed and waved (and in Indian movie-style I imagine it to have been fired . . . several times, the shots still resounding half a century and more later) in the raised hand of my grandmother's father's brother, as he stood helpless on the wharf screaming at Carl Mootoo who, having just eloped with Basdevi Misir, was taking off with her on their honeymoon in a little . . . here it comes . . . or goes . . . put-put boat headed for "down the islands," Basdevi's head covered in a scarf, wearing that and sunglasses to hide her identity, the silver of the sea and the sky glancing off her glasses and off the gun. (The scarf, shades, and shots are the details that make a story; the rest is cross-my-heart truth.)

It was only in her golden years that that same eloping, class- and religion-hopping grandmother's interest in all things Indian and Hindu bloomed, and it did so, then, beyond control. I would have been in my early teens then. At the time Trinidad was in the throes of the Black Power movement, and the land throbbed with the fever of a nationalism that was for the first time being defined geographically and locally. In the midst of such chaos, Grandma, in

an act of her own personal anarchy, insisted that we, her grandchildren, learn to speak Hindi, read and write Sanskrit, attend poojas, sing bhajans, and read the Bhagawat Gita. She insisted that my sister and I (we were then oblivious to her school-skipping, eloping ways) be good Indian girls, a phrase we heard endlessly in those days.

But her admonishments were taking place in a house and in a Trinidad that was no longer simply throbbing but rather exploding, often violently, with the desire for an independence that went beyond that on paper, an independence felt in the fabric of daily life, from the most important issues of equal opportunities among the races in the job place and in government, to issues of the heart.

Just before I entered my teens, my father, the son of that grandmother, announced himself to be an agnostic, and became a politician. In the country there was a sense that the days of the British strategy of divide and rule that had led to conflicts and barbed wire divisions between the various displaced and colonized peoples, between their races, religions, and countries of origin, had to be transcended. We weren't sure what would replace this mess or even if anything could, but it was a project, begun even before independence of 1962, and one that continues, still messily, to this date.

It is interesting that what was seen to be Trinidadian in those days was all that was related to black culture, to the culture of those of African origin, and to aspects of French creole and Catholic life—that is, the steel pan, carnival, calypso. What was of Indian origin remained in the minds of others as foreign, mysterious, inexplicable, dark, and would only in the last two decades or so, seep into the Trinidad consciousness as no longer of a mythical place called India, but as a uniquely Trinidadian hybridization.

At age sixteen, living in such a turbulence, I dreamed of knowing all that was forbidden by my Indian-centred and disapproving grandmother: I wanted to belong to the tinkling of the backyard steel pan; to know on Carnival Tuesday the sweat on the faces and skin of masqueraders as their bodies paraded loose down the streets, to belong to the beat of their shuffle, weary by the end of the day, but relentless in a ritual that was to my mind a testament and pledge to citizenship, to the albeit idealistic unity and equality of the races, and to independence. It was the passion to be a participant in the dreaming up of, the designing and construction of a carnival costume, to be visited on Carnival Tuesday by a “robber character” and to be the recipient of his poetry and theatre. I remember the short walk on Ash Wednesday morning from the car where the chauffeur dropped me and my sister off, to

the entrance of my school gates, collecting up the shiny colourful sequins that had fallen off the costumes of the revelers who had passed on that route while they jumped up to the beat of the brass band and the steel pan band. The sequins seemed to tremble in my hands as I imagined the rhythm of music and motion still to be in them. Things have changed since then, and changed back again, back and forth numerous times, but when I was a child, though there was a handful of radical Indians who participated in these events, those Indians would have been considered of low breeding, and if that Indian was female, she would have found herself bereft of respect.

I didn't understand what being a good Indian girl meant to anyone else, but to me it meant having to be a tourist in my own country. A town-Indian girl, burning with the town's current fever of Trinidad nationalism, wanted to assert her Trinidadianess, to take up space on a stage and gyrate her hips like the young black girls in the new national dance troupes. She wanted to dress in a costume and jump in the streets to the rhythm of calypso music on carnival Tuesday. She wanted to play, not the piano, but pan. How delicious Moonlight Sonata sounded, how rich Beethoven's Fifth, played by the steel pan orchestras, their sounds heard from the practice yards, floating across the hills and coconut trees, tinkling through neighbourhoods and entering one's dreams well into the early hours of morning. She wanted to recite, not Keats, Shelley nor Blake, nor even passages from her grandmother's Bhagawat Gita. What she wanted to shout out loud were the words of the Caribbean poet Linton Kwesi Johnson who wrote:

outta dis rock
shall come
a greena riddim . . .
vibratin violence
is how wi move
rockin wid green riddim
de drout
an dry root out

Years later I would leave Trinidad to go to Canada to study at a Canadian university. In Trinidad, where almost half the population was of Indian origin, I had never met anyone who was born in India—to my mind, in other words, a bona fide Indian. Here I met real everyone—Ukrainians, Jews, Egyptians, Japanese, Chinese, Australians. Everybody! And among them, My First Real Indian.

It surprised me that, in the moment of meeting him, the latent Indianness my grandmother had been trying to pry open blinked like a suddenly

awakening eye. I was ready to learn of myself, to learn my culture from him. I was finally ready and willing. But not long after meeting him, during the course of a Trinidadian-style Indian meal which in my rented student's apartment in London, Ontario, I had with great pride and anticipation prepared for him and a few other friends, he informed me in front of everyone that Trinidad's version of all things Indian—the food, the religion, the people—were inauthentic. Among his words to me, said with laughter surrounding them, perhaps to offer some kind of pillow to a truth, were “you are a bastardized Indian.” On the outside I laughed back, agreed, played with the idea, but inside I felt ill, ill-formed, ill-informed, and hugely confused.

I was actually born in Dublin, Ireland, where my parents resided while my father attended medical college. I wasn't a year old when my mother brought me to Trinidad where I stayed with her parents. She left for Ireland immediately again to be with my father. Then, when I was about six they returned to Trinidad and I was reunited with them. And so the ruptures, bred in the marrow more than a century before, were continued in this “new world,” and were appropriately complicated further—fodder for stories galore.

It is there, in Trinidad, that I lived until 1981 when I immigrated to Canada. As I mentioned before, politics was very much a part of our life. My parents discussed the island's politics at the dinner table, and even as children we were encouraged to know and to have opinions about what was going on. So as an immigrant to Canada, guided by an ingrained sense of social responsibility, when I started applying for arts grants from Canadian funding sources, I decided it was time to make a commitment and to become a Canadian citizen. It was a mildly traumatic decision, but any feelings of disloyalty to my home country, to Trinidad, that is, were diminished by the knowledge that Trinidad permitted dual citizenship.

Later on, after I became a Canadian citizen, I returned home for a visit and at immigration at the airport I entered the residents' line up. When I reached the immigration officer he took my Canadian passport and asked me why I had entered the residents' queue. I told him that I had dual citizenship. He studied my passport and said, “Dual citizenship? With which two countries?” and I responded, as if he were daft, “Well, Trinidad and Canada!”

He said, “Trinidad permits dual citizenship, but you were born in Ireland and this passport indicates that you are Canadian, so you have no Trinidadian citizenship.”

I explained to him that my parents were Trinidadian, that I lived there from the time I was a few months old until I was twenty-four, and that my

entire sensibility was Trinidadian. He listened, but he was unmoved. Seeing the blank stare on his face I stopped myself from pleading with him; I decided not to bother to tell him about the subject matter of my paintings: papaya trees, cattle egret, carib grackle, baliser, and chaconia, of my sense of light and colour, and of my writing—or even that my childhood bedroom was still intact in Bel Air, La Romain. He stamped my passport and handed me a paper that I was to present to immigration on my exit, to prove that I had not overstayed my welcome.

Not long after, I was invited to read from one of my novels at a writers' festival in Ottawa. I was asked because my novel had just been nominated for some prizes and it was very much in the news at the time. It turned out, just by chance, that the major theme of the festival was a showcase of Irish writers, and Seamus Heaney and others were brought over from Ireland. It was discovered on the opening night that I was born in Dublin. I told the story on stage of this fact being a mostly inconvenient footnote in my life and the cause of me losing my Trinidadian citizenship. And I read a well-received poem I had written called "All the Irish I Know":

Oh Sullivan! Oh Keefe! Oh Sharkey!
Mc Namee Siobhan Mcguire.
Naill Erin banshee begorrah?
Elish ni gwivnamacort,
Kavanagh!
Healy Mcliamurphy.
Dermot durcan, Healy!
Oh Sullivan, Oh Keefe, Oh Sharkey!
Leprechaun begorrah! (95)

There was much laughter, and a good bit of kidding around after. The Irish Consulate General happened to be in the audience. After the event the organizers began to introduce me to her but she cut them short and addressed me very sternly. She said to me, "Madam, whether you like it or not, you were born in Ireland, and you are Irish. There is nothing you can do about that. Or at the very least it would not be easy to renounce your Irish nationality. Ireland does not easily give up its citizens, you know."

The very first cinema that I was ever exposed to was when I was a child in Trinidad. My mother's father used to take me regularly, every other week, to the Metro Cinema in San Fernando to see the latest Indian movie that had arrived on the island. The only language I knew at the time was my child's version of Trinidad-style English. The movies were likely in Hindi, and even if there had been subtitles they would have been useless as I was not yet

reading fluently. But, thanks to a continuum of themes and actors from one film to the next, I quickly picked up the story lines, and recognized certain stars. I had been very enamoured then of Shashi Kapoor and his Elvis-look-alike brother Shammi, and in no time they and the roles they played became my models.

One could say that to this date the model of masculinity I am most at home with in my own performance of a female masculinity is that of the Indian starboy, as we called him back then, the one who was wronged, fought for justice in the fairest but loneliest of ways, the one who, only when he was outnumbered by an impossibly large gang of heavy-metal chain-wielding thugs and subjected to a beating that left him with a bloody but neat gash on the side of his forehead, would he finally be forced to clench his fists, and resort to violence. Against all odds and those kinds of numbers, he would, somewhat reluctantly at first but then with dance-like agility and the studied precision of a ninja, deliver a series of blows that would result in him winning back his dignity, the family that had mistakenly shunned him, his and their reputation, and the girl who had danced, sung, and cried with him (in his attire of incredibly beautiful vests and rakishly worn scarves) through wheat fields, around lakes, and on the slopes of the Himalayas.

On returning home from those movies I would stand in front of the mirror, an angled gash of red painted on my forehead, or a Band-Aid applied just above my eyebrow. I would slip my thumbs into the loops of my jeans, and in a flash draw my guns, or deliver a fistful at the face of my imagined enemy, or with a studied chivalry, lean my side against the dresser in my room as I applied an equally studied and contradictory softness of the gaze of the starboy as he looked longingly, yet smugly, at the object of his desire. I imagined her looking back up at me, noting my bloodied forehead, admiring my cream-coloured scarf, my tall cowboy boots, and accepting me fully for all that I was and was not.

In the days of the 1960s, the people in my country (not the country of my film-influenced imagination, but Trinidad) who held the balance of power in more ways than one, were still the whites—recently arrived expatriate Scottish and English ones, as well as the local ones descended from British and from French plantation owners whose families had been on the island many generations longer than mine. From seven-years-old until I was eleven I attended an exclusive private primary school in Vista Bela, Trinidad, where my sister and I, and one other brown-skinned girl named Joy, were the only non-whites. The remaining eighteen students were a mixture of Trinidadian

white children of bank managers and business owners, and children of white foreigners who were stationed on the island, attached in some administrative way to oil companies or construction companies. At that school our sole teacher was a white English woman, named Mrs. Kelly. Although my father was a doctor, he was of South Asian descent, meaning he was an Indo-Trinidadian, further meaning he was dark-skinned. I watched him, forever polite to anyone regardless of class or race, defer just that much more, however, to white managers, administrators, business owners. In turn we, his family, were let into those people's private lives, feted fully by them. In yet another twist in the rope of reciprocations our house was always full of white children come to play with us and to swim in our pool, one of the only two private swimming pools in the town then. At the cocktail parties my parents frequently held white couples were, by far, in the majority. Whiteness, the power it wielded for no other reason than itself, the style it seemed to own, was, naturally, as coveted as it was despised. White women were often objects of desire, as evidenced by calypsos—for instance, *The Mighty Sparrow's*:

Two white women traveling through Africa
find themselves in the hands of a cannibal head hunter
I envy the Congo Man, I wish I could go and shake his hand
but me, you know how many trap I set?
And still, I never eat a white meat yet

They also caused a good number of rumoured affairs and broken hearts. While there was a certain amount of social mixing allowed on the streets, in the sheets this was all but forbidden—by all sides, in general, and when it did occur, it was an underground affair or those involved suffered ostracization. None of this was lost on a hyper-aware child.

When *The Sound of Music* played in the cinema, the Indian starboy in me came face to face with her, or perhaps I should say, *his* first big love, Liesl, the eldest daughter of Captain Von Trapp. I so yearned throughout that movie, and the fourteen other times I saw it, to jump into the picture on the screen, transformed into my own version of Shammi Kapoor, to give Rolf, Liesl's Nazi love interest, a good thrashing, and to win the heart of Liesl, and the approval of her father Captain Von Trapp. If the origins of that white object of desire have been laid bare, old learnings die hard. You make a promise not to ever look at a white woman again, but before the line of that promise has been drawn, one rounds the corner, and you are left shaking your head at yourself, saying, well, indeed, promises were made to be broken.

In my Trinidad days I did not come across women whom I could have

pegged to be lesbian, the word even unheard of in my world then. But every fibre of my self seemed to act and react in different ways from all I saw of how the other females in my family, in our social world, and even on the public street operated. I scanned rooms, crowds, the streets, for others who might be like myself. I had the uncomfortable sense that my body (torso thick and waistless, eyes big wide open always staring, lips pouted in stern curiosity, slow to crack a smile, legs itching to run run run, arms wanting to swing a cricket bat, hands to snap at, stop a frog in mid-leap) was playing tricks on me. I offered myself the explanation that I was really a boy, a fact that would in time become clear to all—and I would win back my dignity, the family that had mistakenly shunned me, my and their reputation, and the girl who had danced, sung, and cried with me . . .

Time passed. No magic ever occurred, but tricks were still played: breasts grew, belly rounded, back and arms took on the proportions handed down by grandmothers, mother, and the daily profusion of Indo-Trinidadian-style sweets. From comments flung down like bits of dung that had accidentally dirtied the hands, I knew that certain kinds of female people and male people were laughed at, scorned, ridiculed, not accepted into “our” circles. I sensed that I was one of those name-less, community-less people.

It was clear that I would never be as pretty as girls who looked and performed the applauded version of what girls were supposed to be, and that I wouldn't be—and didn't want to be—as competent as they were in the ways of courting and being courted by boys, or be the object of potential mothers-in-law's interests and inquiries. To quietly underscore and ensure all of this I adopted a dress code that all but made me invisible. Jeans with loops for a good wide belt, wide enough for a holster and gun (which I wouldn't have used, except to scare away bores and bigots), baggy shirts that hid my straight-sided torso, with a collar and buttons, and on my feet flat, casual sandals or slippers, or easy-to-make-the-quick-get-away-in sneakers. This became my uniform, and it was in studied opposition to that of “real” girls—my sisters and the other girls in my school, the women with whom my mother socialized—who all wore a uniform of their own: blouses without sleeves that exposed their upper arms, round open necks that gave a glimpse of their neck and upper chest area, skirts, or slacks—never pants—that had side-zippers sown flat, and which reached above their ankles so that they didn't trail their shoes, and had little slits up the sides just above the ankle bone, and they mostly wore shiny open-toed shoes with slight heels that made them look as if they were tiptoeing about. While they dressed for the

male-female, heterosexual schedule of time, where boyfriends, marriage, babies, etc. were points along their route that told them how well they were doing, I dressed not to be noticed at all. And it is in the big expansive magical unruly baffling world of whiteness, both coveted and despised, that from young I instinctively sought cover. I just kept hoping that one day I would awaken to find a black stallion with a thick blond mane and tail contained in the garage, saddled and, though restless, waiting—I would leap onto its back and ride it away—either to real oblivion, or to unforeseen, redeeming glory.

Thirty years later, in Canada, the body passed on by ancestry and culture remains, juggled still into the old uniform which is occasionally modified, at least to keep up with changing fashions in jeans, shirts with collars, these days to take advantage of the current trend in cowboy boots and two- and three-toned runners. The Indian starboy's demeanour, too, persists. But in a predominantly white, lesbian landscape, particularly the one where on Friday nights girls become boys or bois—girl/boys/bois surely cursed by not having been brought up on milky sweets, yet blessed at birth with the tendency for the smaller breasts, the concave bellies, the bony backs, I often find myself fitting a bit like a square peg in a round hole. On those same Friday nights the Indian part of the Trinidadian in this starboy lifts his head. He knows better than to kohl his eyes, even though he wants to. By comparison he is flamboyant: God knows I have tried but I can't help the bright coloured scarf (silk, wool, embroidered cotton, pashmina, genuine pashmina, one hundred per cent hand made pashmina—pull it through a wedding ring, you'll see!) and earrings, rings and neck chains—pukka silver all—confounds the femmes and confuses the white-t-shirt butches, and what feels tough on the inside gets called, strangely, soft by the object of desire. Soft butch.

It is said that the soft-hearted, slow-to-fight starboy of old has been replaced in Bollywood by a tougher man, whose dance style is aggressive, his hand heavy on the throat of his love—a move made necessary in part by the West's manhandling of Bollywood and naming of the old starboy's ways as fey. On a recent trip to Delhi, India, I studied men on the streets—the bicycle rickshaw and auto rickshaw drivers, roadside sellers, pedestrians, sons, fathers. Many still sported earrings, all wore the most stylish scarves, several wore kurta down to their knees, and all wore slippers. They looked, in western terms, gay. I bet few were, though.

The Indian man on a Delhi street, soft looking, stylish, is my new starboy.

Ultimately, it is in my writing and in my creative art work that the Indian starboy rears up to fight injustice and to ask for tolerance and acceptance as

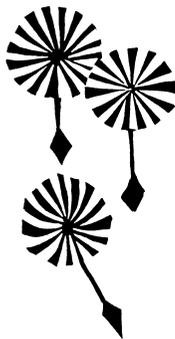
a person in a country and in communities that are constantly transitioning. It is through my writing he shows his quiet forcefulness and I am at my fiercest. It is on the page that he and I dare—dare to attempt to purse our lips and blow at the borders of lesbian identity, create new spaces where, assuming that gender is a trillion-headed venus, the inequalities and discrimination of genders within lesbianism itself get addressed, and where that multiplicity of genders is celebrated.

To be seen and listened to by at least one other person is a blessing. To be seen and heard by a community of like-minded people, friends, and well-wishers is healing. To be invited back by the mainstream gatekeepers is empowering.

Simply, I love fiction writing, for it is here that I get to play at these kinds of breakdowns and buildups. But even before I can get to this, as a writer I beg for longer notions of all that we are, rather than the shorthand ones, such as South Asian. Longer definitions take more time to express. In a sound-bite era it is, granted, difficult to take time. But as my queer Indo-Trin-Can stories suggest, transnationalism is not an entirely new story. It is an old, complicated, and on-going one.

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anon

I fear my words might be asking the same thing:
how to resist closure, how to display my sensibility
the sensuousness on starched pages and have it speak
to the concerns of my sisters and future children.
to desire to either fix or destabilize my own name.
I fear my poems argue for identity, to burn their own
brandings when spoken aloud but are too young
to know what they are. that they will come to me
one day from the shore drained of self no longer able to
speak the right tongue but what else should I expect
from this black body/white body/mixed-up confused body
who was never in the mind of Ginsberg's generation
destroyed by madness as he said in 1956. I fear the empty
fix I'm looking for will tie me down forever to that old bag
of tricks called choosing against context. I know that same
context drenched in history will come lash me with fire,
the types of fire that do not speak of love but would sober up
even Bukowski and the jazz poets is an unforgiving rattling
of bones. I fear those bones will be mine, anonymous,
underground and silenced, that I will be made into
an anonymous poem, that the myth of every document
signed anonymous being a woman is true and so I must wait
in the old style for the other to understand each line. these lines
frontlines in my hands in another language another sea pouring out
into a river as praisesong. it is not that I fear walking across water
but that the water may erase others'
marks on the sand.

Model Minorities, Models of Resistance

Native Figures in Asian Canadian Literature

In the special *Amerasia* issue titled “Pacific Canada: Beyond the 49th Parallel,” editor Henry Yu notes that despite similar thematic concerns in Asian Canadian and Asian American cultural production, works by Asian Canadian artists are also “entangled in broader cultural and political formations that speak to the importance of First Nations struggles” (xviii). The centrality of First Nations struggles in the Canadian political and cultural landscape is reflected in the representation of Native culture in Asian Canadian texts. Though these representations vary, Native presence in works such as Joy Kogawa’s *Obasan* and its sequel, *Itsuka*, SKY Lee’s *Disappearing Moon Cafe*, Kevin Chong’s *Baroque-a-Nova*, Fred Wah’s *Diamond Grill*, Helen Lee’s short film *Prey*, and the recently published Chinese Canadian and Native anthology *Eating Stories*, edited by Brandy Lien Worrall, signals an important avenue of comparative analysis for Asian Canadian studies. Current comparative Asian Canadian scholarship focuses primarily on the relationship between Asian Canadian and Asian American experiences, often situating these analyses within a transnational or a diasporic framework. Given both countries’ similar Asian immigration history and the growing interest on Asian diasporas and transnational circuitries, a comparative Asian North American literature seems to be an obvious field of study.¹ Addressing the many references to Native peoples in Asian Canadian writing, however, reconfigures Asian immigration within a colonial settler history and illuminates the particularities of Asian Canadian racial formation within a transnational US-Canadian framework.

This article examines how the representation of First Nations in Asian Canadian literature highlights the particularities of Canadian racial

formations that are not reducible to US racial formations, but yet cannot be understood independently of them. To reject US racial paradigms by insisting on Canadian specificity ignores US hegemony and the effect of US racial politics on Canadian racial discourse. One needs only to remember the protest and violence that erupted in Toronto when the Los Angeles police officers accused of beating Rodney King were acquitted. Asian Canadian representations of Aboriginal people, instead of revealing something about the experiences of Aboriginal people, reflect Asian Canadian negotiations of a racial formation that is shaped by US racial paradigms and reconfigured by Canadian racial politics. The term “Asian Canadian,” by virtue of its belated emergence in relation to Asian American Studies, suggests a “deferential” and derivative relationship to its more established southern counterpart.² As many scholars have noted, how Asian Americans have been racialized impacts how Asian Canadians are racialized.³ Asian Canadians, like Asian Americans, are often perceived as either perpetual foreigners (the yellow peril, the enemy alien) or as exemplars of successful assimilation, capital accumulation, and traditional Asian family values (the model minority). Whether as a threat to the national fabric or as an affirmation of national inclusiveness, the marginalization of Asians in North America is bound up with the racialization of capital and citizenship.

Through examining the work of prominent Asian Canadian writers, Joy Kogawa, and SKY Lee, I demonstrate how Native characters and culture are figured to contest the particular formations of Asian Canadian marginalization. The aboriginal status of First Nations, their struggle for self-determination and sovereignty, as well as the dominant culture’s romanticization of Native culture as ancient and outside the history of capitalism, are reflected in Kogawa’s and Lee’s presentation of Native characters as models of anti-racist resistance and as enabling figures of social-political critique. Furthermore, interracial romance between Native and Asian Canadian characters reshapes the model minority’s traditional Asian family into a hybridized Native Asian one, thereby authenticating Asian Canadian claims to belonging. This modeling of Asian Canadian identity on First Nation political resistance *and* dominant representations of First Nations posits Native characters as the “model minority” that Asian Canadians need to emulate. Because of the term’s codification with compliance, my use of “model minority” highlights an ambivalence that is foundational to Asian Canadian claims of belonging but is often elided—Asian Canadian status as settlers in stolen lands. “Model minority” in this instance gestures towards

the models of intelligibility, both of containment and resistance, available to minoritized and racialized groups within a hegemony that persistently frames racial discourse in terms of binary relations. Thus, my reference to “the Native” as a kind of model minority does not refer to actual peoples but rather points out the ideological work of fictionalized Native peoples in the elaboration of Asian Canadian racial formation.

Whereas US racial discourse is persistently framed in terms of black-white binaries, in Canada it is the experience of indigenous peoples that have become synonymous with racial oppression. Margaret Atwood in *Survival*, her oft-cited 1972 book on what is “Canadian” about Canadian literature, espouses a common perception: “the Indian emerges in Canadian literature as the ultimate victim of social oppression and deprivation. The blacks fill this unenviable role in American literature” (97). By reducing Canadian racial discourse to a Native-white binary, Atwood’s essentialization of Native peoples as the prototypical victim of Canada’s colonial history and institutionalized racism neatly relegates racism and colonization to features of the Canadian past in much the same way that the myth of the Vanishing Indian affirmed US frontier expansion. However, this is not the only form of Native otherness. Margery Fee, Terry Goldie, and Leslie Monkman have argued that the representations of Native peoples in works by white Canadian writers often say less about the experiences of Native peoples and more about white settlers’ fraught relationship to a harsh landscape. Their unease and fragmented sense of national identity signify a desire for a prelapsarian wholeness and innocence, embodied by the figure of the Native. Because of the functional importance of the Native in defining Canadian literature—to act as a foil for the rugged yet civilizing individual, to authenticate the settlers’ connection to the New World, or as the vanishing figure of nationalist nostalgia—works *by* Aboriginal writers are often displaced and eclipsed by works *about* them.

Though First Nations have been stereotyped as the ubiquitous victim of racial oppression, within minority communities they are often seen as models of resistance. In the late 1970s, Native organizations such as the National Indian Brotherhood (NIB—later reorganized as the Assembly of First Nations), the Native Council of Canada (NCC), and the Inuit Committee on National Issues (ICNI) succeeded in bringing Aboriginal rights and land claim issues into the national spotlight and participated in constitutional reform debates, which had been initiated mainly to address Quebec’s demand for sovereignty. Despite the collapse of the negotiations, the lessons

drawn from these debates led to better coordinated efforts to fight for self-government and land rights. Their legal challenges as well as their vocal resistance, argues Kwame Dawes, should be an example for other minorities in Canada:

Native Canadian Nations are especially well-positioned at the moment to bring about systemic change to Canadian policy towards them and they are acting. It is hoped that their gains will be understood by themselves, and by all society as models for the re-evaluation of the values and systems of governing that have existed in this country for a very long time. It is hoped that other non-white groups who have participated in the fight for fundamental change will be able to participate in the reorganization of the society's attitude to race relations during this period. (12)

Though the struggle for Aboriginal rights and self-government is ongoing, such struggle is often perceived as the example or model which other minorities striving to enter the legal and political process should follow. In the context of Canadian debates and negotiations on multiculturalism, sovereignty rights and national identity, First Nations people are viewed as emblems of resistance for people of colour, an implicitly Canadian "model minority."

Despite First Nations' politicization as a model for other minorities to emulate, the model minority thesis is usually invoked in relation to Asians in North America. Most explicitly aligned with the US racial discourse of the 1960s, the model minority thesis remains a powerful index of Asian containment in the United States and Canada. According to Keith Osajima, it emerged during a time of great urban upheaval, when the Civil Rights Movement, the rise of black militancy, and urban rioting seemed to contrast sharply with the upward mobility and successful assimilation of Asian Americans. The putative success of Asian Americans was attributed to Asian cultural family values, which emphasize education and a strong work ethic. Their success affirmed that the United States was the land of opportunity, and disproved "the black militant's claim that America was fundamentally a racist society, structured to keep minorities in a subordinate position" (450). Model minority discourse, therefore, is essentially a discourse of containment in which the economic success of Asian Americans is not only invoked to police other minorities, but also renders Asians and Asian Americans as intelligible only in terms of capitalist accumulation, as opposed to political participation or social activism. Because model minority discourse prescribes and inscribes economic success as the sign of having "made it," upward mobility becomes the central teleology of Asian presence in North America. Asian North Americans struggling to make ends meet and/or

who do not fit this stereotype are either invisible or simply model minorities in gestational form; their success is assumed to be inevitable since it is a function of traditional Asian family values. The emphasis on family values delineates assimilation as viable only through the domestic sphere of the nuclear family, shifting obstacles to assimilation and belonging away from structural inequities and institutionalized racism to the personal, and thus incidental, domain of the domestic. The essentialization of Asian culture, which underwrites the model minority thesis, also gives the stereotype of mobility across borders. Essentializing Asian domesticity makes national specificity irrelevant. In other words, domesticating the narrative of assimilation obfuscates the centrality of national borders in enforcing proper national subjects. And thus, while model minority discourse emerged out of a particular racial history in the United States, its logic of containment is transnational, in effect, upholding a “transnational discourse of whiteness” against which a homogenous Asian identity is defined (Dua et al. 3).

Model minority discourse’s racialization of Asians in North America figures belonging in terms of capitalist accumulation, but only so much; the reanimation of the yellow peril in the stories of Asian economic competition and domination demonstrates how being too successful can also be a threat.⁴ One example of the intersection of capital, citizenship, and the discourse of the yellow peril is the protest against “monster houses” in Vancouver, British Columbia. During the late 1980s and throughout the 1990s, the surge of anti-Chinese sentiment centred on the influx of wealthy recent immigrants, who were perceived as not only driving up real estate prices, but also responsible for destroying the neighbourhood aesthetic with architecturally invasive monstrosities.⁵ According to Peter Li, monster houses were viewed as, “architecturally unpleasant and environmentally destructive . . . they were seen as being built by greedy developers to appeal to the poor taste of wealthy Chinese immigrants, mainly from Hong Kong” (148). Described as destroying pastoral anglophone neighborhoods, Chinese immigrants were characterized as materialistic, bearers of a crass capitalism who were incapable of political consciousness, patriotism, or respect for the environment.

As Gary Okihiro has pointed out, the model minority and the yellow peril are not polar opposites, but rather two sides of the same coin. Both figure Asians in terms of capitalist accumulation and highlight the tenuousness of Asian claims to citizenship, rights, and belonging. The representation of the Native as a model minority for Asian Canadians is also informed by the characterization of Asians and capital. Here, Native characters are exemplary

figures of resistance and alternative models to capitalist accumulation. Just as Asian American cultural nationalists such as Frank Chin modeled Asian American political consciousness after African American oppositional politics, Asian Canadian modeling of Native resistance locates Asian Canadian racialization within the particularities of Canadian racial discourse.⁶ And just as Chin's admiration of African American resistance was expressed in terms that potentially reinforced dominant cultural assumptions about black masculinity and violence, the representation of First Nations in Asian Canadian literature, at times, also produces similarly ambivalent effects. One example of this idealization of the Native as an enabling figure of Asian Canadian social and political awakening is the representation of Father Cedric in Joy Kogawa's *Itsuka*. Whereas *Obasan* traces Naomi's personal healing and reconciliation with the past, *Itsuka* addresses communal healing through chronicling the politicization of Naomi and her participation in the ultimately successful Japanese Canadian redress movement. What is significant to note, however, is the extent to which the trajectory of her political awakening parallels that of her sexual awakening and her relationship to Father Cedric, a French Canadian Métis priest. At a meeting where Japanese Canadians debate whether or not to push forward with redress, Naomi thinks to herself, "I wouldn't dare admit it right now, but I'm not a true believer in redress. I'm not a true believer in anything much. . . . I may not know what I believe but I know whom I follow. I'm here mostly because Cedric is" (154). Later, as she becomes more passionate about redress, she sees love as inseparable from justice. In wondering what others think of her participation, Naomi muses, it "isn't money that drew me [to become involved in the Japanese Canadian community]. What would Nikki think if she knew I'd only become involved because of Cedric? . . . It's probably true that it's love, not money, that makes the world go round" (221). In *Obasan*, Aunt Emily's words—her activism, petitions, and archival collections on internment and injustice—"do not touch" Naomi and the rest of the family in Alberta because they "are not made flesh" (226). In *Itsuka*, it might be said that the words *are* made flesh through the relationship between Naomi and Father Cedric. It is her love for Father Cedric, what Naomi calls, "the fact of flesh" (208), and not any desire for compensation, that ultimately brings her out of isolation and into a politicized consciousness founded on community and justice.

From the opening pages of the novel, Father Cedric is presented heroically, simultaneously an adventurer and a sage, and connected to the land. To Naomi, he seems larger-than-life, a "free-roaming, French Canadian,

post-modern priest . . . a Buck Rogers from another galaxy” (5).⁷ Elsewhere he is described variously as ageless (5), intimately connected to a primordial or ancient landscape (159), and a wise spiritual guide (117). Though he is part French as well, it is his Native heritage from his mother’s side that he identifies with and which sustains his connections to the ancestral landscape. He tells Naomi on one of their outings to the forest, “The place of my great-great grandmother . . . You see these high cheekbones? They come from here. When I go back in my mind, it isn’t to France. It’s here. I begin here” (159). Margery Fee argues that Native peoples have a particular symbolic currency because of their perceived “autochthonous claim to the land” (18), which trumps anglo-colonial claims. Nationalism, Fee continues, “is the major ideological drive in the use of the Indian in contemporary English Canadian literature” (17). The romance between Naomi and Father Cedric, I would suggest, needs to be understood within this history of representations, in which the alignment between Asian Canadian and Native experiences poses a particular nationalist claim, despite its critique of Canadian nationalism. Early in their relationship, Father Cedric gives Naomi a Haida rattle, which he describes as an emblem of the kindness and shelter the Haida provided the Japanese Canadian men who fled to the remote Queen Charlotte Islands during the round up of World War II. “For you, Naomi,” Father Cedric tells her. “Maybe it will help us communicate?” (134). Symbolic transfers of ownership are sometimes represented in what Fee calls a “totem transfer” whereby a Native “voluntarily hands a totem (often an animal) over to a newcomer, thereby validating the white’s land claim and blessing the relationship between old land and new landowner” (21). Though this is not necessarily strictly a transfer of ownership, the hybridized rattle can be seen as the totem through which the relationship between Father Cedric and Naomi and, by extension, Native and Japanese Canadians is symbolically bridged and affirmed. Furthermore, the rattle is the only gift that connects Father Cedric to his own father, a parish priest who was sent away for falling in love and impregnating a young novitiate, his mother. “My mother always loved him,” Father Cedric tells Naomi, “This rattle told her sad stories about children who lose their fathers. It was made by a man who left his child” (108). This rattle, which had connected Father Cedric to his own lost father, connects Naomi to Father Cedric. The resonance of lost or broken families invoked by the rattle also suggests that their experiences of loss—the fragmentation and dispersal of the Nakane-Kato family during World War II—are parallel.

If the rattle can be read as a totem and the symbol of mutual recognition, then Father Cedric might be understood as the substitute for Naomi's loss. He is simultaneously father and mother, and it is through him that she is able to reclaim a primordial connection to the land that precedes national inscription. Not only does Naomi have trouble dropping the title "Father" as they become more intimate, but he "is as soothing as friendship. He cradles me as a mother holds her child, with care and confidence" (252). In her allusions to the fairy tale Cinderella, Father Cedric is both the prince and her "fairy god mother priest" (137). As many have argued, the fragmentation of the Nakane-Kato family and the absence of Naomi's parents can be read as a breakdown of the national family and the betrayal by one's own fatherland.⁸ Given the history of racialized citizenship and belonging, the union of Father Cedric and Naomi suggests a return to the natural world, a contrast to institutional inscriptions of national identity and citizenship. Through Father Cedric, belonging for Naomi is a visceral experience, and the boundaries between bodies and the elements blur:

The bodies that we are inhabiting are light specks—infinitesimal coloured things in a golden road, in a blip of time, dreaming we live and breathe and have our being. We are gliding into the world by rainlight, down the highways of the mind, the backwoods, the trailways, by word, by flesh. We are here to tread this dreaming earth, its surfaces, its winding private ways, by foot, by limbs, by eyes, by touch. . . . And with fingertip and tongue and tangled hair, through the falling air, through starlight, into stone, into stone become flesh, into the ancient myths of birth and rebirth and the joyful rhythms of earth, we are journeying home. (252)

The exploration of the body is indistinguishable from the exploration of different kinds of paths—highways, backwoods, trailways, private ways—that etch the psyche as well as the earth. The absence of differentiation, in which bodies are figured as ephemeral as light specks, enables the journey home. For Naomi and the Japanese Canadian community, their racialization and differentiation led to internment. In this moment, homecoming is figured as a return to a prelapsarian innocence where difference does not register

The return to wholeness and completion is a return to the childhood sense of security, where Japanese Canadians are Canadians and not "enemy aliens" and the government remains a benevolent parental presence. However, such parallels, which refigure Japanese Canadian redress as a restoration of familial ties, naturalizes the family as the ontological source and sign of wholeness through encoding the Native as synonymous with "nature." Such romanticization of the Native to authorize a humanist inclusion overlooks the ideological sedimentation of "nature" as prelapsarian and primordial which,

in turn, dehistoricizes Native cultures as essentially ancient and outside the socio-political institutions that characterize “Canadian” culture (Davey 105). This concurrent elaboration of political and romantic awakening reworks the redress campaign and the critique of institutionalized racism into a narrative of multiracial family reunion, whereby members previously deemed to be outside of the family are recognized and embraced into the fold.

While *Itsuka* situates Japanese Canadian redress within the framework of a multicultural family headed by a Métis parental figure, this liberal humanist coalition potentially also displaces decolonization struggles. The conflation of anti-racist politics with decolonization politics, as Bonita Lawrence and Enakshi Dua argue, potentially de-centres analyses of the continued colonization of Aboriginal people by co-opting decolonization struggles into a liberal-pluralist framework (131). Whereas *Itsuka* can be read as potentially rehearsing dominant representations of the Native in the portrayal of a Japanese Canadian political consciousness, SKY Lee’s *Disappearing Moon Cafe* can be read as a cautionary tale on the dangers of a belief in racial purity and of Chinese Canadian internalization of the terms of Canadian assimilation. Set against the anti-miscegenation and anti-Chinese immigration laws, the concern over family, bloodlines, and progeny is crystallized through the Wong family’s Native roots. Mary Condé argues that the fall of the Wong family could have been avoided had Gwei Chang not deserted Kelora, the half Chinese-half Shi’atko woman who rescues him, and had he recognized their son Ting An as his own.⁹ According to Condé, “It is [Kelora] rather than [Wong Gwei Chang] who is the first Chinese Canadian of the family. She is the daughter of Chen Gwok Fai and a Native Canadian woman of a ‘very wealthy, old and well-respected’ family. . . . It is to Kelora, if anyone, that the Canadian land spiritually belongs” (179). The Wong family and its successful business are founded not only on the disavowal of its Native family members, but also on a disavowal of how Native peoples helped the Chinese survive.¹⁰ Kelora, for example, not only saves Gwei Chang from exposure and hunger, but she salvages his flagging quest by guiding him to the bones of their Chinese predecessors. She had “peculiar intuition for locating gravesites whose markers had long ago deteriorated” (14). Kelora, described as possessing an intimate knowledge of the terrain and environment, is the bridge between him and those who came before him. Gwei Chang’s betrayal and return to China for a “real wife,” therefore, unmoors the family from its history and sets into motion the eventual end of the Wong family (in patrilineal terms) in Canada.

Condé's suggestion that Kelora is the "spiritual" owner of Canada is reinforced by her abilities to blend into the "natural" world. When they come upon each other, the incongruity of Kelora furthers Gwei Chang's sense of confusion. To him, she is "an Indian girl, dressed in coarse brown clothing that made her invisible in the forest. Her mouth did not smile, but her eyes were friendly—a deer's soft gaze" (3). Their meeting is unreal to him, an effect of hunger's hallucinogenic power and her other-worldliness: "In this dream-like state, he thought maybe he had died and she was another spirit here to guide him over to the other side" (2). Indeed, the other side that Kelora guides him to is not death, but life where humans exist in harmony with nature, a contrast to the enmity between humans and the landscape from where he had just been rescued.

Life out in the wilderness is described in terms of an equal economy of exchange, which seems to mirror ecological balance. As they explore the forest, Kelora explains to Gwei Chang, "If I need to gather cedar, then I have to say a few words to the tree, to thank the tree for giving part of itself up to me. I take only a small part too, but not today. . . . Many women have come here to gather what they need. When we walk in the forest, we say 'we walk with our grandmothers'" (13-14). Need, and not want, governs the limits of harvesting. Whereas in the earlier passage, Kelora is described as deer-like, here the forest is humanized as part of one's extended family. Even the location of the house that Kelora and her father Chen Gwok Fai live in reflects this delicate ecological balance. Their house is situated "on a very strategic spot" (9), at the nexus of wilderness, human civilization, and commerce. Their "home and vegetable garden [are] snuggled into the edge of a pine forest that crept in from the windward side of the mountain. And it made a welcome respite for the Indians who traveled up and down this busy avenue of exchange—'grease trail' they called it, naming it after the much sought-after fish oil they ate" (9). Not only does the garden, cultivated by human hands, exist intimately with that which tests the limits of human survival, but this blurred space is also bisected by an avenue of commerce. The representation of harmony with nature includes the equity of exchange. Located at such a strategic intersection, they give shelter to those who pass by, and in turn these travellers often leave tokens of thanks: "The exchange was fluid though, flowed both ways, depending on the seasons. Often enough Kelora and her father would share their food with a load of impoverished guests. Either way, it made a good life for them" (9-10). Here, the economy of exchange produces no surplus value, and the delicate balance of ecology

and economy are here intertwined, such that the rise and fall of trade is inseparable from the cycles of nature.

Life in the city, in contrast, is much different, where mobility is marked by the racialization of labour, gender, and capital. Mui Lan can only enter the country as a merchant's wife and only after paying the five hundred dollar Chinese head tax. Similarly, Fong Mei refuses to leave her husband Choy Fuk for Ting An for fear of becoming a waitress, which was perceived as equivalent to being a prostitute. If financial security and independence are precarious for women, then producing an heir, preferably male, becomes the privileged mode of production for them within the Confucian order. Their part in the consolidation of the family name becomes synonymous with the expansion of the family fortune. The following juxtaposition highlights this relationship: "Fong Mei produced only a girl, who tiny as she was, gave her mother enough omnipotence to vie for power and launch a full-fledged mutiny. . . . First, Fong Mei learned to drive a car; next she took her share in the family business and turned it into the most lucrative one of all—real estate" (134). Bearing a child initiates her entry as an agent in the capitalist economy, leading her to discover a talent in making a profit off property. What began as a family business, simply a means of maintaining livelihood, eventually expands into a capitalist venture through the commodification of land.

The link between reproduction and property acquisition reflects one of the central anxieties expressed by the yellow peril discourse. When the waitress Song An gives birth to Keeman, the white midwife translates her stoicism as evidence of the Chinese as a "capital breed" (133). Given the anxieties surrounding invasion by Chinese hordes, the phrase "capital breed" reinforces belief in the "innate" abilities of the Chinese to accumulate capital through labour, both reproductive and manual. The threat of Asian reproductive labour is reinforced by the threat of the invasion of an Asian labour force that will not only crowd out white workers, but eventually take property away from them. In this way, "capital breed" situates Asian model minority and yellow peril discourse in the language of biological and cultural essentialism, linking the relationship between capital accumulation, labour, and the family unit as the sign and source of Asian success and potential invasion.

However, just as the laws were implemented to preserve racial purity and "keep Canada white," Mui Lan's desire to perpetuate the family is based on a similar logic of racial purity and authenticity. The failure of her son Choy Fuk and daughter-in-law Fong Mei to have children is a source of endless bitterness and shame for Mui Lan. She imagines others saying, "What good

is all that Wong money when their family name can't even be assured?" (36). It is important to note, however, that Mui Lan's obsession with reproduction cannot be necessarily and simply reduced to Confucian values, but as Donald Goellnicht points out, her obsession is also a product of the exclusionary immigration laws aimed at curtailing Chinese immigration and containing the growth of Chinese communities ("Of Bones and Suicide" 304). From her great-granddaughter's perspective many years later, her motivations are thus characterized: "From her husband's side, Mui Lan would certainly claim a share of that eternal life which came with each new generation of babies. What could be more natural, more ecologically pure?" (31). The logic of racial purity, naturalized in ecological terms, leads to the failure to produce an heir; the last male child is the product of incest and dies in infancy. The dominant culture's fear of miscegenation and Chinese economic competition deprive the Wong family the ability to generate itself. This fear also informs the Wong family decisions on who is a "legitimate" heir to the family and who counts as a "real" spouse. As long as the heir is a "real" Chinese, Mui Lan doesn't care if the child is born out of wedlock. For Gwei Chang, his betrayal of Kelora, his inability to acknowledge Ting An as his own, and his subsequent attempts to dissuade Ting An from marrying a French Canadian woman by enticing him with a "real wife from China" (233), reflect his inability to reconcile his concept of legitimate heirs with anyone not deemed authentically Chinese. His ideas of racial purity are therefore no different from the fears of miscegenation that haunt white Canada.

In the context of the harsh immigration laws designed to maintain a white Canada and the failure of the Wong family to produce a male heir, hybridized identities like those of Kelora and Ting An seem uniquely able to survive and navigate life in Vancouver, if only those in the Chinese community could recognize this. Ting An, for example, is described as particularly adept in dealing with outsiders, the "ghostly" whites, an ability attributed to his birth. According to Choy Fuk, "A Ting is native-born. He knows how to deal better with ghosts" (35). Of course, the double-meaning of "native-born"—racial ancestry and birth-place—is instrumental to Ting An's ability to move beyond the confines of Chinatown:

People remarked that he spoke English like a native speaker; he behaved much like a ghost too, never very visible. He drove the horse and wagon around town a lot . . . There were a lot of others who could get by in English, but Ting An got along really well with the devils. He had a way about him, and he was the reliable type who didn't shoot off his mouth. People readily accepted that he was a loner, more at home in the stables than with his own kind. (113)

Ting An, like his mother, is portrayed as more comfortable with animals than with people. And like his mother, there is something insubstantial about him—a ghostliness that marks him as different from others and renders him invisible in both Chinatown and outside; his multiracial heritage is unintelligible or ghostly in these communities that adhere to strict codes of authenticity and racial purity. However, like the countless other Chinese “orphan-men” at the work camps, Ting An is also an orphan, cut off from his mother and Native heritage. It is this sense of dislocation and dispossession that connects him to all the lonely Chinese immigrants he meets: “When he had come to Tang People’s Street to stay, Ting An couldn’t help but feel a camaraderie with the orphan-men there; it was like a contract between faces, so to speak. People who had suffered the same hardships understood each other” (115). Here the experiences of Chinese dislocation and dispossession are situated in the broader history of Aboriginal dispossession and dislocation. Able to share in the loneliness of these early immigrants and yet able to deal with outsiders, Ting An is presented as a kind of ambassadorial figure who bridges the mutual distrust between Chinatown insiders and the outside world.

In posing a silenced Chinese Canadian genealogy that is bound up with First Nations people, however, *Disappearing Moon Cafe*, like *Itsuka*, also risks rehearsing what Terry Goldie describes as the nationalist narratives of “indigenization,” whereby white writers in Commonwealth countries grapple with their colonial settler status. But, as Guy Beauregard writes, what does it mean for “members of an excluded group to use the trope of indigenization to assert a place in Canada” (63)? Or put differently, what does such a representational strategy reveal about contemporary racial discourse such that these are the tropes of belonging that have currency? Lee’s representation of Kelora and Ting An powers her critique of the essentialization of “Chineseness” that both girds anti-Chinese immigration laws *and* the insularity and xenophobia of the Wong family. By rejecting its Native roots, the Wong family is unable to sustain a patrilineage in Canada. Kelora and Ting An are both figured as pivotal to the survival of the Wong family in Canada, and their abandonment by the family, therefore, is instrumental to its downfall.

The representation of First Nations in Asian Canadian literature locates Asian Canadian formation within a hemispheric Asian diasporic framework at the same time that it grounds these formations within a colonial settler history. More importantly, these representations situate Asian Canadian racial formation within the ongoing decolonizing struggles of First Nations peoples and demonstrate the necessity of connecting Asian Canadian

anti-racism to indigenous decolonization struggles. Though Asian Canadian struggles are not comparable or equivalent to Indigenous struggles, both are simultaneous and relational. As Rita Wong has noted, “For those of us who are first, second, third, fourth, fifth generation migrants to this land, our survival and liberation is [sic] intimately connected to that of aboriginal people” (110). It could be argued that the vision offered in *Disappearing Moon Cafe* is one that presents the interconnection of migrant experience and Aboriginal experiences. Forgetting that mutuality, as the Wong family does, is to inhabit a partial history that in the end proves the unsustainability of the family.

In postulating a Native “model minority,” I am not suggesting that Asian North American experiences of racism and displacement are comparable to Native experiences nor do I want to reclaim the term “model minority” by reinvesting it with “positive” connotations; the dominant assumption about the model minority stereotype has been that it is “complimentary” and should be flattering to Asians. Rather, I am interested in the invocations *about* comparability instead of making a case *for* comparability. It is by raising questions about how certain minorities are figured as “models”—by whom and for whom, under what conditions and contexts—that we can trace the discursive formations that give rise to certain models of racial intelligibility and belonging. More specifically, by viewing “modeling” as a citational process that is indexical of contemporary racial formations under colonization, we can consider how Asian Canadian identity emerges out of complex multiracial relations and is mobilized against whiteness but not defined oppositionally by it.

The representations of Natives in Asian Canadian works necessitate further inquiry into a more collaborative comparative work than what I have laid out here. This collaborative comparative work raises important questions for Asian Canadian and Asian American studies as well as for coalitional politics more broadly. Scholarship on Asian Canadian and First Nations struggles can expand the transnational framework that currently informs comparative Asian Canadian and Asian American studies to include the complex relations between migration, settlement, and indigenous sovereignty. “In articulating Asian American and/or Pacific/Asian Canadian Studies,” writes Russell Leong, “we must . . . pay attention to indigenous and interdiasporic relationships across borders and within native nations and territories themselves” (ix). Without examining the complex relationships between Asian immigration and indigenous struggles for land, rights, and sovereignty, Bonita Lawrence and Enakshi Dua warn, anti-racism projects

can potentially reproduce colonial relationships with Aboriginal peoples, de-centring anti-colonial resistance so that anti-racism becomes equivalent to or substitutable for decolonization (134).

In her story, “Yin Chin,” which is dedicated to SKY Lee, Lee Maracle writes about a young Aboriginal child who has internalized the racism around her. The title, “Yin Chin” refers to the first meeting between Gwei Chang and Kelora. Gwei Chang is surprised that she speaks Chinese. “‘But you’re a wild injun,’ he says, but in Chinese, it sounds like ‘yin-chin’” (3). Kelora in turn calls him a “chinaman.” Both have internalized racist stereotypes of the other. In Maracle’s story, the narrator, now an adult, looks back on the child that she was and is pained by her ignorance of and role in perpetuating racism. Ashamed of her behavior to a kindly Chinese merchant, she thinks, “how unkind of the world to school us in ignorance” (161). Reading Maracle’s text alongside Lee’s as well as Kogawa’s is a reminder of how both communities of colour and Aboriginals have internalized dominant assumptions about each other. It also reminds us how such internalizations have both segregated the history of Asian Canadian migration and settlement from the history of Aboriginal displacement and dispossession and rendered anti-racism struggles separate from decolonization struggles.

NOTES

I would like to thank Elisabeth Ceppi, Dorothy Wang, the anonymous readers, and the careful eye of the editors for their help and insight in strengthening this article.

- 1 With the exception of Tseen-Ling Khoo’s *Banana Bending*, which examines Asian Canadian and Asian Australian literature, most focus on comparative Asian North American works. Comparative Asian North American works include Eleanor Ty’s *The Politics of the Visible in Asian North American Narratives* and *Asian North American Identities: Beyond the Hyphen*, edited by Eleanor Ty and Donald Goellnicht.
- 2 See Beauregard’s “What’s at Stake in Comparative Analyses of Asian Canadian and Asian American Literary Studies?” The developmental and temporal lag of Asian Canadian Studies in relation to Asian American Studies is also explored in Donald Goellnicht’s “A Long Labor” and Chris Lee’s “The Lateness of Asian Canadian Studies.”
- 3 See for example, Anthony Chan’s “Born Again Asian” in which the racist stereotypes he identifies come from US popular culture.
- 4 As Gary Okihiro has pointed out, the model minority and the yellow peril are not polar opposites but, in fact, “form a circular relationship that moves in either direction. . . . Moving in one direction along the circle, the model minority mitigates the alleged danger of the yellow peril, whereas reversing direction, the model minority, if taken too far, can become the yellow peril” (143).
- 5 See Richard Cavell’s “The Race of Space” for an analysis of the racialization of the aesthetics of these “monster houses.”

- 6 In “Back-Talk,” Frank Chin decries the emasculation of Asian culture in mainstream representations: “We are characterized as lacking daring, originality, aggressiveness, assertiveness, vitality and living art and culture.” This emasculation is part and parcel of a larger US racial discourse in which “We have not been black. We have not caused trouble. We have not been men” (556).
- 7 Curiously, the original Buck Rogers, who appeared in a short story, “Armageddon—2419 A.D.” in the August 1928 issue of *Amazing Stories*, was a former air force pilot turned surveyor who is transported to the future and becomes a leader in the fight against the “Mongol hordes” who are a threat to the civilized world.
- 8 See, for example, Goellnicht’s “Father Land and/or Mother Tongue.”
- 9 There is no consensus on Kelora’s ancestry, however. Diverging from many scholars who have read Kelora as the biological daughter of Gwei Chang, a recent article by Neta Gordon persuasively argues for the dying white man that Gwei Chang encounters in the cabin as her father. Whether Kelora is part Chinese or part white, it is the Wong family’s Native ancestry that remains silenced.
- 10 The first Chinese arrived in what was later to become British Columbia in 1788. About fifty Chinese artisans settled in Nootka Sound and became a part of the Native community, raising families with Native women. See Chan’s *Gold Mountain*.

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Birth of Quebec Lit

Bernard Andrès, ed.

La Conquête des lettres au Québec (1759-1799).

PUL 49,00 \$

Reviewed by Constance Cartmill

Historians of literature routinely ignore the period immediately following the Conquest. This new anthology suggests that the second half of the eighteenth century was an intense period of cultural and intellectual activity, as the inhabitants of New France made the transition from colonized to conquered people. The question of identity is central to this book, the intent of which is to shed light on the birth of Québécois literature and its institutions. All of the texts chosen for inclusion in this heterogeneous collection partook of the public sphere, even those that were never published. "Lettres" refers to literature in a broad sense, including riddles, songs, and open letters often presented as poems. The anthology is divided chronologically into five parts: the first two sections, "Le Trauma de la conquête (1759-1763)" and "Le Temps d'une paix (1764-1774)," encompass first person accounts of the siege of Quebec and the transfer of power between the French and British monarchies; here we find the beginning of a long and troubled relationship between French and English. The third and fourth sections, "L'Invasion des lettres (1775-1783)" and "L'Occupation de l'espace public (1784-1793)," document an explosion of writing against the backdrop of the

American and French Revolutions, a period of intense journalistic activity made possible by the creation of new periodicals. Reactions to the 1775-76 American incursions into Quebec were divided. The Loyalist francophone elites condemned the rebels for their excessive love of liberty, which led to barbaric excesses and imperialist ambitions. However, popular songs from the period reveal a different point of view: they hint at high-ranking Catholic clergymen accepting bribes from the British authorities in exchange for encouraging the *Canadiens* to take up arms against the rebels.

However, not all the texts from this period are concerned with political matters: the death of Voltaire gives rise to a lengthy discussion on the merits of the Enlightenment; the publication of a short story leads to a heated debate on plagiarism and literary integrity; numerous exchanges are devoted to women's rights. Letters written by women seeking the liberation of their unjustly imprisoned husbands or lovers are also included (several prominent men of letters suspected of rebel sympathies were made an example of until the British government officially recognized American independence). Theatre and education also became controversial topics in late eighteenth-century Quebec: the British military, which had circumvented the Catholic Church's ban on theatre, opened the door for French-language plays, but a proposal to create a multi-denominational university could not overcome the opposition of the Church. The final years of the eighteenth century

comprise the last section of the anthology: “La Valse-hésitation (1793-1799).” The enthusiasm of young intellectuals for the democratic ideals of the French Revolution began to wane when news spread of the reign of Terror: the Church took advantage of this moment of crisis to reassert its dominance over intellectual life. Hence two sermons are included by Joseph-Octave Plessis, whose superb rhetorical skills helped persuade the *Canadiens* to accept their English conquerors, thus saving them from the evils of the French Revolution.

Although it is unlikely that this period produced any outstanding writers, the names of two prolific men of letters stand out nonetheless: their stories, strangely complementary, seem to exemplify the tensions of the nascent literary sphere made apparent by this anthology. Henri-Antoine Mézière, born in Montreal, was a staunch supporter of the French Revolution; his numerous writings, highly critical of the English presence in Quebec, led to his forced relocation to France where he spent the rest of his life. Joseph Quesnel, born in France, was forced to remain in Quebec when his ship was seized by the British; there, he became a Loyalist and eventually founded the Théâtre de société de Montréal, becoming a major participant in the cultural life of his adopted country.

Disasters Canadian and Indian

Anita Rau Badami

Can You Hear the Nightbird Call? Knopf Canada
\$34.95

Reviewed by Paulomi Chakraborty

In an interview given to CBC in 2006 about *Can You Hear the Nightbird Call?*, Anita Rau Badami lamented the unwillingness in current Canadian public culture to remember the 1985 Air India tragedy. This novel, her third and most recent, addresses

this silence. The novel details the context of the tragedy and spells out the extent of the loss so that Canadian readers can grapple with this moment and appreciate that the tragedy, like the people involved in it, was Canadian. It is well-researched and well-crafted, tells a compelling story with rich and poignant ironies, and gives us heartbreaking, mind-numbing portrayals of the human cost of politically motivated disasters. The novel is structured as three women's stories; the woman-centric focus on the domestic quotidian life of common people offers a gendered critique of how a public catastrophe affects the everyday. Its background consists of traumatic milestones of Sikh history which include the 1947 Partition and the anti-Sikh riots of 1984 in India. The novel connects these events from a Canadian/diasporic perspective, bracketing them within two historical phenomena connected to Sikhs in Canada: the memory of Komagata Maru and the 1985 Air India bombing. It tells Canadian readers a story they need to hear and situates Badami as a Canadian writer in her choice and presentation of material.

Because the novel largely narrates the story of the global Sikh community, the standard critique of the diasporization of the history of the global South needs to be nuanced. As the novel suggests, the Sikhs in India and in Canada have a strong sense of shared history and sometimes a common imaginary of movement through the Partition, the anti-Sikh riots in 1984, and the diasporic consequences of past events like the blocking of the Komagata Maru (a ship filled with would-be Sikh immigrants turned away from Vancouver in 1914). This imaginary, as well as the century-old history of the Sikh diaspora in Canada that includes their early arrival to work in the paper mills in BC, needs to be understood and assessed differently than that of other “intellectual” immigrants from the Indian sub-continent after Canada officially becomes “open” to all races. The novel's

attempt to chart a continuous history through the early Sikh diaspora in Canada, Indian Sikh refugees of the Partition, through the scars of 1984, and eventually to the 1985 air crash is an ambitious venture.

Nevertheless, the novel seems to promote a universal homogenous diasporic narrative whose real subject is the very “intellectual immigrant” differentiated above from the Sikh diaspora. Out of the three women whose stories form the foundation of the novel, one, Leela, is not a Sikh. She represents the non-Sikh Indians in Canada; specifically, arriving in Trudeau’s Canada in 1967, she is the prototype of the immigrant during Canada’s turn to a policy of multiculturalism. The emotional investment of the book appears to lie with Leela. Having faced the stigma of being born of a white mother in India, she is petrified of her impure heritage, of hybridity, of being suspended between spaces. In other words, she fears the very things that Badami recognizes as the immigrants’ predicament and also, therefore, what the immigrant must embrace and creatively turn into resources. Badami’s novel directs correctives not only to Leela but also implicitly to religious fundamentalism which was the basis of the 1984 riots and the 1985 bombing. The diasporic wisdom of hybrid existence is offered as a critique of religious fanaticism of all kinds and of the Sikh separatist demand for a nation-state based on a single religion. The critique of fundamentalism is well-taken, but is the vantage point of the diasporic or the lessons of multiculturalism necessary to formulate this critique?

Further, while the novel is critical of a section of the diaspora for supporting separatist politics and for funding militant activities in India, it still privileges the diasporic. How are we to read the end with the “return of the native,” with the child “adopted” by diasporic Canadians returning to the grieving biological mother in India, and obviously symbolically returning to his damaged motherland? Even

if the gesture is of repentance by the diaspora for sympathizing with militant fundamentalists, or an attempt by the novel to distinguish between different kinds of diasporic involvement, there is also a claim here that the hopes of the motherland are the responsibility of the diaspora.

Badami’s novel promotes the idea of a globe where everyone is connected and teaches that collective violence spreads globally so that everyone gets hurt. There is little more for a reader familiar with the complexities of the history it covers than an affective engagement with this somewhat clichéd liberal lesson. While the traumatic events preceding 1985 that the book covers are, no doubt, of supreme importance in Sikh imagination, the novel’s rendition of twentieth-century Sikh history as a series of disasters is ultimately reductive. Nor is the story able to probe deep enough to encounter the real difficulties or problematics of 1947 or 1984. Given its imperative to tell a Canadian story and to fashion itself as a post-9/11 disaster-tale, perhaps it cannot.

Unpopular Culture

Bart Beaty

Unpopular Culture: Transforming the European Comic Book in the 1990s. U of Toronto P \$29.95

Reviewed by J. Kieran Kealy

Much attention has been directed recently at the comic book, that so often overlooked contributor to popular culture. Bart Beaty, however, in his meticulous exploration of the evolution of the European comic book in the 1990s, offers a new suggestion in this regard. Perhaps, he argues, one should resist attempts to popularize this form and realize that the true emergence of the comic book occurred in Europe in the 1990s, when it became “unpopular,” no longer pandering to mass popularity, but rather aspiring to be recognized as an “autonomous cultural production.”

Beaty's introduction immediately provides the contrast he wishes his audience to consider, as he compares Zep's multi-million selling Tcho series with Nadia Raviscioni's *Odette et l'eau*, a fifteen-page hand-printed comic with a print run of 150 copies. Zep, Beaty argues, satisfies the marketplace's pre-conceived notions of what a comic should be. Raviscioni's creation, on the other hand, is an attempt to redefine the entire form, to provide a sense of artistic creativity "long associated with cultural fields other than the comic." Beaty admits that Raviscioni's impact on the commercial marketplace was but "a blip on the radar," but it is precisely these blips, he suggests, that should be carefully examined, for, ultimately, they thoroughly transformed the entire field of European comics.

Beaty begins by chronicling the origin, in 1990, of L'Association, the French artist-run publishing cooperative that consciously confronted prevailing models of comic production, demanding a more sophisticated and adult sensibility and, most significantly, a focus on the "visually defined" book. This exploration then moves to a discussion of the evolution of small presses, particularly in France, and their conscious attempt to "denormalize" the popular concept of what constituted a comic book, providing "counter-discursive models" which questioned the rigidity of the so-called traditional comic book.

The innovations that one found in such models were heavily influenced by experimental and non-traditional visual aesthetics, all occurring, Beaty reminds his reader, within the "cultural backdrop of postmodernism." Artists were now influenced primarily, not by literary texts, but by painting, photography, and sculpture.

Beaty is particularly incisive and persuasive when he explores this new predisposition toward visual effects by closely examining a variety of seminal texts of the 1990s, all of which in their way seek

to redefine the entire genre. He notes the increasingly introspective nature of these comics, as autobiographic texts, perhaps spurred by the success of Satrapi's *Persepolis*, come to dominate. But he also recognizes that the success of such texts creates a problem akin to that found in popular music of this same period as popular small-press artists began to gravitate toward more lucrative mainstream publishing houses. Are such artists "selling out," or is this simply the necessary "changing of the guard"?

Beaty's exploration of specific artists concludes with a detailed examination of the creations and career of Lewis Trondheim, perhaps the most important and successful of the artists spawned by the small-press movement, an artist who, when he retired, referred to himself as "big has-been," stressing the need for this newly defined medium to move on, to continue its movement, not toward mere cultural legitimacy, but toward becoming truly "high art."

Beaty concludes with a brief response to those who fear that the small press movement may well have become a victim of its own success, that a kind of "soft avant-garde" has replaced the true *avant-garde* of the 1990s. Beaty rejects this categorization, suggesting instead that, though the comic book revolution is far from over, the ultimate legacy of Europe's reconceptualization of the form heralds a day when comics will finally be recognized as a visual rather than a literary form of communication.

To be honest, much of what Beaty examines may well be somewhat alien to the North American comic book audience, but, nonetheless, his impressively scholarly examination of the evolution of the European comic provides one of the first truly sophisticated and comprehensive examinations of the entire form, providing an invaluable chronicle of one of the most significant periods in the long history of the comic book and its related manifestations.

Writing Quebec

Yves Beauchemin; Wayne Grady, trans.

The Years of Fire: Charles the Bold, Volume 2.

McClelland & Stewart \$32.99

Lise Tremblay; Linda Gaboriau, trans.

The Hunting Ground. Talonbooks \$15.95

Reviewed by Gordon Bölling

The Years of Fire is the second volume in Yves Beauchemin's *Charles the Bold* series. In this sequel to *Charles the Bold: The Dog Years* (2006), Beauchemin guides us through the tumultuous adolescence of the spirited Charles Thibodeau. As we follow the course of Charles' life between the ages of thirteen and seventeen we become witness to a whole series of initiations. Charles discovers his interest in girls, is seduced by the pudgy Marlene, and, finally, falls in love with Céline, the daughter of his foster parents, Lucie and Fernand Fafard. Much room is also given to the description of Charles' intellectual development. Always an avid reader, at the tender age of fifteen Beauchemin's protagonist looks for guidance in such unlikely places as Tolstoy's novels: "In the books he'd read (he'd just finished *Anna Karenina*) making love was something you took terribly seriously, not at all the way he'd taken it that evening. But did books represent real life, or did they just try to console us for it?" Despite his doubts about the truth claims of fiction, Charles' interest in literature is ever increasing. In this he is guided by the notary Parfait Michaud who acts as a kind of mentor to the young boy. It is he who introduces Charles to the works of Balzac and, in particular, to *La Comédie humaine*. Infatuated with the writings of the French master, Charles sets out to become a writer himself and in the course of a single night sketches a draft of his first short story. A few pages later *The Years of Fire* ends with a rather grandiose exclamation by the apprentice writer: "Montreal! You're

going to be hearing from me! I'm going to make your ears ring!" This intertextual reference to Balzac's novel *Le Père Goriot* serves Beauchemin as a kind of cliffhanger to bridge the gap to the next volume in the *Charles the Bold* series.

Like *Charles the Bold: The Dog Years*, Beauchemin's latest novel can on various levels be read as a regional and as an urban novel. The first Quebec referendum as well as the recession of the 1980s are central to *The Years of Fire* and Beauchemin's descriptions of the particularities of Montreal life are nothing but impressive. What is much less impressive, in my opinion, are the numerous passages in which the reader is burdened with some sort of essential truth about the intricacies of life. The narrator's comments on the transitory nature of happiness are just one example of this kind of writing: "We get used to happiness, and after a while it begins to seem ordinary to us. If only we could take as much pleasure from our good health as we suck misery from our sicknesses! But for us, everything eventually becomes stale and flat, and we seem to be condemned to dissatisfaction." Another example would be Parfait's lengthy lecture on the merits of reading and the uses of literature. Heavily didactic or clichéd passages such as these rob Beauchemin's novel of much of its appeal. They cast in a less favourable light an otherwise memorable portrait of Quebec's largest city in the early 1980s.

Lise Tremblay's *The Hunting Ground* is a very different matter. First published as *La Héronnière* in 2003, the book has garnered the praise of critics and has gone on to win several literary awards. In her recent translation, Linda Gaboriau successfully captures Tremblay's sparse and economic style. Stripped of all superfluous ornamentation, the language here is precise, exact, and tight. *The Hunting Ground* is a slim book. Covering a mere ninety-five pages, the volume is perhaps best described as a short

story cycle. Consisting of five interrelated stories, *The Hunting Ground* explores the psychology of a small settlement in northern Quebec. The name of this village goes unmentioned, thus making it in a way representative of a larger number of small communities in Canada's francophone province. Equally anonymous are the five first person narrators whose stories evoke a fragmentary and unidealized portrait of a culture in transition. Each of these narratives reveals facets of a community that struggles to adapt to the changing socio-economic circumstances of contemporary Canada. Loneliness, violence, alienation, class conflict, and the futile quest for a past long gone are recurring topics in these stories. In "The Trailer," the narrator looks back upon his life and, in particular, on his failed marriage. A sense of deep-seated anger underlies his reflections and the story ends with a thinly veiled threat of future violence: "Sometimes, I get these crazy ideas, I scare myself. I think of how surprised they'd be if one night I stopped, just like that. I'd leave the door to my truck open so I could hear Johnny Cash. I'd take out my hunting rifle, not my shotgun for ducks, no, the other one, the big one, for moose, the rifle I gave to my brother Sylvain." The northern village suffers from the effects of a sustained rural exodus, in which especially women are leaving for a supposedly better life elsewhere. Feeling they are a community on the brink of extinction, the villagers regard visitors, be they tourists or scientists interested in herons, as intruders. Yet, lacking other means of support, the village increasingly depends on these strangers for its livelihood. The second story, "The Heron Colony," revolves around a violent murder committed during the annual Birdwatchers Symposium. The third and fourth stories provide readers of *The Hunting Ground* with the perspectives of outsiders. These stories are told by narrators who spend only a limited time in the unnamed village. Both

are female academics from Montreal and both, though for different reasons, fail in their attempts to establish a durable friendship with two women from the village. The protagonist of the final story occupies a kind of middle position. Having suffered from a heart attack, he returns to the village he grew up in only to find it completely changed. *The Hunting Ground* is a haunting and profoundly moving book and I urge you to read this short story cycle in a single (albeit longish) sitting.

Opening the Gate

Stan Beeler and Lisa Dickson, eds.

Reading Stargate SG-1. I.B. Tauris \$19.95

Reviewed by Allan Weiss

Stargate SG-1 is one of the most popular science fiction television programs ever; it has lasted ten seasons, spawning a large fan base, various related products (role-playing games, DVDs, etc.), websites, and one spin-off, *Stargate: Atlantis*. It owes its success to its emphasis on action—there is no shortage of enemy aliens and subversive Earthlings to be fought—and engaging main characters. Along with enthusiastic interest, it has provoked some controversy, particularly in its portrayal of women—especially its main female character, USAF officer Samantha Carter.

In recent years, a number of books aimed at fans of the show have appeared, few of which make any pretense at being more than adulatory histories of the program and profiles of its stars. The relative absence of serious studies is not surprising given the show's fairly conventional approach to the genre. The series is, to my mind, overly dependent on some immortal SF clichés: evil and predatory or godlike and distant aliens; morally impeccable, brilliant protagonists; last-minute heroics to save the Earth from certain doom; and characters—both good and evil—with an ability to rise from

the dead reminiscent of slasher-movie villains. The title of *Reading Stargate SG-1* promises a more in-depth approach to the show's themes and techniques, but the volume unfortunately fails to deliver.

Reading Stargate SG-1 features twelve essays on various topics, although the question of Samantha Carter's portrayal pervades the book. The first essay, Lisa Dickson's "Seeing, Knowing, Dying in 'Heroes, Parts 1 and 2,'" is among the most interesting, using a seventh-season two-parter to show how *Stargate's* dialogue and camera work achieve self-reflexive effects. Dickson argues that the show is consistently self-aware of its place in the world of television SF, and the cinematic point-of-view (i.e., handling of camera angles) reflects the blurring of distinctions between "real," "documentary," and "fictional" worlds in the episode and the program as a whole. Dave Hipple's "*Stargate SG-1*: Self-Possessed Science Fiction" similarly shows how the series foregrounds its place in the history of media SF through allusions to other shows, but the article depends a bit too heavily on plot summary and needs tightening. As in her *Approaching the Possible: The World of Stargate SG-1* (2005), Jo Storm in "Sam, Jarred: The Isis Myth in Operation" reads the series in the light of the Egyptian and other myths the writers use as inspiration for the characters, notably the chief villains of the early seasons, the Goa'uld. Her analysis tempts one to believe she reads too much into possible links between the original myths and what the writers do with them, but she has had significant access to the show's writers and producers and can speak with some authority.

The Samantha Carter controversy is the subject of articles by Stephanie Tuszynski, Sabine Schmidt, and Rachel McGrath-Kerr. How realistic is the show's portrait of a female military officer? Is she too scientifically knowledgeable to be credible, and does she exhibit too much or too little emotion

in her dealings with male characters? McGrath-Kerr, in "Sam I Am: Female Fans' Interaction with Samantha Carter through Fan Fiction and Online Discussion," makes perhaps the best point in saying that Sam simply cannot win; no matter how "professional" or passionate her behaviour, fans fault her for being either too cerebral or too sexual.

Two articles, Gaile McGregor's "*Stargate* as Cancult? Ideological Coding as a Function of Location" and Stan Beeler's "'It's a Zed PM': *Stargate SG-1*, *Stargate: Atlantis* and Canadian Production of American Television," consider how Canadian the show is. McGregor makes some surprisingly old-fashioned generalizations about what constitutes Canadian culture based on Northrop Frye's debatable notion of the "garrison mentality." While it is true that there are Canadians involved in the writing and production of the series, one must not forget that it is an American show designed for an American and international audience. The simplistic distinctions she draws between Canadian and American approaches to series television are dubious. The essays that deal with the economics of the series and its offshoots, such as role-playing games, are of interest mainly to those in media studies.

Too often, the articles are repetitive, such as Judith Tabron's "Selling the Stargate: The Economics of a Pulp Culture Phenomenon" with its recurring focus on the role of establishing shots, or descriptive rather than analytical. A number of major issues are neglected; it would be interesting, for example, to see a discussion, and perhaps critique, of the way the series deals with aliens, or its perhaps insulting premise that ancient cultures' gods and myths were based on encounters with aliens. "Reading" *Stargate SG-1* must necessarily involve analyzing how it treats religion in general and the role of extra-terrestrial Others in human culture, areas where the show treads on

dangerous ground. Overall, the book is less a reading than a viewing of the series, offering a more superficial look at *Stargate SG-1* than one might expect or hope.

Bissettiad

bill bissett

narrativ enigma / rumours uv hurricane.

Talonbooks \$17.95

bill bissett

northern wild roses / deth interrupts th dancing.

Talonbooks \$17.95

Jeff Pew and Stephen Roxborough, eds.

radiant danse uv being: a poetic portrait of bill bissett. Nightwood \$23.95

Reviewed by Karl E. Jirgens

Beat poet Anne Waldman celebrates *radiant danse uv being* as a portrait of bill bissett as “Canadian artist, poetry trickster and bodhisattva.” At the Toronto launch of *radiant danse* Tarot cards were distributed featuring bissett wearing fedora and multicoloured jacket (see Marijke Friesen’s illustration in this collection). Captioned “th fuul,” the card provides divinatory meanings: “There is a possibility of failure in success . . . the opportunity of success coming from failure.” And conversely, “Generosity of spirit is always its own reward and the unexpected way might be the best path to take.” Robert Kasher offers a variation of this card in the collection, co-relating meanings of “Fool” to “O” the mysterious symbol of nothing and everything, the hole, the circle, and the trickster. It is important to recognize First Nations as opposed to other global tricksters, but bissett’s undifferentiated consciousness and open-mindedness verifies this Tarot-portrait. Alternatively, George Bowering’s portrayal: “Round & Round he goes & round where he stops / the inky smudge of words of words . . .” depicts a spiritual “inkster.” Praise from other writers including Jack Kerouac, James Reaney, Warren

Tallman, and Margaret Atwood embellishes the back cover. Indeed, in this collection, nearly eight dozen “frenz of bill” pay homage to his work.

It is high time for this homage. bissett’s innovations in sound poetry, shaped poetry, music, painting, and publishing have stimulated, provoked, influenced, shocked, and delighted audiences for half a century. There are movements to award bissett the Order of Canada and to nominate him for other honours. Poetic forms abound in this collection. Striking visual texts are generated by Alan Briemaster, Penn Kemp, Gus Morin, Carl Peters, and Jamie Reid. Darren Wershler-Henry’s poem was produced by running bissett’s “i was printing billy th kid” through a spell-checker. Paul Dutton’s ingenious lipogram “oh bill bissett” includes only letters of bissett’s name plus the exclamatory “oh.” Here’s an excerpt:

bill’s titles to islet lots—hot sites—
let bill sit still to sell belts, bells.
bill’ll till his islet lots.
bill’ll settle his islet lots.

Leonard Cohen’s urbanely witty “dear bill” is both summation and exclamation:

thank you
for leaving nothing out
fraternally
leonard

Pew and Roxborough’s “Prelude” explains their aim of producing “an intoxicating kaleidoscopic reflection-portrait.” The introduction comments on the “true revolutionary,” compassionate, aware of chaos and the need to transform human interaction. In his “bare bones biography” bissett summarizes past jobs including ditch-digger, musician, writer, and publisher, while commenting on the counter-productivity of dominating cultures that overlook natural energies. He supplies a playful self-portrait at the anthology’s end, outlining his birth on Lunaria, and identifying his books as “field research” undertaken

during his incarnation on earth. MAC Farrant's postscript emphasizes the importance of unrestricted perception coupled with universal awareness. Nightwood has crafted this book into a nine-inch-square format, including a useful chronology of bissett's life. Anecdotes by contributors are included. Atwood calls bill her "Astral Twin" informing us that his illustration in *lunaria* served as a signpost while she wrote *Oryx and Crake*. bissett and Atwood form a strange binary. Both are Scorpios born on the same day, month, and year. The book closes with succinct contributor's notes, an acknowledgments page, and another of bissett's self-portraits, this time focusing on early youth. The tasteful cover features an early photo of bissett and a colour reproduction of one of his remarkable paintings. Raging and fabulous!

Both *narrativ enigma / rumours uv hurricane* and *northern wild roses / deth interrupts th dancing*, are vintage bissett. bissett is highly prolific, receiving regular attention and acclaim, and recently winning the Dorothy Livesay Poetry Prize (2003). Talonbooks offers rich full-colour covers and simple but elegant design. Both collections include diverse typewriter poems and drawings. Poems featuring chant (e.g. "rumours uv hurricane," "desert wings," "amazements jaguar jumps"), project states of reverie. Lyric forms such as "ballet boy" offer intimate autobiographical perspectives. bissett has endured near-death experiences and his battle against Thanatos takes many forms. Longer invocative narratives ("I herd the toastr titul sing in my masculine reveree," "aria 4 isis," "its in the magik books" or "in the event of accidental deth pleez wud yu change th curtains") raise questions concerning war, governmental failures, limited human perceptions, and the nature of language. Hybrid poems combine concrete, narrative, visual, and lyric forms (e.g. "aftr life times uv dreems can we wake" or "dreem on"). Self-reflexive texts including

"what yu let flow out thru yu" or "eye in yr belee" address creativity and channelling of spirit voices through poet as shamanic medium.

Portions of *northern wild roses / deth interrupts th dancing* are available on CD (Red Deer Press), mixed by Pete Dako and Ambrose Pottie. This collection continues the journey through lyric, narrative, shaped, and concrete poetry while offering a remarkable departure, specifically, "text bites," a twenty-six-page, minimalist, hand-drawn essay of text and imagery. "text bites" addresses compositional modes and Futurist-inspired *parole in liberta*. Marjorie Perloff has commented extensively on this form, and Wittgenstein's investigations establish an earlier foundation. "text bites," in the tradition of poets like Ken Patchen, appears deceptively simple but raises profound questions concerning typographic innovation, audience reception, tactility of print, indoctrination of thinking patterns, inter-textuality, tautology, contextuality, musicality, and semiotics, arguing that *jouissance* and unbridled expression lie in the *loop-holes* to convention. Appropriately, the structure and conceptual frame of "text bites" illustrates its own points. These three collections offer a sardonic alarm, battling against Thanatos and social travesties, while engaging the creative spirit of Eros.

Poésie de l'intime

Hélène Boissé

Tout a une fin. Triptyque 16,00 \$

Alain Gagnon

L'Espace de la musique. Triptyque 17,00 \$

Compte rendu par Jonathan Lamy

« Tout a une fin », nous dit Hélène Boissé dans le titre de son quatrième recueil paru chez Triptyque. Mais malgré ce titre, qui donne aux poèmes qu'il chapeaute une impression de finitude, voire de désenchantement, le recueil va plutôt vers les débuts

des choses. Car si « tout a une fin » —l'être humain comme le livre—, il semble que tout ait plusieurs commencements. Et ce sont ces multiples origines, à la limite du dicible, que tente de cerner Hélène Boissé à travers ses petits poèmes en vers. Ainsi, tout au long du recueil, la figure de la naissance s'impose d'avantage que celle de la mort : « à peine nés / gorgés de lait / nous apprenons notre désir / noir et sang ». La mort est bien sûr présente, elle suinte à travers les choses, elle plane sur les souvenirs. Mais sa présence et son attente laissent la possibilité de « sécrire à jeun / avant que la mort ne nous râpe / encore les joues », de dire autre chose que son inévitable arrivée. La mort permet de revenir à la naissance et au commencement, de les questionner, de les réinventer : « je nous imaginai / tous / sans généalogie ». Elle incarne avant tout la disparition à laquelle le sujet fait face et pour qui « à chaque respiration / quelques visages s'estompent ». Dans ce sixième livre publié par Hélène Boissé, les visages, les prénoms, tout tient dans le creux de la main. C'est une poésie de l'intime, de la précarité, du dedans, de ce qui habite et traverse le sujet, sa voix, ce qu'il écrit.

Dans le recueil d'Alain Gagnon, *L'Espace de la musique*, publié également chez Triptyque, tout tient plutôt dans le creux de l'œil, dans le regard que porte le sujet sur ce qui l'entoure. Tout comme chez Hélène Boissé, les poèmes d'Alain Gagnon viennent ici marquer ce qui s'écoule avant que la vie ne prenne fin. S'adressant autant aux autres qu'à lui-même, il note : « vous vous écrivez et souhaitez battre de textes la mort ». Le temps presse, il faut faire vite, écrire. Ici aussi, le sujet effectue par moments des retours aux « contrebandes ancestrales ». Parfois associée à Dieu, l'idée d'un « espace de la musique » incarne en fait l'espace même de la vie, de la nature. Dans une prose plus proche de la description que de la narration, jardins, plaines, étangs, marais et les animaux qui y habitent, de la libellule

au renard, défilent sous les yeux du lecteur. C'est comme si le sujet de *L'Espace de la musique* « chuchotait sur ces paysages », en faisant alterner ou cohabiter la naïveté, la banalité et la déchirure. Une des cinq sections du recueil, « Marie-Jo en novembre », nous amène en ville, de Baltimore à Buenos Aires. Le campagnard et l'urbain se mélangent parfois : « Les néons et les soleils morts des bûches rougiront le tracé du stylo ». C'est à l'occasion de ces rencontres que l'écriture d'Alain Gagnon se montre la plus percutante.

A String of Western Canadian Firsts

Fred Booker

Adventures in Debt Collection. Commodore \$16.00

Andy Brown

The Mole Chronicles. Insomniac \$21.95

Mark Anthony Jarman

Dancing Nightly in the Tavern. Brindle & Glass \$19.95

Reviewed by Thomas Hodd

It is cliché nowadays to begin a review of Canadian literature by mentioning geography. Yet such a departure point is difficult to resist, particularly when the three books under consideration are so obviously linked by the writers' shared experiences of Western Canada: Fred Booker is a long-time resident of British Columbia; Andy Brown spent his childhood in Vancouver; and Mark Anthony Jarman is a native of Alberta. Not surprisingly, the West factors greatly in their respective publications. More significant is the fact that each author has achieved a professional "first"—Booker, his first collection of fiction and the inaugural title of Commodore Books; Brown, his first novel; and Jarman, a reprint of his first short story collection. But it is here that the similarities end, for all three writers vary considerably in their style of writing, interpretation of the West, and quality of workmanship.

Booker, already an accomplished poet and musician, marks a turning point in his artistic career with his first foray into fiction. Based on his experience with the Collection Department at General Motors Acceptance Corporation of Canada, the eight compact sketches that make up *Adventures in Debt Collection* will delight readers looking for a unique fictional perspective without the trappings of a postmodern narrative structure. Moreover, each story is a variation on a theme, in which he depicts a clearly divisible tension between the “noble” reposessor and the unwilling owner of the vehicle in question. In “Matoxy Sixapeekwai,” for instance, Bob Ware remains calm and restrained throughout his pursuit of a Blazer owned by the desperate and defiant Fran Wallace. Similar sympathetic portrayals of the reposessor can be found in “Woman of the Year” and “The Civic.” In many of the tales the law-breaker also experiences an epiphany or emotional turning point once the car is repossessed. In “Incident on Highway 3,” for example, Hugh Bryce quickly overcomes his anger at having his Cadillac repossessed, deciding that “Alexis Dumont [the reposessor] had been a messenger sent to suggest that he should accept life at a lower altitude. . . . Highway 3 was open and uncertain, like his future. Yet he felt strangely euphoric.” The net result is a group of moral urban fables that reveal the author’s belief in the redemptive qualities of humanity. Although the didacticism is forced at times, it is refreshingly optimistic. Brown, founder of Conundrum Press in Montreal and author of a previous collection of short fiction, *I Can See You Being Invisible*, has recently penned the playfully titled book, *The Mole Chronicles*. Described on the back cover as his first novel, the book is more accurately a mélange of linked vignettes using the controlling metaphor of a mole to buoy its fictional structure. Although this technique is reinforced by the book’s lack of chapter titles, the novelty

quickly wears off. The narrative continually shifts between Vancouver and Montreal, describing the day-to-day adventures of a young man in his twenties struggling to cope with recurring skin cancer; fragile relationships with his father, sister Lesley, and a love interest named Tracey; and the haunting car accident that killed his mother several years earlier. Inspired by Kerouac but without his literary sophistication or raw fictional energy, this novel quickly degenerates into a diary of sorts in which the narrator recounts a host of events, most notably his blackmailing by a group of activist doctors calling themselves “DAGWOOD—Dermatologists Against Global Warming and Oncologists Opposing Dams.” Perhaps intended as humour, Brown’s descent into pulp fiction reads less like witty social commentary on urban malaise and more like trite narrative silliness. Not surprisingly, the ending of the novel also offers a tidy plot twist in which the narrator crashes a getaway car into his sister’s vehicle. All in all, *The Mole Chronicles* is charming, but disappointing.

When Jarman originally published his first book of short stories, *Dancing Nightly in the Tavern* (1984), it gained positive reviews but few readers. Now, more than twenty years later, with several publications to his credit, he has decided to re-release his important first collection. Complete with an introduction by rogue publisher and Canadian literary polemicist John Metcalf and an author’s afterword about the genesis of the book, *Dancing Nightly in the Tavern* has been attractively repackaged. Its nine gritty tales are all set in small town North America, in which lower-middle class characters fade in and out of life and where sex and alcohol are the weapons of choice. A community bereft of moral or spiritual essence, Jarman’s fictional world is T.S. Eliot’s “Hollow Men” in jeans and a t-shirt. The strongest stories are those in which he allows the emotional powerlessness of the

characters to come through. “Wintering Partners,” for example, is haunting in its desolate portrayal of the empty relationship between Trask and Carson. Equally strong is the pathos of “That’s How Strong My Love Is,” in which a drunken single mother named Mary clings to Hank and Mohawk as they make their way from party to party. Jarman’s stories are modern Everyman tales in which people struggle to connect with life, not existentially but physically and tangibly, a fictional feat that resonates somewhat with David Adams Richards’ depictions of small-town living in the Miramichi.

None of the three publications is particularly memorable, and only Jarman’s collection offers readers the kind of originality that will challenge our expectations. Having said this, it is hard not to be suspicious of the re-release of a collection of short stories so long after its initial publication, particularly when *Dancing Nightly in the Tavern* received so little attention the first time. The addition of an introduction and afterword certainly lends intellectual weight to the collection; but whether or not the stories will find a new, broader audience through his second kick at the publishing can remains to be seen.

Humanity’s Soiled Underbelly

Marilyn Bowering

What It Takes to Be Human. Penguin Canada \$26.00

Trevor Cole

The Fearsome Particles. McClelland & Stewart \$32.99

Reviewed by Carolyne Van Der Meer

With the dark underbelly of humanity so poignantly yet disturbingly portrayed in both Marilyn Bowering’s *What It Takes to Be Human* and Trevor Cole’s *The Fearsome Particles*, it is fitting that these novels be considered one alongside the other. While

Cole uses wit and humour to reveal the nasty particles that infiltrate good people and good lives, Bowering pokes at our innermost vulnerable places by exposing the betrayal of innocence and human decency.

Bowering’s fifth work of fiction is initially a difficult read. It takes time to get acquainted with twenty-year-old protagonist Sandy Grey, whose violent reactions to his fundamentalist preacher father land him in an asylum for the criminally insane—and time to follow the twisting turns of his psyche as he finds his way out of the labyrinth. Sandy is far from insane; rather he is grossly misunderstood by an unbending and abusive parent—and erroneously portrayed to the institution’s medical staff. Nevertheless, he must prove his stability to a series of psychiatrists during World War II, where he is compared to his fellow inmates—a gamut of torn and broken soldiers and all their neuroses.

In some respects, Bowering’s novel is an intricate puzzle of seemingly separate and unrelated happenings. There are complex layerings of characters and events, which eventually come together to create the fabric of the story. That it takes so long to understand the intertwining of these events is a detriment, as some readers may abandon the book before it gels—and this would be a sad mistake. Bowering’s handiwork is ultimately brilliant, but a significant investment is needed for these worthy returns.

The story opens with Sandy’s attempted suicide—he jumps off a ferry in Patricia Bay, near Victoria, BC, after having met Georgina, a woman with whom he briefly chats before jumping. Those moments of superficial conversation ultimately establish a strong bond—Georgina jumps in after him and saves him. But authorities fish them from the cold waters and Sandy is quickly committed to a local institution. His parents, from whom he has fled after attacking his father with a tire iron, have alerted police of his instability. During Sandy’s time as an inmate, through sessions with psychiatrists,

experiences with truth serum, and his personal writings, we slowly discover why his anger nearly led to murder. The novel is rife with postmodern practice—Sandy has written this novel (Bowering's), along with two other stories contained within it—and through these constructions, reveals the painstaking abuse he underwent as a child and the control his father has exerted over him as a young man. Ultimately, he must convince his doctors of his sanity or undergo the lobotomy his parents are demanding so that they can “manage” him upon his release. Sandy convinces Dr. Frank and Dr. Love of his solidity through writing, an exercise that allows him to confront the genesis of his crime. There are distinct echoes of Ken Kesey's *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, but there is no Nurse Ratched to ensure brain death; quite conversely, there are only Frank and Love, with names so aptly chosen, who allow him to be human.

In *The Fearsome Particles*, Trevor Cole works at similar themes, but rather than pull on our heartstrings, he explores the fragility of human nature through the ridiculous, masterfully exposing the frightful ever-nearness of becoming unglued. When the twenty-year-old Kyle Woodlore chooses to leave university to go to Afghanistan and personally contribute to fighting the War on Terror as a volunteer water purification expert with the Canadian Armed Forces, his parents Gerald and Vicki teeter on the very edge of stability, their seeming steadfastness sorely tried. Upon Kyle's discharge after an unexplained “event,” the perceived success and perfection of Gerald and Vicki's upper middle-class existence is shattered. In the face of a son who is broken and silently screaming for help, neither can step up to the plate without first selfishly—and ridiculously—enduring their own personal crises—ultimately reaching Kyle with little time to spare.

Cole expertly juxtaposes the absurd with the deeply serious. Gerald's career

as a senior executive at Spent Materials, a company aptly named for its dwindling longevity in the furnace filter and window screen industry is almost farcical; Gerald is an ineffective manager who has climbed the ladder and succeeded mostly due to loyalty. The company has steadily lost market share and a young ambitious member of Gerald's staff has a plan to turn the company around that might just succeed—or backfire, making Spent a laughing stock. And Gerald, caught up in his sudden understanding of his ineffectiveness in his career—and now as a father—might just let her run with it.

This absurdity is further highlighted by Vicki's vocation of “staging” high-end houses with temporary furnishings to woo potential buyers. She effectively fabricates the lives of imaginary residents, wholly believing in her creations. She also believes a house will only sell if the life of these imaginary residents is fully plausible. Her imagination fails her when she understands—but refuses to face—that she doesn't know how to help her own son, her entire career poised on the edge of catastrophe.

It is against this backdrop that Cole ultimately explores the fortitude of the family unit. Kyle's crisis forces Gerald and Vicki to refocus, with Gerald's courage and determination surfacing only when Kyle is his beacon. Cole subtly leads us to the understanding that our children indeed have the power to jolt us out of any self-induced reverie. What makes his message all the more rattling is his ability to highlight the inanity of the human condition.



Bushed, Whacked, and on the Road

Nadia Bozak

Orphan Love. Key Porter \$22.95

Reviewed by Kit Dobson

The publicist for Nadia Bozak's very strong first novel, *Orphan Love*, compares it in the press release to Margaret Atwood's thesis in *Survival*. Its readers are asked to see this book as a new interpretation of the survival myth, and we should expect just such a literary underpinning to an intelligent novel written by a doctoral candidate in comparative literature at the University of Toronto. Bozak manages this context, however, without explicit literary pretensions, and displays remarkable range and depth for a first-time novelist (she is a previous winner of the Lush Triumphant Best Fiction Award and has published a number of stories). This violent, expletive-filled, and disturbing book does, indeed, push the limits of human possibility. But survival, it seems, is a given. Especially when what Atwood calls "the Great Canadian Baby" in *Survival*—or the "Baby ex Machina"—is woven throughout the novel in a parallel narrative introduced from page one, a narrative that tidily meets with the book's primary narrative in its closing pages.

Orphan Love is, at its core, both an incredible adventure tale and a coming-of-age story. Set in 1989 in northern Ontario, the novel's protagonist, named Bozak, sets off on a journey of revenge and escape. She leaves the town of Black Dew Seat with a death and a terrible secret on her hands, departing "before the snow was gone and the body . . . had a chance to come up ripe and rotten in the thaw of northern spring." Early into her journey she meets Dave, who is similarly escaping from his own small town of Trident. The two set off together by canoe and, eventually, arrive in New York City. Along the way we are given glimpses

of abuse, violence, sex, drugs, alcohol, and, of course, the all-Canadian favourite, incest. These visceral, unsettling elements are what make this book work, saving it from being an otherwise familiar story. Bozak, who narrates much of the novel, is a disturbed and self-hating youth, whose penchant for punk music and self-destructive habits push her to the margins of the already marginal community in which she is raised by her uncle Bellyache. There is little that she favours, hating her hometown, disliking her uncle and her sometime boyfriend Slava O'Right, and maintaining a mixed relationship with Pickles, her uncle's only friend. Between the drinking, smoking, and swearing, we get a portrait of a difficult and secluded youth. She finds hope in the possibility of leaving, and seizes on the opportunity when foul events present her with an opportunity. Her slow-growing attachment to Dave, himself effectively an orphan, as the two of them paddle to New York in Dave's dilapidated boat, is handled well, uneasily, and with necessary touches of reserve and uncertainty. Their road towards one another is easily as rocky as their trail to New York, which is then followed by these two characters' separate routes to Los Angeles, where they will, we assume, make a life together (along with the baby, who is the last of the Bozak line).

So the stylistics make this book work. Particularly its largely unquotable four-letter adjectival play, which develops through accretion. The action elaborates upon this foul-mouthed ethos. Gut-wrenching scenes of baby Bozak being neglected, fed inappropriately and having its hands, mouth, and feet duct-taped and then being left in a glove compartment, for instance, are difficult to take (especially for this reviewer, as I read portions of this book to my infant daughter while hastening to make my deadline, expurgating hefty sections as I went along). The prejudices and hatreds of the characters are on full display, from Dave's distaste for

what he calls Indians—despite being one himself—to Bozak’s awed and awkward first encounter with a black man in Albany, even though she concludes that “an asshole’s an asshole no matter what colour of skin it’s puckered up in.” This book cleverly brings an intolerant rural mindset to life and forces it down the throats of its readers, arriving at the promise of a new future that is filled with ambiguity and the unknown.

The Natural History of Language and Literature

Robert Bringhurst

The Tree of Meaning: Thirteen Talks. Gaspereau \$31.95

Robert Bringhurst

Wild Language. Institute for Coastal Research \$20.00

Reviewed by Rebecca Raglon

Toward the end of the *The Tree of Meaning* the poet Robert Bringhurst, meditating on a dead fawn he has encountered at the side of the road near his home, suggests that there is “nothing new and modern (or post-modern) in the claim that human beings are the fountain of meaning and value, and that the dead fawn is nothing unless it has meaning and value for us.” This collection of lectures, given in a variety of venues over a period of a dozen years, is a complex and scholarly attempt to refute this common, and, to Bringhurst, very selfish and self-serving assumption.

In several lectures, Bringhurst is at pains to establish the idea that all languages developed within particular ecosystems. Poetry is thus most profoundly viewed as an aspect of natural history. In articulating these ideas, he is clearly challenging the idea of a nature/culture divide. According to Bringhurst, nature itself is best understood as possessing culture. Animals and birds have language, knowledge exists in landscapes, and poetry is an expression of being. “Every human culture is really just an extension of the underlying culture known

as nature,” Bringhurst writes in “Poetry and Thinking,” a lecture that ranges from Aristototle to Liu Xie, from Simone Weil to the Crow poet, Yellow Brow. As merely one part of this vast “culture of nature,” it should be clear that by itself human language doesn’t create the world. Rather, as Bringhurst suggests, at its best, human language and literature partake of the patterns that the world has created. Human culture, then, is simply the human part of a much larger culture variously known as wild nature, ecosystems, bioregions, or in Bringhurst’s writings, the world. “Poetry is,” he observes, “what I start to hear when I concede the world’s ability to manage and to understand itself. It is the language of the world: something humans overhear if they are willing to pay attention, and something that the world will teach us to speak, if we allow the world to do so.” Because the world is capable of managing itself, it possesses intrinsic meaning, and it is the work of the poet, the oral storyteller, the writer, to witness this fact.

Bringhurst goes more deeply into these ideas in the lecture “Wild Language,” which is published separately as an attractive chapbook. Any familiarity with wild nature reveals that humans do not create or manage natural systems. “The wild is the real, and the real is where we go for form and meaning,” Bringhurst writes. “Meaning doesn’t originate with us. When we are actually speaking, what we say has form and meaning, and those, at root are not man-made.” Rather, language has evolved and was fashioned from the heart of nature, and the sensitive poet is one who tries to live up to the standards expressed by the wild. At their best, Bringhurst believes that human civilizations begin to resemble the forests they have emerged from and “start to attain—and to sense and respond to—the forests’ supple and self-reinforcing order.” In this way, stories, poems, language, music are all aspects of “the wild.”

Bringhurst works with a vast number of different references, both ancient and modern, to develop his poetics. He makes the point—which needs to be made over and over again—that North American literature does not begin with European contact; and many of his examples are drawn from First Nation texts and languages he has worked with over many years. He draws on his work as a historian of typography in the essay “The Voice in the Mirror” and uses his studies of linguistics in “The Tree of Meaning and the Work of Ecological Linguistics.” His own poetry appears when he quotes from “Finch,” a poem which views the dignity of a bird at his feeder that has lost an eye and has a shattered beak. In all of these wide-ranging topics, however, Bringhurst returns again and again to the idea that human culture, language, and poetry are shaped by the world—the same world inhabited by a deer or a finch. As a corrective to the belief that humans “create” meaning, or that nature and culture are antagonistic, these books are essential reading.

First Engagements

Heather Burt

Adam's Peak. Dundurn \$21.99

C.S. Richardson

The End of the Alphabet. Doubleday \$17.95

Reviewed by Andrew Bartlett

In *Adam's Peak*, we alternate between the perspectives of two thirty-something Canadians. Rudy Vantwest, born in Sri Lanka but raised mostly in Canada after his family emigrates in 1970, has returned to the “exotic” homeland to teach English and search for a sense of roots. Clare Fraser, the only child of Alastair and Isobel, Scots who emigrated in 1964, has a degree in music but works as an uninspired clerk in a music store. Although they grow up across the street from each other in the West Island of Montreal, Rudy and Clare know next to

nothing of each other. But they similarly lack self-orientation; they are each troubled by broken family ties. Rudy, adrift, evasive, feels guilt over having failed to reciprocate the affections of his younger brother, Adam. Clare, frustrated by sexual inexperience, extremely shy, feels stuck at a great emotional distance from her mother, friends, and co-workers.

Meanwhile, about a dozen textual segments with month-year titles add historical depth to the main narrative. Three segments titled “April 1945” show Alec Van Twest (the father of Rudy and Adam) as a boy in Sri Lanka, betraying in a way his elder brother. This brother appears decades later as the Uncle Ernie who treks with Rudy up Adam's Peak. Three segments set in May and June 1964 narrate the graceless conception of Clare Fraser, the circumstances that impel Isobel into marriage with Alastair, and emigration to Montreal.

If the mark of successful fiction is its getting the reader to feel attached to the characters, then Heather Burt's first novel is an unequivocal success. One anticipates the end, mourning that there will shortly be no more of Rudy and Clare, partly because the characters are very young in spirit when the story ends, but also because they have only just been freed from their traps, but we must part with them. The story is also deftly plotted work: one quest goes eastward back across the Atlantic with Clare, the other goes across the Pacific with Rudy, ending when he climbs Adam's Peak. Overall, the accidents and acts of awkward kindness that bring the Vantwest and Fraser families together form a credible sequence while managing to be oddly moving. *Oddly* moving because it is a strangely spectacular *ordinariness* that tips over into the transcendental here. Even though there is nothing at all “distinguished” about either Rudy or Clare (quite the contrary), the final pages actually evoke a sense of joy—joy is rare in the earnest gloom of much contemporary fiction.

Heather Burt has studied the human risks of communicating face-to-face, but she eschews the sentimental when getting her characters to take those risks, even in scenes overloaded with opportunities for violins to come in. She defies current fashion in her handling of Clare's decisive first-ever-and-one-time-only meetings with her Scotland connections as she does in Rudy's reflections at the top of Adam's Peak, neither tossing out scraps of deflationary sarcasm nor getting pretty with language so as to distract from the mundane that compels our attention. Burt gets right a certain realism of human entanglement with "fate." From a distance, at the airport in the novel's closing encounter, Clare sees of all people her neighbour Rudy. The coincidence "might be fate" she thinks, but certainly neither the punishing fate that incites futile resentment nor the delusory necessity to which some resign themselves in life-negating self-denial. It is instead "a sort of inexorable energy that organize[s] circumstances a certain way—not for the best, not for the worst, but simply in ways that [make] sense."

In *The End of the Alphabet*, Ambrose Zephyr (husband, an advertising executive) and Zappora Ashkenazi (wife, a fashion magazine columnist), called Zipper, are shocked to learn Ambrose, only fifty years old, has but thirty days to live. Ambrose decides to travel, one place per day for twenty-six days, one for each letter of the alphabet: A for Amsterdam, B for Berlin, C for Chartres. After crisscrossing the European continent for a brief while, Zipper gets him to return to Kensington (K): his hand has been shaking as he shaves. Back home, for J, they visit his tailor Umtata in "Old Jewry," the dear tailor who did their wedding garments and who now outfits him with a linen shirt to fit his wasted-thin body.

The drive provided by Ambrose's impending death is not all that accounts for the immensely compact energy of C.S.

Richardson's beautiful text. The pacing is not only shatteringly elliptical (the ellipses evoking the speed with which Zipper witnesses Ambrose dying), but also punctuated with crisp pictures and briefly pleasing insights. Ambrose, who has always just liked what he likes in art and literature, remonstrates with out-of-character enthusiasm after studying Rembrandt's *The Night Watch* up close. Zipper, annoyed by his claim he can "see" things nobody else can, does herself finally see England on the sea-line horizon just where Ambrose had been pointing at it.

One can read *The End of the Alphabet* in a single sitting. But having finished, one wants to start over. This is poetic prose without a wandering word or stray phrase. We are compelled into an enchanted respect for Ambrose and Zipper (and about as far away from the voyeuristic pity of the tear-jerker as one can get). For Richardson keeps them in their crisis at a distance from us. They are different, eccentric, odd: the point is partly that their love is of that type which makes two people just right for each other, excluding all others. The intimacy is one with the vulnerability of the intimacy, for the beloved without any rivals on the horizon will never be replaced. This elegant, brilliant novella might even be said to test the merit of the DeRougemont thesis: here we have *married* love in the Western world, fearless in its loyalty and mighty in its tenderness.



Three Books of Stories

Barry Callaghan

Between Trains. McArthur \$29.95

Emily Givner

A Heart in Port. ThistleDown \$16.95

Stephen Henighan

A Grave in the Air. ThistleDown \$18.95

Reviewed by J. Russell Perkin

Emily Givner was a musician, teacher, and writer who died in Halifax of an allergic reaction at the age of thirty-eight. These facts are recorded in the biographical note to *A Heart in Port*, a collection of ten short stories, one unfinished, that have been published posthumously, and they overdetermine one's reading of the book, especially given that some of the stories include musicians, some are set in Halifax, and several of them focus on the experience of chronic illness. Seán Virgo, the book's editor, provides a brief preface that discusses Givner's writing, observing that her "life as a writer was unfinished (she would have said, had scarcely begun)." A few of the stories in *A Heart in Port* seem to be more works in progress than finished products, but others are accomplished and manifest a distinctive voice, with a range that includes an unsentimental observation of illness, an affinity for the grotesque and fabulous, and a portrait of the Halifax arts scene that is at once affectionate and sardonic. It is clear from this collection that a gifted, distinctive literary voice was lost when Emily Givner died.

The strongest story in *A Heart in Port*, "The Resemblance Between a Violin Case and a Cockroach," is a bizarre fable that tropes on Kafka's "The Metamorphosis" while remaining a wholly original and moving piece of writing. Clarissa, the asthmatic heroine, discovers at the age of fifteen that she is beautiful: "The transformation didn't phase Clarissa in the least, even though it seemed to take place, more or less from what we could tell, overnight. If anything,

Clarissa considered her good looks like a parcel she had ordered long ago and always expected to arrive." Eventually, as a result of the change in her appearance, she finds herself dreaming of becoming a cockroach, and the rest of the story unfolds from this premise, with a conclusion it would be unfair to summarize here.

Barry Callaghan's *Between Trains*, the work of a long-established and well-known writer, is rather a curious mixture. The twenty-two stories vary in length from a few hundred words to about fifty pages. Many might be termed postmodern fairy tales, with elements of magic realism, formulaic characterization, and obtrusive plots. Some of the shorter pieces reflect on the act of telling stories, and are perhaps meant to be read as commentaries on the longer pieces. There are a number of recurring elements, such as ventriloquists, mobsters, priests, and Holocaust survivors. However, despite these larger structural devices, I do not think *Between Trains* adds up to something more than the sum of its various parts.

If the stories are taken one by one, on the other hand, quite a few fail, for various reasons, to engage the reader. Often the grotesque details seem merely gratuitous, and some of the shorter pieces seem little more than elaborations of not-very-interesting jokes or plays on words. For me, the most successful story is "Dog Days of Love," a tale about an elderly priest and his dog that manages to avoid being either sentimental or merely odd, and as a result is a moving tale of affection. "Drei Alter Kockers" ("Three Old Fogeys") has both narrative and linguistic energy, but in its evocation of a past world where men wore hats and talked tough, it seems overly imitative of other writers who have explored the same territory.

Stephen Henighan's *A Grave in the Air* consists of eight stories, including the title work which, taking up approximately one-third of the book, is more novella than short story. Most of them involve European

political conflicts, generally in the post-1989 “world order,” and they explore the problematic effects of national identity on the characters, who include a young Polish woman, a Bosnian Muslim girl posing as a Slovenian, and a Hungarian Canadian observing from an outsider’s perspective the way that Anglo-Montrealers are adjusting to their changing position in Quebec. Two stories focus on the sometimes difficult, sometimes comic relationships between Canadians and English people. While Henighan’s characters are often made uncomfortable by the past they carry around with them, attempting to forget the past creates even more problems.

The personal relationships of the characters in these stories are generally transient and insecure, torn apart or prevented by the historical events that are omnipresent. Recurrently they long for the kind of life that people in less troubled times or situations simply take for granted as “normal,” when a sporting event is not overshadowed by politics, and sexual attraction is not countered by ethnic or linguistic divides. I was initially troubled by the sketchiness of some of Henighan’s characterization, but as I read more of the stories, this seemed part of his point. Life is always elsewhere in these stories, and the extent to which self-transformation is possible is limited by circumstance.

The outstanding title piece focuses on a Canadian foreign correspondent named Darryl who has taken a leave from reporting, and who is haunted by the atrocities he witnessed in Bosnia. In Germany, he encounters a Bosnian girl who initially doesn’t want to hear his story about the fate of her uncle, whom Darryl got to know while reporting on the civil war. “A grave in the air” is a quotation from Paul Celan’s “Todesfuge,” and the story begins with an epigraph from this poem in both German and English. The relationship of language to identity is an important theme

not only in this story but in the book as a whole; Henighan observes the politics of language in both Montreal and the former Yugoslavia, while in “A Grave in the Air,” Darryl reflects on the different implications of “I lived in East Germany” and “*Das war die DDR-Zeit*.” Darryl has to decide whether to testify about the Bosnian genocide in a British trial, and his decision is influenced not only by his encounter with the Bosnian girl but by his awareness that Weimar, where the story is set, is “just down the road” from Buchenwald, which sinister name, Henighan reminds us, means “beech wood.” As a witness to atrocity, Darryl seems to speak for Henighan when he tells his editor that if we can no longer remember our history then “we’re all heading in the same direction as Yugoslavia.” *A Grave in the Air* is the product of a serious, unflinching moral imagination. These stories are often uncomfortable reading, but they are important reading, the work of a writer who looks hard at the complexities and rebarbative elements of the multicultural, globalized world we live in.

Telling Her Stories

Emily Carr; Ann-Lee Switzer, ed.

This and That. Ti-Jean \$17.95

Reviewed by Susan Butlin

Much has been written about the artist Emily Carr (1871-1945). She has been accorded an almost iconic status in the Canadian imagination, created and recreated from many perspectives. Carr achieved success as a visual artist, writer, and as a liberated “New Woman.” But what was the reality behind all these images we have of Carr? Thanks to editor Ann-Lee Switzer, we now have another book of writing by Carr herself which allows her voice to be heard once again.

Carr began writing these stories in the autumn of 1943, as therapy when she was

recovering from a stroke. Switzer discovered the writings, a series of stories, among Carr's papers in the British Columbia Archives. Her research revealed the artist had intended them to be published eventually; Carr laid them out with a draft table of contents and a handwritten dedication, but they remained unpublished until their appearance in this small volume.

How do these stories fit into the published works penned by Emily Carr, including collections of stories such as *Klee Wyck* (1941) and her autobiographical *Growing Pains* (1946)? Although inevitably limited as precise historical sources, these stories further enrich our understanding of Carr's construction of her own autobiographical narrative. Roughly assembled in chronological order, the stories take the form of a random collection of memories and were written by the artist shortly before her death. The stories are not all in finished form, and were not edited or "improved" by Carr's long-time friend and editor Ira Dilworth. Some were typed, but others were found only in draft form in the archive, for example, written by the author on the backs of letters.

For the reader unfamiliar with Carr's own writing, but familiar with one of several biographies that have been published on Emily Carr, these stories will give an immediate sense of the artist. Although Carr came from a prosperous family, this is no genteel lady's account of growing up. She is opinionated and self-deprecating, and her stories read like a lively journal as she introduces the reader to her family and domestic life in amusing detail. Her inventive and humorous use of language and her creation of new words to express an emotion or situation are entertaining.

The stories in *This and That* allow Carr to emerge from the lives and histories that have been supplied for her, to imagine her own identity. Although Emily Carr has had vastly more scrutiny than many of her

Canadian women-artist contemporaries, in the ongoing project of rescuing Canadian women's lives and cultures from the anonymity of history, to reclaim them as part of our history, Carr's stores of *This and That* are a valuable addition.

Versifications du sublime

France Cayouette

La Lenteur au bout de l'aile. David 10,00 \$

Joël Des Rosiers

Savanes, suivi de Poèmes de septembre.

Triptyque 18,00 \$

Pierre Raphaël Pelletier

L'Œil de la lumière. Interligne 12,95 \$

Dominique Zalitis

Entre les murs de la Baltique. David 15,00 \$

Compte rendu par Katia Grubisic

Il y a cent ans, le sublime décrivait ce qui est terrifiant, incommensurable et d'une beauté grandiose. À l'heure actuelle, lorsque la terreur est à la une et la beauté est réifiée pour n'importe quelle marque de commerce, sommes-nous prêts, et nos poètes aussi, à redéfinir le terme? Peut-être devrions-nous revenir à la racine latine du mot sublime . . .

Dans son premier recueil de haïkus, la poète chevronnée France Cayouette invoque les impulsions sublimes de ce genre japonais, sans tout à fait suivre le code structurel du haïku. *La Lenteur au bout de l'aile* suggère un rythme quotidien, vécu tantôt avec le détachement typique des *haijin* (poètes pratiquant l'art du haïku), tantôt avec une perspective et un fil narratifs qui relèvent des modes occidentaux. Cayouette évoque le flou et le momentané de la forme traditionnelle, puisant ses réflexions dans le monde naturel. Les poèmes de Cayouette sont imprégnés de cette nature vivante, débordant discrètement de possibilités métaphoriques :

ce matin
un peu plus de ciel
dans la mangeoire.

Même quand elle transgresse les fondations naturelles, saisonnières ou méditatives du haïku, c'est par curiosité. Cayouette joue par exemple avec l'intersection du bureau et des cormorans dont les ailes sont « ouvertes au soleil ». Bien que la collision entre la banalité implicite du métro-boulot-dodo semble discordante à côté de la transcendance de l'oiseau, cette juxtaposition nous invite à considérer d'un même élan ces éléments apparemment divergents. *La Lenteur au bout de l'aile* nous offre un monde où mouettes et bistros existent à parts égales, où tout moment mérite réflexion—un monde dans lequel la poète plane lentement, humblement.

Il n'y a pas grand-chose d'humble dans le dernier recueil de Joël Des Rosiers, une réédition de *Savanes*, suivi des plus récents *Poèmes de septembre*. Avec son érudition caractéristique, ses volte-face imprévues, ses torsions syntactiques et ses sonorités à la fois ludiques et recherchées, Des Rosiers trace la topographie culturelle, linguistique et historique des Caraïbes et, dans la deuxième section, celle de New York après les attentats de 2001.

Non pas que le poète soit toujours obligé d'assumer une position sceptique, ni de forcer de multiples perspectives, mais Des Rosiers glisse vers l'essentialisme, voire le néo-romantisme. Ses îles font preuve de promiscuité, ses amantes sont « souillées par la pureté », le corps féminin est « le corps parfait du poème », « la fée de la liberté [est] plissée sous la burka » . . . Le poète se perd parfois dans le mélodrame de son système figuratif :

nous les poètes
 nous sommes les mulâtresses de
 plantation
 nous désirons le maître et nous désirons
 nous sommes des femmes qui simulent
 le viol.

Pourtant, quand il se libère d'un certain sentimentalisme historique, ses images poignardent et pleurent. Le dernier vers du

passage cité ci-dessus est simple et émouvant : « nous portons le nom de ton enfant mort ».

Pierre Raphaël Pelletier se voue depuis plus de trois décennies à interroger la mort, à peindre et dépeindre des élégies et des éloges à la fois intimes et universels. Son dernier recueil, *L'Œil de la lumière*, aborde la question platonique de l'homme en renaissance perpétuelle, de l'âme qui se remet constamment de quelque chose : « Je me détache / d'une blessure effrayante / la naissance ». Le poète s'adresse à un *toi* qui demeure assujéti sans jamais devenir interlocuteur, mais les poèmes sont plus touchants quand le *je* s'évade, permettant aux images de témoigner d'un tiraillement qui rappelle la forme persane du ghazal, qui

ressemble de plus en plus
 aux conversations tristes
 d'un départ
 remis au lendemain.

Sans cet effacement de l'auteur, les pyramides verbales et les négations abstraites manquent de rigueur. « Ailleurs on se passe / de la mort »—ailleurs, c'est trop facile. C'est au poète de nous inventer un monde et celui de Pelletier devient fascinant lorsque l'auteur mord dans le surréel à pleines dents.

Le premier recueil de la Québécoise Dominique Zalitis trace un départ primordial : celui de l'exilée qui ne vient de nulle part. Zalitis contrôle adroitement son matériel—une révision poétique aux couleurs politiques de l'histoire souvent opprimante et sanglante de la Lettonie—et ses apostrophes hardies aux lecteurs sont désarmantes : « Permetts-le moi une seule fois », nous implore-t-elle, de racler avec elle les cendres de l'Europe de l'Est. Zalitis commémore un passé qu'on est condamné à revivre : « Terreur / persécution / cruauté / tant de mots qui ne peuvent pas se traduire ». Malheureusement, ils ne se traduisent que trop bien.

Avec un brin de sagesse, Pelletier suggère : « ne vaudrait-il pas mieux / laisser / parler

la beauté / sans l'interrompre? » Pourtant, ce sont les traductions, les réflexions, les interruptions qui entrouvrent les poèmes, permettant aux lecteurs d'entrevoir un monde à la fois beau et apeurant—*sublimis*, qui va en s'élevant.

Amour et bestiaire

Jean Charlebois

Petites nouvelles. . . Heures bleues 27,95 \$

Marie Hélène Poitras

La Mort de Mignonne et autres histoires.

Triptyque 19,00 \$

Compte rendu par David Dorais

Il y a de ces livres qui ne sont ni remarquables ni catastrophiques et dont on ne sait trop quoi dire. S'il s'agissait d'une copie d'élève, on mettrait un soixante-cinq pour cent ou soixante-dix pour cent, sans aucun commentaire, sinon la remarque « Passable, pourrait faire mieux ». Pourtant, Jean Charlebois a du métier. Depuis trente-cinq ans qu'il publie des poèmes et de la prose, disons qu'il sait écrire. Mais dans les meilleurs passages même de son dernier recueil, *Petites nouvelles* . . . , on se prend à rêver de ce que cela donnerait entre des mains expertes. On trouve là des intrigues qui ne demandent qu'à être parachevées. Les histoires que propose Charlebois sont pourtant simples et près du réel. L'une d'elles revient de façon récurrente : l'histoire d'amour entre un homme fatigué de la vie, sujet à l'angoisse, aux peurs, et une femme qui offre ce qui lui manque pour retrouver le goût à l'existence. La femme est dépeinte sous son aspect sensuel. Son indulgence et sa douceur parviennent à combler l'amant : « La vie est froide sans amour. Une place déserte dans un désert. Mais, à eux deux, la vie mène partout. » La fusion amoureuse prend parfois une forme littérale, à travers la relation du couple de Luc et Luce, ayant tous deux changé de sexe (*Entre huit'z'yeux*), ou même à travers un simple pronom

unificateur (*ILLE*). Plusieurs des nouvelles sont loin d'être fleur bleue, et Charlebois sait leur donner de la gravité : des personnages tuent par compassion, pour éviter aux êtres qu'ils aiment une souffrance physique ou morale. C'est avec l'éloge de l'amour et l'alliance de celui-ci avec la mort que Charlebois offre la lecture le plus profitable possible. Encore faut-il préciser : dans les nouvelles où la narration est en prise directe sur les événements et offre un minimum d'élaboration poétique. Car c'est souvent le style qui perd Charlebois. Qu'il use d'images hasardeuses (une femme émue a « les yeux dans le sirop d'érable ») ou de badineries grammaticales inutiles (à quoi sert le z dans « c'est déjà bien assez compliqué sans zelles »?), on sent une certaine complaisance. Dans les passages les plus enfiévrés, les calembours s'étalent comme le sable au désert. Néanmoins, le ton désinvolte montre un désir de jouer avec les mots et de ne pas se prendre trop au sérieux.

Marie Hélène Poitras, à l'inverse de Jean Charlebois, est une jeune auteure. Elle s'est déjà fait remarquer par sa première œuvre, *Soudain le minotaure* (2002), qui a remporté le Prix Anne-Hébert. On serait tenté de l'associer à cette flopée de jeunes auteurs montréalais décriés par Victor-Lévy Beaulieu, et il est vrai qu'on retrouve dans *La Mort de Mignonne et autres histoires* certains des traits qui font ce que d'aucuns appellent la « littérature du Plateau-Mont-Royal » : tonalité autobiographique, personnages de jeunes sans attaches et drogués, thème de la dérive amoureuse, peinture enlaidissante de la ville, etc. Mais ce serait là un jugement réducteur, car l'œuvre de Poitras ose s'éloigner de cet enclos. Symbole d'une certaine liberté créatrice, l'image du cheval revient à plusieurs reprises, dans la nouvelle éponyme, entre autres, où une jument s'échappe de son box et galope follement dans les rues de Montréal, mais aussi dans *Protéger Lou*, qui décrit le milieu sordide des conducteurs de calèche,

ou dans *Nan sans Réal*, où la relation entre une fille de douze ans et un homme suicidaire passe par l'équitation. Dans toutes ces nouvelles, et dans celles encore qui utilisent l'image de la bête agonisante (cachalot, renarde), l'animal représente la vie débordante, l'excès, soumis à une vie misérable, tel le formidable cheval Bataille dans *Germinal* de Zola. À propos de l'écho des fers sur l'asphalte, il est écrit : « Ce bruit affolant, creusé, est celui du déracinement et des agonies, une alarme qui dit que le monde est à l'envers depuis qu'on a éloigné les chevaux du sol. » Ce triste sort exprime la désillusion, la fin de l'innocence. D'ailleurs, le recueil de Poitras est conçu presque en entier sur l'opposition un peu simpliste entre, d'une part, la campagne, l'enfance, la pureté et, d'autre part, la ville, la saleté, la perversion. Notons que plusieurs récits sont écrits au « tu » et usent de longues phrases au fil de la pensée, ce qui communique un sentiment de dynamisme et d'urgence. Des images violentes et corporelles sont aussi utilisées (le sang, le vomi), mais somme toute, le style reste assez sage, l'auteure misant plutôt sur la force des histoires racontées.

Vents et marée

Andrée Christensen

Depuis toujours, j'entendais la mer. David 20,00 \$

Pierre Yergeau

La Cité des vents. L'instant même 17,95 \$

Compte rendu par Kinga Zawada

Deux forces de la nature—le vent et la mer—lient les titres choisis par Christensen et Yergeau, et suggèrent le tempo de ces deux délectables romans.

Christensen donne immédiatement le ton à son premier roman en le qualifiant de « roman-tombeau ». Mais grâce au style lyrique et poétique de l'artiste franco-ontarienne, le lecteur se laisse bercer par un thème aussi accablant que la mort. Le

récit commence par l'arrivée d'un mystérieux colis envoyé par un archéologue danois à la porte de sa cousine écrivaine. En lui confiant son carnet intime, Thorvald Sørensen la prie de « dévoiler [s]on histoire en la créant ». Intrigué, le lecteur pénètre l'univers de l'énigmatique cousin pour découvrir avec lui que « c'est la mort qui façonne la vie ». Le parcours de Thorvald est ponctué par les trépas de tous ses proches et s'achève par son propre anéantissement « dans les bras de la mer ». En s'incorporant à la mer/mère/mort, il achève sa vie « en toute lucidité . . . et en état de grâce ». La présence de dépouilles, de momies et de portraits des défunts souligne la présence des absents et élucide comment « *[m]ortui vivos docent* (Les morts enseignent aux vivants) ». Assaisonné de références littéraires et historiques, de légendes nordiques et de quelques mots étrangers, ce splendide roman nous incite à réévaluer notre rapport à la mort, à l'approprier et à l'intégrer à notre quotidien.

Si *Depuis toujours j'entendais la mer* se déploie avec douceur et envahit le lecteur vague par vague, *La Cité des vents* progresse avec la vitesse d'un véritable souffle qui balaie tout sur son passage. Ce roman captivant, vif et mouvementé est composé de phrases courtes et de chapitres très brefs. Des mots écrits à l'envers (« Ogacihc », « el evêr », « ruoma ») soulignent la force du vent qui semble avoir déplacé les lettres et reflètent le rythme rapide de ce roman qui rappelle un tour sur des montagnes russes.

La Cité des Vents est le quatrième roman qui relate les épisodes de la saga familiale des Hanses et s'inscrit dans le cycle entrepris avec *L'Écrivain public* et poursuivi avec *La Désertion* et *Les Amours perdues*. C'est avec un frisson de plaisir et d'anticipation que le destinataire de ce volet retrouve le personnage de Georges—l'ainé des enfants Hanses. Après avoir entrevu l'enfance du protagoniste dans les livres précédents, le public est invité à l'accompagner dans

ses péripéties d'adolescent en quête de fortune et d'aventure.

Le personnage principal est doté de sa propre voix et narre son histoire, qu'il parsème habilement de réflexions et de doutes pour interpeller et engager le lecteur. Georges dévoile, en rétrospective, son voyage à la cité des vents—Chicago—ainsi que son plan : « ramasser le plus d'argent possible pour ouvrir un commerce, et . . . ne rien dépenser. »

L'ainé des Hanse tentera sa chance dans les espaces marginaux de la grande ville. Après avoir quitté l'Abitibi et traversé illégalement la frontière dans un camion de poires en décomposition, Georges s'enfoncera davantage dans la pourriture en se mêlant aux clochards et aux gueux, et s'éprendra d'une mystérieuse jeune bourgeoise délirante qui choisit ses noms en fonction de son humeur du jour.

Ce récit à la première personne permet d'explorer les « entrailles » de Chicago et de découvrir les recoins et les personnages négligés par l'histoire américaine : la faune des gares, des entrepôts et du dessous des ponts. Plongés dans cette « poubelle » de la cité des vents composée d'éléments hétérogènes, les lecteurs sont entraînés à s'interroger, comme Georges, sur les différentes facettes de l'« American Dream ».

Les chemins du poème

Guy Cloutier

Affûts, précédé de *Rue de nuit*. Noroît 18,95 \$

Louise Cotnoir

Les Îles. Noroît 18,95 \$

Paul Bélanger

Origine des méridiens. Noroît 18,95 \$

Compte rendu par Thomas Mainguy

Rue de nuit relate la recherche d'une unité intime, où l'utilisation de la deuxième personne du singulier témoigne des efforts du poète pour s'amarrer à lui-même. En dehors de ses territoires familiers, il arpente

un paysage où se marient la mer, la nuit, la ville, une rue, puis une route menant dans les terres. Épris du besoin de se nommer, il constate que le silence qu'il voulait déjouer l'accompagne dans son exil, rendant équivoque la promesse des lieux appréhendés : « Tu sais qu'il faudra creuser / seul la route jusqu'à toi. » Ce n'est qu'une fois le sujet départi du carcan langagier qui l'opprime qu'il entend la véritable voix du lieu, rendant le « Je » possible : « Je te rejoins au-delà de ton nom. // Je te dénomme. // Je t'innomme. »

Toujours dans un rapport difficile à soi, le poète, de ses *Affûts*, perçoit sa jeunesse telle une bête non apprivoisée. Voulant se réconcilier avec elle, il soliloque, tiraillé entre la peur et l'envie de tourner la page : « Combien de fois devrais-je le répéter / pour que tu m'écoutes je parle pour moi / inutile de raconter ta vie dans ma tête. » La naissance—perçue comme un abandon de la mère—constitue sa blessure originelle : « Tu es né mort-né. » Et ce n'est pas sans pathétisme que le poète témoigne de ce premier rejet. Cultivant un goût pour le mot précieux, sa voix prend parfois un accent complaisant. Or, il est un vers à retenir, qui à lui seul porte le recueil et résume, il me semble, son sentiment envers la vie : « il faut s'y être brûlé pour l'aimer. »

Visiter *Les Îles* de Louise Cotnoir équivaut à la suivre durant un voyage sombre et grave, alors qu'elle file sa réflexion sur nos origines, l'écoulement du temps, au moyen d'un vers court et incisif, et d'une prose nerveuse, au souffle incertain. Cotnoir nous guide avec adresse en ces territoires isolés à la surface du monde, ces « Parcelles encadrées / Résistantes à l'éventuelle disparition ». La fin hante sans cesse le périple, puisque la conscience d'un temps linéaire, de sa stratification, ne semble offrir aucun autre horizon que celui de la chute, de l'« emportement ». La soif humaine de progrès a transformé l'existence en une course absurde, au sens érodé et diffus, alors qu'un

mince rempart, l'enfance, résiste « Contre le chaos sans cesse recommencé / avec le feu tombé du ciel ». Dans ce contexte, la préservation des « images d'enfance », leur tranquillité et leur *inconscience* garantissent à l'individu une île où demeurer à la surface, bien que la menace de l'engloutissement soit toujours présente. Une fois les lumières de l'innocence perdues, qui seules permettent d'abolir le cours du temps, le destin ne peut pas être plus ténébreux, la vie moins chaotique : « Aux touches d'un piano bleu, les doigts défient l'insensé : fermer les yeux de son enfant. » Vivre tient alors du prodige et pour éviter l'absurdité, il faut consentir à la mort, contempler son visage qui est aussi le nôtre, car, dit Cotnoir, nous sommes des « astres en chemin / Vers la poussière ».

Origine des méridiens met la poésie au service d'une conscience inquiète. Le langage dessine ainsi des chemins qui s'enfoncent dans le « chaos intérieur » et le silence dont l'existence est investie : « Ton entêtement, cependant, sur la route / isolée de ce ciel gris—l'enfantement // futile et fiévreux, l'enchantement / qui transfigure les sommeils // et engendre quelques noms / pour ce monde opaque. » Surpassant l'action de « Narcisse », le poète s'aventure au-delà de son « visage », « franchit le miroir / et surprend le monde inversé ». Voilà qu'il quitte l'univers opaque de la matière, du paysage, pour pénétrer dans la transparence du vide, de l'insaisissable qui soutient et informe notre existence. Le poème représente ainsi le méridien qui unit les pôles contraires de nos vies (soi et l'autre, visible et invisible, chant et silence) afin qu'elles obtiennent une certaine consistance, une certaine forme : « Je reviendrai, solitaire / pour t'écrire qu'aucune fin / n'a le visage de l'absence. » C'est par ailleurs dans la reprise qu'un tel lien se maintient, le poète subissant le même sort que Sisyphe : « Chaque fois / tu dois recommencer // revenir à la première / ligne, à ce qui enchaîne / les mots aux heures. » Bélanger livre dans

son recueil une réflexion riche et profuse, réitérant le bon ménage que font poésie et philosophie. Il en résulte cependant un recueil qui sacrifie souvent l'aspect charnel de l'image, rendant ainsi son approche difficile à l'occasion.

Civility at the Gates

Daniel Coleman

White Civility: The Literary Project of English Canada. U of Toronto P \$55.00

Reviewed by Cynthia Sugars

Canadians have long taken heart in their national reputation as a populace committed to community values, multiculturalism, political compromise, peaceful government, and international peacekeeping. For generations, they have reiterated a notion of Canada as occupying a middle ground between British class hierarchy and American materialism, also understood as Old-World ossification and New-World laissez-faire individualism. Various myths about Canadian benevolence have proliferated, including Canadians' sense that they offer a more hospitable environment than the US to Aboriginal peoples and immigrants.

Daniel Coleman's analysis of the pervasive metaphor of "civility" in Canadian cultural discourse is a fascinating and eye-opening study that provides a welcome genealogy of this discourse in Canadian literary texts published between 1850 and 1950. Influenced by Homi Bhabha's well-known essay from *The Location of Culture* (1994), "Sly Civility," the study provides an analysis of the predominance of white normativity in English-Canadian literature by focusing on the ways the conception of English-Canadian identity is tied up with an exclusionary model of British civility and masculinity. According to Coleman, this notion of British civility has manifested itself in unique ways in the settler-colonial

context. His claim is that a particular form of white Canadian civility was promulgated via four ubiquitous allegorical figures in Canadian literary texts of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, each of which functioned as a personification of the Canadian nation: the Loyalist brother, the Scottish orphan, the muscular Christian, and the maturing colonial son. Each figure is defined by his paternalistic civility towards marginalized others. However, as Coleman demonstrates, the code of civility was integrally based on a racist assumption of white priority, whereby “others” could be readily embraced as long as they modeled themselves according to white British values. This, as Coleman puts it, is the inherent contradiction of civility: it has to be policed; it *depends* on a process of othering. As Coleman writes, “modern civility is, paradoxically, a limited or constrained universality that tends to proliferate and striate not only external but also internal differences.” Given these conditions, it follows that the project of civility is also a clearly pedagogical one: civility, as Coleman states, “became something that a person or culture *did*.” In other words, it taught people how to “act” Canadian.

This background renders the project of white civility in Canada an acutely ambivalent one, which was further undermined by the temporal gap between the colonies and the Old World. A specific version of pan-ethnic “Britishness” fit the bill nicely in the colonies: first, because the concept of Britishness could be held up as an example of a union of diverse peoples, and hence as a kind of founding instance of Canadian compromise and tolerance; second, because the overarching concept of Britishness enabled Britons who did not identify themselves as “English” (either along class or cultural lines) to assume cultural dominance in a new context. This latter approach informed the social Darwinism that underlay the founding of a new “race” in Canada,

forged in the harsh northern environment and, because of this, superior to its British predecessors and American counterparts. Indeed, an element of moral superiority inflects each of the four allegorical figures that Coleman investigates.

Not surprisingly, the allegory of the Loyalist brother was used to signal a loyalty to British tradition and values; more importantly, however, the allegory demonstrates an ambivalence at the heart of the civil code itself. For if the American War of Independence is seen as a foundational moment for the Canadian nation (since many Loyalists migrated to the northern British colonies following the war), it was also difficult to rationalize with an inherent notion of British civility. How could brother turn against brother? How could one explain this overt lack of civility at the nation’s origins? Looking at John Richardson’s *The Canadian Brothers* (1840), among other Canadian novels, Coleman identifies the revolutionary war as an origin-making trauma for Canadian culture, where the ideal of fraternity meets the threat of fratricide. In other words, encrypted within a tale of Loyalist honour is a tale of “domestic violence.” As a result, it was necessary to delineate an emerging Canadian “type,” who was distinguished from his American brother along ethical lines. The Canadian brother was guided by an honour-bound code of civility, within which communal and spiritual values were elevated above materialist, self-centred ones. This, in turn, informed the notion of the decent, hard-working Canadian homesteader. Fratricide thus became a “necessary precursor to the next generation’s idyll of innocence.”

Coleman’s analysis of the motif of the Scottish orphan in early Canadian literary texts—including Thomas McCulloch’s *The Letters of Mephibosheth Stepsure* (1821–22), John Galt’s *Bogle Corbet* (1831), and Ralph Connor’s *The Man from Glengarry*

(1901)—underlines the ways the Canadian notion of “Englishness” is in fact Scottish based. Scottish orphans, in these narratives, are figured as prototypical and enterprising Canadians, who embrace an ideology of progress and improvement within an anti-capitalist code of thrift and moral rectitude. This discourse not only enabled Scottish settlers to produce a “slippage between Britishness and Englishness to gain social status in Canada,” but it also enabled Scottish settlers to assert a distinct Scottish identity while also including themselves as “British” founders of the nascent Canadian nation. Thus “Scottish values become generalized in colonial society as the universal values of the model British colonist,” which in turn informed the discourse of “muscular Christian” values in Canadian culture. The muscular Christian, like the Scottish orphan, was characterized by an ethos of manly hard work and Christian humility. Even more than the Loyalist or Scottish orphan, however, the muscular Christian was defined by his civil treatment of racial or ethnic outsiders. This social reformist aspect of the muscular Christian in effect meant that civility was based on a capacity to civilize others. The welcoming embrace of the Christian social code—anyone could be a member—was thus based on a dichotomy of universalism and difference dependent on a distinction between agents and recipients. The model was inclusive to the extent that it embraced those willing to assimilate to the white, British, heterosexual norm.

If the muscular Christian became associated with the refinement of the new nation’s character, this is explicitly the case for the final allegorical figure Coleman considers, the maturing colonial son. In this instance, manly maturation combines with Christian character-building in the allegorical figuration of a nation with a unique reputation and identity. A key sign of the nation’s maturity, Coleman notes, was its ability

to embrace others: Native peoples, French Canadians, Eastern Europeans. Coleman’s discussion of Gilbert Parker’s *The Seats of the Mighty* (1896), Connor’s *The Foreigner* (1909), and J.S. Woodsworth’s *Strangers within Our Gates* (1909) is excellent for its analysis of the contradiction at the core of white civility’s professions of inclusion: “Canada’s ‘maturity’ depends upon extending civil treatment to others, but in the very process it constantly repositions these others ‘at the gates’ in its need to reiterate its maturity.”

Coleman concludes his study by considering texts that did not succumb to the romance of British civility, yet which nonetheless attest to its power by countering its predominance. Examples include John Marlyn’s *Under the Ribs of Death* (1957), Sara Jeannette Duncan’s *The Imperialist* (1904), and James de Mille’s *Strange Manuscript Found in a Copper Cylinder* (1888). The discussion of *The Imperialist* is particularly interesting, not only given the text’s apparent mourning for the failure of a distinct Canadian society, but also for its very ambivalent relation to the Six Nations’ peoples on the Grand River Reserve. Ultimately, the texts discussed in this final chapter confirm Coleman’s analysis, either by giving credence to the hypocrisy of colonial civility in Canada, or by unintentionally succumbing to it, as does Duncan, in the midst of their critiques.

This is a fine and informative study, which complements Eva Mackey’s 1999 study of Canadian multicultural discourse, *The House of Difference*. If I have one criticism of the book, it is to point out the masculine focus of the study. While Coleman highlights the patriarchal assumptions at the base of white civility in Canada, he does not discuss important formative allegories of female civility (for instance, the figure of the maternal feminist or the female pioneer). This is a necessary limitation of the parameters of the study, but a regrettable

one given how important the notion of the female settler has been in Canadian literary discourse.

Today, Coleman states, we “demonstrate our humanity by manifesting an awareness of our own capacity for inhumanity.” This is what characterizes the contemporary approach he labels “wry civility” in Canada. In effect, *White Civility* is an example of “wry civility.” It provides a history and critique of the project of normative civility in English Canada, while also highlighting its continuing impact in popular understandings of Canadian identity today.

The Poetics of Response and Response-ability

Stephen Collis

Phyllis Webb and the Common Good: Poetry/Anarchy/Abstraction. Talonbooks \$24.95

Reviewed by Amanda Lim

The mysterious aura that surrounds Canadian poet Phyllis Webb informs Stephen Collis' book, *Phyllis Webb and the Common Good: Poetry/Anarchy/Abstraction*, but does not hamper him as it has some critics who, as he points out, find it easier to dismiss Webb as neurotic and reclusive than to delve into the intricate connections of art, poetry, philosophy, politics, and ethics that tangle through—and complicate—interpretations of her work. Collis effectively and ethically counters the critics who perceive Webb as inward-turning, and possibly even solipsistic, by arguing that she does the very opposite through her connections between social responsibility and poetic response—what Collis terms her “poetics of response.” Her poems, especially those that show her responding to poets as varied as T.S. Eliot, Andrew Marvell, Rainer Maria Rilke, Gertrude Stein, and H.D., indicate Webb's openness to the other. Whether these allusions register as overt apostrophes or as implicitly shared motifs

and symbols, Webb's persistent dialogue with her many literary influences disrupts the common image of the poet as solitary figure and demonstrates, instead, that the poet's primary responsibility is to others and to the “common good” over the individual. Thus, “whoever would see Webb as a solipsistic poet misses the ‘many voices’ that echo within her resonating and responsive poems, misses the ‘fusing’ and ‘joining’ of her responsive poetics.”

Collis' arguments about Webb's poetic response-ability extend to his argument that Webb's anarchist politics inform the relationship between self and other in her poetry. Anarchy, he says, is *not* about a total lack of government or about absolute autonomy; instead, he suggests that we might think of anarchism as an “an-anarchism”—or a philosophy “without origin”—that emphasizes relations over origins and understands singularity to always be in contact with the plural. Seen in this way, an “an-archic” poetry such as Webb's is without conclusion but is rather “a prolonged investigation of the actual multiplicities of the seemingly singular self.” Responsibility for Webb is “the *keeping* of the ability to respond”—to others, to possibilities, to the future—rather than a singular identified and fixed state.

Webb's own interconnections and self-referentiality within her body of poetry, and between her poetry and painting, demonstrate her preoccupation with the lyric subject, poetic self, and, according to Collis, abstraction. For Collis, Webb's progression from poetry to painting is natural, given that Webb has expressed in her poems as well as in her essays, her frustrations with the limits and failures of language and representation and her growing feeling that abstraction is the way to go. Her increasing turn towards abstraction is evident in her later poetic works, such as *Water and Light* and *Hanging Fire*, and in her paintings that foreground colour, texture, shape, and

line over representation. This turn, Collis argues, indicates Webb's desire to question the position of the lyric self, the limits of lyric subjectivity, and the emphasis on referentiality and mimetic representation. Thus, abstraction in Webb's work is *not* a depoliticized mode of being but a highly political process of becoming.

Overall, Collis shows, with nuanced analysis and in-depth research, both how Webb is a product of her literary milieu and how she strove to counter dominant political ideologies and literary influences, even as she acknowledged her ambivalent relationship with them.

Inside the Darkness

Lorna Crozier

The Blue Hour of the Day. McClelland & Stewart
\$22.99

Reviewed by Joan Crate

One of the advantages of a book of poems selected from the expanse of a poet's career is the sweeping poetic vision it reveals. Lorna Crozier's *The Blue Hour of the Day* contains excerpts from nine of her books and, through them, takes us from the often messy details of personal lives backwards through memory, story, anecdote, and ancestors to a prehistoric beginning where there was "nothing broken / or in need of breaking" ("The Origin of the Species"). This is a world unmarred by human fault and filled with light that "glossed all / that waited to be seen" ("Apocrypha of Light"). Yet even then, there are things in the darkness that make light itself recoil. Crozier writes of a world of imperfection, clumsiness, violence, betrayal, pain, and in spite of everything, delight and love.

Though several of her poems include the natural world, her emphasis is on the human one. In her exploration, she is unflinching, lifting up all rocks and pulling out all stops to expose the ugly deeds

crawling beneath an ordinary day and a "typical" relationship. She considers characters such as the pedophiles that exist within families, the travelling poet with the teen-aged lover who calls him *Mister*, and the lover whose abandoned wife puts their son on the phone. "Only four, *Daddy*, he'd say, / when are you coming home? / till his father / clicked the receiver down . . ." ("The Other Woman"). By examining particular, often despicable actions, Crozier makes those who perform them, if not redeemable, at least recognizable. Shit happens, life goes on, and love exists not because it doesn't see or its object is irresistible, but *in spite of* a myriad of all-too-obvious faults.

As the title of this book of selected poems indicates, darkness is an essential element in everyday life. It is also seductive and often the source of yearning.

Everything yearns—
that stone in your hand,
that singular blade of grass.
Don't think it's only for the light.

Yet, as the book's title also indicates, darkness is limited. In a sense it clarifies the light which shines on the most unlikely of places, including the "Canada Day Parade" that features a boy holding up a sign saying "Future Oilman," beside him a girl, the "Future Oilman's Wife," and the "four Lions' Ladies / in fake leather fringes, / faces streaked with warpaint, not one / real Indian in the whole parade."

Always accessible, Crozier speaks a language we understand, but she uses it to tell us of things we don't. In "Photograph, Not of Me or Little Billy, Circa 1953," she introduces a child narrator who looks down the bowling alley "trying to catch sight / of the little man who lives / inside the darkness at the end of the lanes." There "Little Billy" waits "to set things right." We can smile at the child's way of explaining a technology she can't understand, and her desire for an outside hand to guide circumstances

beyond her control is touching in the context of the childhood Crozier constructs. In various poems, she develops the character of a father robbed of the family farm, his drinking, bravado, illness, bad behaviour, and flawed heroics. In this childhood, in many ways both defective and ordinary, conditions are not exactly “right,” yet there is acceptance and a love that simply is.

Often it is the disconnected and the minute that interest Crozier, perhaps because they can be appreciated without the baggage that larger, more complicated subjects bring. In “Delight in the Small, the Silent,” she celebrates

those that inhabit
only a corner of the mind,
the ones shaped by wind
and a season: a slip of
grass, the nameless flower
that offers its scent
to a small wind.

Without the eastern philosophy, Crozier creates a kind of yin-yang from light and dark, transgression and acceptance, simplicity and complexity, pain and humour. Her work is refreshingly unromantic and her depiction of love is in-your-face and realistic. Love does not necessarily elevate one; it is not necessarily noble, but the fact that it grows amongst debris in the darkest of places is something to rejoice in.

Chimères et lucidité

Jean-Paul Daoust

Cobra et colibri. Noroît 23,95 \$

Jean-Paul Daoust

Cinéma gris. Triptyque 17,00 \$

Compte rendu par Nathalie Warren

Divisé en quatre parties, *Cobra et colibri* nous mène par des jardins où les poèmes ouvrent, comme autant de fleurs, leurs corolles. Ici chatoyantes, là vénéneuses où appas de plantes carnivores même, à tout coup elles odorent et altèrent les sens.

Sur un monde qui pour lui est « radeau de la Méduse », sur une terre « bleue comme une orange / Avariée » l’auteur pose un regard qui tour à tour passe de l’écoeurement à la fascination.

À proximité de l’autre, passager comme lui de cette embarcation précaire, mais conscient et en lui-même isolé, jusqu’à en être affligé d’une mélancolie toute lamartienne, il n’émerge du « lac Rocher » qu’avec les mots, ceux après lesquels on court, ceux desquels on espère l’affranchissement, l’impulsion permettant au regard de ricocher, d’aller ailleurs.

Mais en cet endroit inexorablement il revient, comme il revient aussi en ces autres lieux où le chavire la beauté et si, dans *Duos*, le jour est parfois « lourd comme un roman russe », pour contrebalancer la vie porte également tant de ces splendeurs qui lui « scient les nerfs » qu’il demeure néphar enraciné entre ce qui abat et ce qui pâme d’aise.

Enfin, à mille lieues de ce foisonnement d’atmosphères le recueil *Cinéma gris*—qui fut finaliste au Prix de poésie des Terrasses Saint-Sulpice de la revue *Estuaire*—se circonscrit, quant à lui, autour du thème de la passion et de ses aléas. Unité de sujet donc, mais de forme également, car Daoust nous y propose une trame de textes en cinq vers où la brièveté ne s’allie certes pas à l’apesanteur.

En effet, passé la sobre couverture, le tapis rouge ne s’ouvre ici que pour les stars de la solitude et de l’amertume. La volupté, la jalousie et l’intimité y passant comme de seconds rôles ayant été surjoués.

Intercalés avec des poèmes où le sentiment apparaît comme étant unilatéral, où les amants en viennent à se mimer des actes de présence, où l’ennui comme le mépris affleurent et dans lesquels la maîtrise de la plume est indiscutable; d’autres, par trop immatures et fleur bleue détonnent.

Or, comme au début de ce chassé-croisé amoureux où le vide remplit l’espace à rasbords, le poète écrit :

qui peut comprendre les chimères
l'amour est une fiction
pourtant ton opulence
inutile d'en rajouter
alors ma langue déploie son aile rouge

Force m'est de conclure que si les deux œuvres font état du fait qu'en concordance avec le cœur et le désir la fantasmagorie vient suppléer au réel jusqu'à le faire basculer du côté de la fiction, dans *Cobra et colibri* seulement le subterfuge opère.

Une éthique de la poésie

Jean Désy

Âme, foi et poésie. XYZ 23,00 \$

Claude Beausoleil

Alma. XYZ 18,00 \$

Catherine Morency

L'Atelier de L'Âge de la parole. 19,95 \$

Compte rendu par Nelson Charest

Il faudra un jour poser sérieusement la question d'une éthique de la poésie. Des trois essais ici recensés, celui de Jean Désy pose clairement la question, avec un courage certain; *Âme, foi et poésie* est un titre que peu de gens, aujourd'hui, accepteraient d'endosser. Bien sûr l'on pourra reprocher à Désy son manque de distance critique, la bigarrure de ses références, son ton professoral, et certainement moralisateur, ou encore un style qui frôle parfois le scatologique. Faire le compte de ces lacunes reviendrait à appliquer une lunette critique à un texte qui demande plutôt empathie ou antipathie, et qui l'assume clairement : « En résumé, les arts, quels qu'ils soient, ont-ils une fonction éthique? Ou bien l'humanité est lancée dans une hystérique course en avant, esthétique et brillante, tant scientifique qu'artistique, mais qui la conduit à toute vitesse vers son gouffre, ou bien il y a espoir. D'où vient cet espoir? » À rebours, et en comparant avec les deux autres essais recensés, c'est cette franchise qui semble la plus « critique », car elle pose

d'emblée une question éthique qui risque, autrement, d'être larvée et insidieuse.

Lorsqu'on lit, en quatrième de couverture du récit *Alma* de Claude Beausoleil, que la poésie a produit « la métamorphose d'un enfant en passion créatrice », on sait bien que cette affirmation présuppose que la poésie a des vertus morales. Tout est ici mis en œuvre pour présenter l'éveil à la vocation poétique comme la création d'un monde, de la prédestination de la naissance (« Je suis né au matin du 16 novembre, au Rita Snack-Bar, au milieu du siècle dernier, le même jour que ma grand-mère Alma. ») à la communion avec l'« *Alma mater* », du rite de passage au roman d'apprentissage. Le présent intemporel, le baptême des lieux et des êtres, la progression chronologique des expériences et des jours, et jusqu'au feu divin transformé en « Smith-Corona », tout concourt à créer la fiction de la (re)naissance d'un être qui cache mal son élan religieux. Il est difficile de dire, dans ce contexte, ce qui prime comme impression : est-on, comme le souhaite sûrement l'auteur, dans une sacralisation salvatrice du quotidien, ou au contraire dans une banalisation du sacré? Chose certaine, ce sacré est partout sous-entendu mais jamais révélé, de telle sorte qu'on *doit*, comme lecteur, s'agenouiller devant des stations (trop) bien visibles, sans vraiment savoir pourquoi : « Cigales. Clapotis léger du canal. / Espace désert. / Des herbes sèches. / La structure massive des grands moulins de Pantin. ».

L'essai de Catherine Morency, *L'Atelier de L'Âge de la parole*, n'a bien sûr aucune prétention morale, et il serait hasardeux de considérer sous cet angle une étude rigoureuse de la genèse d'un des recueils les plus marquants de la poésie québécoise. Que cette grande œuvre soit marquée, d'une façon originale, par le passage des plaquettes initiales, chefs-d'œuvre de plastique, de typographie et d'imprimerie, à la mise en recueil exigée par la naissante collection « Rétrospective » des éditions

de l'Hexagone, Morency nous en convainc très bien. Pourtant la question de l'éthique revient au détour, plus insidieuse. Ainsi, après avoir consciencieusement interprété la teneur de chacune des plaquettes et leur transformation dans le recueil « rétrospectif », Morency pose pour ce dernier une « ouverture de sens » qui ressemble davantage à un jugement de valeur qu'à une interprétation du « sens » créé, précisément—alors même que ce jugement de valeur n'est plus nécessaire, les nombreuses citations de l'essayiste le démontrant parfaitement. C'est comme si l'étude, en fin de course, ne visait plus qu'à démontrer ce qui n'a plus besoin d'être démontré, que *L'Âge de la parole* est un recueil « ouvert », entendre grand, bon, ou autre terme mélioratif. Cela est d'autant plus surprenant que Morency, une page plus tôt, considérait avec Marc André Brouillette que le passage des plaquettes au recueil entraînait une « perte irrécupérable » . . . Affirmer l'ouverture après avoir affirmé la perte, c'est d'abord se contredire, mais c'est aussi poser une question « statistique » à un recueil de poésie : nous offre-t-il plus ou moins? Or répondre à cette question, c'est inévitablement faire intervenir un jugement de valeur, et donc, encore une fois, une question éthique; alors qu'on aurait pu se contenter de la question du « sens ».

Children Alone

Brian Doyle

Pure Spring. Groundwood \$14.95

Matt Duggan

The Royal Woods. Key Porter \$16.95

Reviewed by Lynn (J.R.) Wytenbroek

In the late nineteenth to early twentieth centuries, many books featured children or young people orphaned because of the death of or desertion by their parents. Then, in the mid twentieth century, complete families were predominant. Today, single-

parent families are popular in children's and young adult literature. Interestingly, though, both *Pure Spring* and *The Royal Woods* feature children who are alone largely because of the death of one or both parents.

Doyle's *Pure Spring*, set in Ottawa of the early 1950s, is a sequel to *Boy O'Boy*, featuring a fifteen-year-old protagonist with the improbable name of Martin O'Boy. The tale is gritty yet suitable for most young teens as it follows Martin into his first full-time job as a helper to Randy, the driver of a truck that delivers *Pure Spring* soft drinks. Rapidly blackmailed by the unscrupulous Randy into stealing from their customers, Martin is equally quick to fall in love with the beautiful Gerty McDowell, daughter of one of Randy's victims. The story realistically traces Martin's agony over the crimes and how to rectify them without losing both his job and his first true love.

Doyle is a multi-award winning novelist, well-known to readers of down and dirty Canadian young adult realism. But despite the gritty realism of the stories, many of Doyle's characters, as usual, in this novel have a good heart. Not only Martin, but funeral-junky Grandpa Rip, Martin's kind employer Mr. Mirsky and, of course, the lovely Gerty, are all sterling characters, yet utterly believable, as is the plot. Randy is a despicable, foul-mouthed and dirty-minded two-bit criminal, yet also believable. The flashes of Martin's earlier life with his drunken father, brow-beaten mother, and mentally ill twin add interest to an already riveting tale. Themes of loyalty, integrity, truthfulness, and kindness are highlighted through both the characters and the plot without being too overt. Overall, this is an excellent book for early mid-teen readers.

The Royal Woods is Duggan's first children's book, although Duggan has written screenplays, short stories, and articles for adults before. In *The Royal Woods*, twelve-year-old Sydney and her eight-year-old brother Turk have fled their home because

of their depressed father's neglect following their mother's death. They go to stay with an elderly great aunt and uncle, only to find the farm replaced with a new, cookie-cutter subdivision complete with golf course and shopping mall. Befriended by the new immigrant Kumar and the kindly but homeless and absent-minded Shep, the two find a way to make enough money to stay alive while living in unsold houses in the subdivision.

Sydney's determination for herself and Turk to survive and, indeed, to flourish, is matched by her capacity for hare-brained ideas. Turk has great strength of character as well, but is more sensible and flexible than his sister. The two characters, plus their friends Kumar and Shep, are quite delightful, as is the story that whirls the reader through one misadventure after another. However, Duggan has chosen to use a dated narrative style. He addresses the reader directly, asking what the reader thinks the characters will do or say next. This creates a slightly condescending tone which becomes increasingly annoying. Also, the story is badly overwritten in places, with everything carefully explained. There is no room for trying to figure anything out, because it is all laid out clearly, which takes away part of the pleasure of reading. Finally, the ending has a somewhat *deus ex machina* feel, as the children, driven out of Royal Woods and somewhat desperate, are found by their loving father who has been shocked out of his depression by the loss of his children.

Pure Spring is a fine novel that will be enjoyed by many teens, particularly boys. *The Royal Woods* is a novel with some real promise but the style fundamentally doesn't work for today's audience.



Seeing and Being

Elizabeth Rollins Epperly

Through Lover's Lane: L.M. Montgomery's Photography and Visual Imagination. U of Toronto P \$29.95

Reviewed by Christa Zeller Thomas

Scholarly interest in Lucy Maud Montgomery and her literary output is gaining momentum given the number of book-length studies published in recent years. The growing list of titles now includes *The Intimate Life of L.M. Montgomery* (Gammel 2005), volume five of *Montgomery's Selected Journals* (Rubio and Waterston 2004), and most recently *Through Lover's Lane*, Elizabeth Epperly's detailed and contextual analysis of Montgomery's fiction in relation to her photography and journals. It is a welcome addition, not least because of the inclusion of some thirty beautiful photographs, carefully selected by Epperly from the extensive Montgomery collection held by the University of Guelph. The photographs are not only a great pleasure to see for anyone interested in Montgomery, but they also serve to illustrate Epperly's argument about Montgomery's visual imagination and "way of seeing."

Epperly contends that in her photography and throughout her life Montgomery "repeated patterns and shapes: S curves, keyholes and circles of light, arches, and framing forms," and that these same visual patterns underlie the descriptions and themes in Montgomery's fiction. Epperly finds confirmation for Montgomery's preoccupation with these shapes and forms in the journals, both published and unpublished, and scrapbooks. In particular, Montgomery's photographs of *Lover's Lane*—which she captured repeatedly over a period of about thirty years—register all the major patterns, according to Epperly. Crucial to these patterns, she says, is their ability "to convey multiple meanings"—curves or "bends in roads," for example,

“suggest surprises beyond”—culminating in the central message that “seeing beauty is finding home,” or simply, “beauty is home.” Montgomery’s preferred shapes, therefore, are “metaphors for belonging and home.”

Epperly begins her exploration by tracing the influences on Montgomery’s visual imagination—mainly Wordsworth, Scott, and Burns, as well as American writers Irving and Emerson—and by analyzing, somewhat speculatively, Montgomery’s interest in photography. The main point here is that Montgomery appears to have been drawn to photography’s ability to “unfix” time (in Emerson’s expression), that is, to suspend and freeze specific moments. Epperly follows these early chapters with a detailed study of the selected photographs. Montgomery’s repeated photographs of Lover’s Lane get special attention, as they bring together, Epperly says, “story, nostalgia, beauty, home, and belonging.”

In the second half of *Through Lover’s Lane* Epperly delves into Montgomery’s fiction—mainly the *Anne* and *Emily* novels, as well as *The Blue Castle*—where she discovers a preference for the same shapes and forms she had earlier identified in Montgomery’s photographs. She argues that these elements are the “experiential ground” on which Montgomery built her scenes, stories, and characters, and that they allowed Montgomery to explore the link between seeing and being—the ways in which the material world reflects and inspires the creative mind that views it. For the child Anne, for instance, “seeing and being are one.” Anne is Prince Edward Island, and part of Montgomery’s lasting appeal, according to Epperly, is Montgomery’s ability to make the reader “a part of a dialogue about belonging.”

Epperly succeeds in putting forward a persuasive argument about the development of Montgomery’s aesthetic in relation to the patterns and visual elements to which she turned throughout her career. The book

leaves unanswered, however, the question, why these specific shapes? Why not squares rather than circles? I would have welcomed some theorizing as to the psychological, autobiographical significance of the shapes for Montgomery, particularly since Epperly does point out that “Montgomery is always telling her own story in her writing.” About *The Blue Castle*, for example, she says, “the personal longing that inspired it is almost palpable.” She also quotes Roland Barthes, who, in the context of home and his “landscapes of predilection,” and using psychoanalytic theories, made the explicit connection between the maternal body (as the one and original sheltering place) and the landscapes’ appeal to him. Epperly chooses not to pursue this train of thought, nor does she make reference to C.G. Jung’s exploration of the Mother archetype, or Erich Neumann’s association of circular shapes with the Mother (derived from vessel symbolism and the uroboric snake) and with the notion of home (the vessel contains and protects). Since Montgomery experienced the trauma of losing her mother at an early age, this particular investigative path may have been fruitful in suggesting the maternal pre-text as the original source of longing for Montgomery’s “landscape of desire.” Nonetheless, Epperly’s study provides much food for thought and may well inspire further studies seeking to explain Montgomery’s fascination with the specific shapes that spoke to her.



Remembering WWI

Suzanne Evans

Mothers of Heroes, Mothers of Martyrs: World War I and the Politics of Grief. McGill-Queen's UP \$29.95

Geoffrey Hayes, Andrew Iarocci, Mike Bechthold, eds.

Vimy Ridge: A Canadian Reassessment. Wilfrid Laurier UP \$38.95

Reviewed by Sherrill Grace

The year 2007 marked an important stage in Canada's remembering and reassessing of the Great War. Several new scholarly books were published, like the two I am reviewing here, and in April we returned to Vimy Ridge, that symbolic site of Canadian remembrance, to unveil the restored monument and rededicate it with the pomp and circumstance, sincere emotion and political rhetoric, that such historic, public celebrations entail. On the 2007 Easter weekend, all of Canada could watch the ceremonies on CBC television; a new film about Canadians at Vimy and in the Great War was shown on CBC; and the Queen and our politicians extended condolences for Canada's recent casualties in Afghanistan. Through the power of memory, music, rhetoric, and modern media, Vimy Ridge, Walter Allward's monument, and the current deployment of Canadian troops were brought together to support ideals of military sacrifice, democracy, and national pride. The scene, witnessed live on television from the Douai plain, was dramatic, moving, and politically charged because Canadians were being asked to endorse much more than Allward's monument.

All the more reason to read books like *Mothers of Heroes, Mothers of Martyrs* and *Vimy Ridge: A Canadian Reassessment*. Both books attempt to understand World War I by looking closely at the facts and documents of the period and by placing the war in its socio-political, military, and rhetorical context. Each strives to slice through the

sentiments, propaganda, political manoeuvrings, and jingoism that seem to stick to the Great War to arrive at a deeper appreciation of what was at stake for the Canadian nation and its citizens, at home and on the battle front. It would be foolish to claim that these studies present us with *the* truth, but they certainly go some distance towards establishing clarification and balance in our ongoing analysis of Canada's role in the war and our understanding of what it continues to mean for us.

Evans' subject is one that has received scant attention even though the figures at the centre of her study are always expected to play an essential role: mothers supply the sons who fight the wars, who are killed or maimed, and mothers are expected to play their role without complaint. They are upbraided, or vilified, if they fail in this, their supreme patriotic duty, and they are chastised if they show any lack of support for their own and others' glorious ladies. This term "glorious ladies" belongs to World War I but, as Evans shows, mothers have been coerced into playing their role in wars for thousands of years. She also argues that this figure of the mother of hero and martyr is a creation of patriarchal societies, where women are limited to passive, secondary parts in any national story, and she links the mothers of World War I back to the medieval figure of the Mater Dolorosa who gladly gives her most precious possession, her son, to a larger cause. Evans' chilling conclusion is that during the Great War the power of the mother was mobilized by the military and governments to sanctify staggering human loss and to encourage ever greater efforts against the enemy. Put simply, if a woman publicly bemoaned the enlistment or death of her son or criticized conscription, she was a disgrace to the country, and this is a message Canadians (and citizens of other countries) are hearing today.

In the main chapters of her book, Evans examines the "language of sacrifice" used

during the war in the interests of propaganda and patriotism. She considers posters, art works, patriotic verse, novels, speeches, and news coverage for examples of this language at work, and while I might quibble over some of her interpretations of the literature, her case for the prevalent rhetoric of sacrifice, glory, and martyrdom is strong. Moreover, mothers had little else to console or reward them except this verbal praise from a so-called grateful nation, and they were often left in poverty after the war to tend the damaged minds or bodies of men who returned.

The editors of *Vimy Ridge* have produced an important collection of essays focused on the battle of Vimy Ridge and the role of Canadians in its capture. The central argument of the military historians (one British, the others Canadian) is that Canadian troops could not have taken the ridge in 1917 without the training, planning, supplies, experience, and support of many British officers and soldiers who fought before and beside them on that day. Vimy cannot, they argue, be granted mythic status as a *Canadian* victory, and they have marshalled the facts from documents, diaries, and reports to support these claims. Captain Andrew Macphail put it well in 1917 when he likened the collaborative process that made Vimy a success to the one used to farm well, hold a dinner party, or make “a stage performance a triumph.”

Although this concept of planning and collaboration only seems like obvious good sense, it is also rather beside the more important point, which is that Vimy Ridge was immediately seen by those at home and those within the Canadian armed forces as a distinctly Canadian accomplishment to be viewed with national pride. The objective facts tell one kind of story, and one that needs telling, but the larger significance of an event like Vimy far exceeds the historian's grasp. As Evans demonstrates in her book and as the editors of *Vimy Ridge*

remind us in their “Afterthoughts,” the symbolic capital of that battle makes it almost sacrosanct within a national myth of maturation, pride, and valour. However, the narrative glory of Vimy blinds us to the “darker legacy” of the battle—the deaths of 3,598 soldiers, the thousands more who returned home shattered, the meagre pensions provided, the suffering of the families left behind, and the divisive political debate over conscription in the 1917 election, the consequences of which are with us to this day. If we have forgotten this legacy, it is because of the memorializing that followed Vimy, and the chapters by Jonathan Vance, Jacqueline Hucker, and Serge Durlinger trace some of the ways in which poets, architects, and artists fashioned Vimy into a heroic national story that retains its power, as we saw this past April with the rededication of Allward's monument.

There is much to learn from these two books. Their publication is timely and their messages are important. Upon reflection, I am struck by the implicit warnings these authors offer which I take to be that the legacy of war is terrible, that we forget this legacy at our peril, and that the rhetoric of national glory leads directly to the inglorious language of intolerance, demonization of enemies, aggression, and violence.

Three Canadian Poets

Marya Fiamengo; Janice Fiamengo, Seymour Mayne, and Russell Thornton, eds.

Visible Living: Poems Selected and New. Ronsdale \$14.95

Anne Claire Poirier; Nora Alleyn, trans.

Let Me Go! Guernica \$12.00

Tammy Armstrong

Take Us Quietly. Goose Lane \$17.95

Reviewed by Kristen Guest

Visible Living collects the work of Marya Fiamengo, beginning with poems from *The Quality of Halves* (1958) and ending with

a selection of previously unpublished new work. The time span covered here—nearly fifty years—allows editors Janice Fiamengo, Seymour Mayne, and Russell Thornton to highlight the evolution of key themes in Fiamengo's oeuvre, and their short introduction offers a useful overview. The poems themselves document Fiamengo's engagements with questions of identity as a matter at once personal, social, and cultural.

The great strength of this collection is the insight it lends into Fiamengo's evolution as a poet. Perhaps most interesting are the recurrence and transformation of key images and concerns. Thus, for example, overt references to Yeats in the opening poems are echoed and transformed in Fiamengo's most recent verse. In "At the Edge," Fiamengo's image of an eagle in flight recalls Yeats' falcon from a deeply personal and affirmative perspective:

It dipped in a moment
of grace, it soared to answer
the transparent breath
from my throat.

Fiamengo is similarly assured in her engagements with, and transformations of, figures associated with female maturity, power, and wisdom. Hagia Sophia, first named in "In Praise of Old Women," enfolds earlier fairy-tale figures—such as Baba Yaga—even as she offers a developing mythic register for the positive aspects of aging.

Let Me Go!, produced by Anne Claire Poirier in collaboration with Marie-Claire Blais, was originally the voice-over for Poirier's documentary *Tu as crié!* Though the text cannot reproduce the stunning visual effect of the film, it stands alone admirably as a deeply moving elegy for Poirier's daughter Yanne. In taking up the personal experience of mourning by attempting to know and accept her daughter's life as a heroin addict, moreover, Poirier also challenges the reader to engage with the social politics of addiction.

As an extended meditation on the loss of her daughter, Poirier's lyrical engagements with memory originally represent an attempt to find meaning, even order, in death. In tracing the biographical and legal "facts" of Yanne's life, however, Poirier confronts the larger problem of the ways we assign meaning to life. Finally, she concludes:

I have no answers.
Disturbing questions
replace my old certitudes.
I risk the discomfort of doubt.
I choose to trust.

This moment highlights her loss of faith in fact, even as it points to the higher spiritual and emotional possibilities of trust and acceptance. Central to this moment of release is Yanne herself, whom Poirier figures in symbolic terms as an iceberg: "eternal ice / free and immutable":

The ice floe breaks away from the glacier,
the iceberg breaks away from the ice floe
and floats down
Towards a place of transformation.

As a spiritual point of reference, Yanne structures a work that cannot find meaning in psychological or forensic forms of examination. Her repeated cry, "Let me go!" begins as an unborn infant seeking to escape the womb and ends, searingly, in her mother's benediction: "I let go. / I let you go, *mon amour*." Between these points of bringing life and accepting death, "let me go," takes on a range of meanings—from the adolescent's desire for self-determination ("Don't hold me back, Maman, from my first love. / He is a junkie. I want to save him. / Let me go!"), to her pleas for mercy from her murderer. This repetition not only anchors the absent figure of Yanne, it also expresses the structure of joining and breaking apart central to Poirier's central images and themes.

Take Us Quietly, Tammy Armstrong's most recent collection, explores the conjunctions between familiar and strange,

the geographically proximate and an exotic elsewhere, that shape our processes of memory. In the volume's first two poems, for example, titles work to locate us in specific spaces we are subsequently invited to explore as points of conjunction. In "Mojacar Orange Groves," for example, the orange—and its attendant sensations of taste and touch—evokes a series of stanza "segments" that join Spain with "our winter kitchen with its western light." Similarly, "Rogersville: Garage Man's Daughter Back From the City," explores the experience "I'd forgotten to expect": "how foreign we seem / after years in the city."

This concern with conjunctions of the familiar and the strange forms a central current in the sixty-three poems included here, one that is explored and reworked in relation to human and geographic location. Particularly effective, in this regard, are "Pearson International" and "Affair With My Partner after Spring Haircut/Shave." Both poems take up questions of proximity and displacement through the lens of personal relationship. The former conjoins the experience of habitual travel (in the liminal space of the airport) with concrete connections to a now-absent lover. The latter connects the defamiliarizing effect of a change in the speaker's partner's appearance with an earlier phase in their relationship: "This perennial hookup / leaves alarm clocks, toothbrush rituals in the margins."

Taken together, the poems in this collection use unexpected images and language in a way that challenges the reader's response to everyday life: aspects of relationship, and of location, to which we become desensitized by familiarity.



La Langue française (au Canada)

Jean Forest

Les Anglicismes de la vie quotidienne des Québécois. Triptyque 23,00 \$

Claude Verreault, Louis Mercier, et Thomas Lavoie, dirs.

1902-2002 La Société du parler français au Canada cent ans après sa fondation : mise en valeur d'un patrimoine culturel. PUL 30,00 \$

Ian Lockerbie, Ines Molinaro, Karim Larose, et Leigh Oakes

French as the Common Language in Québec: History, Debates and Positions. Nota bene 13,95 \$

Liliane Rodriguez

La Langue française au Manitoba (Canada) : histoire et évolution lexicométrique. Niemeyer 164,00 €

Compte rendu par Cécile B. Vigouroux

Le livre de Forest se veut une réflexion (l'ouvrage est qualifié d'essai) sur le mal qui ronge le français des Québécois : l'anglais. L'ouvrage ne tient pas les promesses de la quatrième de couverture où l'on annonce une étude sur les mécanismes linguistiques, politiques et sociaux qui ont conduit à l'anglicisation du français québécois. Le lecteur cherchant à renforcer ses convictions sur la croisade guerrière de l'anglais contre le français québécois trouvera, à n'en pas douter, de multiples réflexions à l'emporte pièce venant le conforter dans cette voie. Quant au lecteur curieux, désireux de comprendre les mécanismes sociologiques, politiques des dynamiques langagières du français dans cette partie du monde, il restera peu convaincu par l'exercice de style de Forest. Ce livre, parsemé de métaphores belliqueuses, s'inscrit dans la lignée d'ouvrages qui depuis le fameux *Parlez-vous français?* d'Étiemble (1964) joue sur la peur de l'envahisseur. Il se profile chez Forest l'idée qu'il faut sauver le français des Québécois qui le parlent, comme si cette langue jugée trop grossière ne rendait pas justice à la qualité du français laissé en héritage. Les

comparaisons avec d'autres situations linguistiques à travers le monde sont balayées d'un revers de main (en deux pages, on passe de l'araméen au latin, du Mandarin à l'arabe) et extrêmement mal informées. La dernière ligne de l'ouvrage laisse quelque peu perplexe quand l'auteur énonce sous forme de question la possibilité de voir le français du Québec être réduit au swahili qualifié de langues « qui ne rendent compte que d'une toute petite fraction des connaissances couvertes actuellement par l'esprit humain ». Cette phrase marque, de toute évidence, la méconnaissance du swahili (d'ailleurs écrit au pluriel) par l'auteur et des fonctions communicatives, administratives, politiques et littéraires qu'il remplit dans certains pays d'Afrique de l'Est, plus grave encore, il témoigne de ses préjugés linguistiques et culturels.

L'ouvrage de Verreault, Mercier et Lavoie est la publication des actes d'un colloque organisé en 2002 par le laboratoire de lexicologie et lexicographie québécoises sur la Société du parler français au Canada (désormais SPFC). Les huit communications présentées dans ce livre (en plus des allocutions d'ouverture et de fermeture) couvrent les différentes activités de la société, comme l'œuvre dialectologique, lexicologique et lexicographique. La mise en perspective historique du Canada français de l'époque brosse dans plusieurs des articles nous permet de mieux comprendre dans quel climat sociohistorique la SPFC a émergé et d'appréhender, en contexte, les différents objectifs qu'elle s'est assignés pendant près d'un demi siècle (1902-60) : l'étude et le perfectionnement du parler français au Canada. Les éclairages apportés par chaque auteur sont complémentaires et n'apparaissent jamais redondants à la lecture. L'ensemble du livre constitue un tout cohérent, agréable à lire et extrêmement informatif. Il est aussi bien un travail historiographique sur la SPFC qu'un ouvrage de première main sur le développement

du français au Canada et en filigrane sur des questions plus larges d'idéologie linguistique.

French as the Common Language in Québec est une mise en commun d'articles initialement publiés en français dans la revue *Globe* entre 1999 et 2005. Mis ensemble, ces quatre présentations donnent au lecteur une perspective éclairée sur les différents débats autour de la langue française au Québec et permettent d'en saisir les implications politiques, linguistiques, institutionnelles et sociales. Les questions abordées par les auteurs incluent celles de l'aménagement linguistique et les problèmes de normes (endogènes vs exogènes) que l'aménagement soulève, l'identité québécoise à travers la promotion du français comme langue « publique », et enfin la politique québécoise d'intégration des étrangers allophones. Ici se pose aussi la question de l'équilibre à trouver entre les droits linguistiques individuels et la cause nationale. Ce recueil d'articles donne au lecteur l'envie de poursuivre la réflexion stimulante engagée par les auteurs.

Liliane Rodriguez présente l'évolution du français au Manitoba à partir d'une étude lexicométrique. Cette dernière, réalisée à partir de 131 144 lexies, fait suite à une première enquête du même genre réalisée en 1963 par Gaston Dulong. Le volume se compose de deux parties : la première est un exposé de la situation du français au Manitoba ainsi que des enquêtes lexicales menées pour recueillir le corpus d'étude. La deuxième partie, qui constitue plus de trois cent pages d'un ouvrage qui en comporte cinq cent vingt, est une très longue liste de tableaux où sont classées les lexies par thème (ex : les parties du corps, la nourriture) avec leur fréquence d'emploi. Ces tableaux présentent peu d'intérêt pour un lecteur non spécialiste de lexicométrie, d'autant plus qu'il n'est donné aucune grille de lecture permettant de les interpréter. Ils constituent néanmoins une base de données

importante pour tout chercheur désireux de continuer l'oeuvre descriptive de Rodriguez. On se demandera néanmoins dans quelle mesure ce type d'étude ne présente pas un intérêt limité pour saisir la vitalité d'une langue en ne s'intéressant jamais à la langue en contexte, c'est-à-dire telle qu'elle se pratique par les locuteurs qui s'en servent.

Passion/Signification

Cécilia W. Francis

Gabrielle Roy, autobiographe : subjectivité, passions et discours. PUL 49,00 \$

Compte rendu par Jane Everett

Peu après la mort de Gabrielle Roy, l'écrivaine Joyce Marshall, réfléchissant à sa traduction de *Cet été qui chantait* (*Enchanted Summer*, McClelland & Stewart, 1976), évoquait dans un article les difficultés qu'elle avait éprouvées devant la « deceptive and (for a translator) tormenting simplicity of her style, which by then had become so limpid it almost seemed to disappear » (*The Antigonish Review* 55). La remarque nétonnerait personne qui a lu Gabrielle Roy et encore moins les personnes qui se sont penchées sur son oeuvre, tâchant de cerner et d'explicitier le pourquoi et le comment du texte royen.

C'est à cette tâche que se consacre, à son tour, Cécilia W. Francis, qui prend comme objet principal de son étude l'autobiographie de Gabrielle Roy, *La Détresse et l'enchantement*, dernier livre publié du vivant de la romancière et qui, avec sa « suite » posthume, *Le Temps qui m'a manqué*, représente l'aboutissement de ce que Francis appelle la « série intimiste » du corpus royen. Récit racontant la venue à l'écriture de Gabrielle Roy, l'autobiographie fournit les clés essentielles à l'interprétation des traces et des perturbations que laissent l'émotion, le passionnel dans le tissu discursif constitué par l'ensemble de l'oeuvre.

Le sous-titre de l'ouvrage de Francis—*subjectivité, passions et discours*—campe

d'emblée son programme et son approche, qui s'appuie sur la « sémiotique des passions », dans le but d'« éclairer la logique passionnelle de cette descente littéraire en soi que constitue l'écriture autobiographique royenne ». Le premier chapitre présente le cadre théorique sous-tendant l'ensemble de l'analyse, l'accent mis sur le concept du sujet, la nature du « geste autobiographique » et la sémiotique des passions dans ce double contexte. Le « schéma pathémique canonique » tel qu'envisagé par Greimas et Fontanille sert de point d'appui pour l'analyse de *La Détresse et l'enchantement* que propose Francis dans le deuxième chapitre de son étude. Elle y traque « l'émergence de la culpabilité érigée en macro-système passionnel, indissociable d'un vaste conglomerat affectif où se distingue une poussée vers la réparation, assimilée au geste créateur ». Le troisième chapitre explore l'expression discursive de la culpabilité et de la volonté de réparation, notamment à travers l'articulation « d'une forme de vie basée sur la justesse, avatar esthétique de la réparation artistique ». Dans le quatrième et dernier chapitre du livre, Francis se penche sur la dynamique énonciative articulant et liant la nostalgie et l'autopunition.

Le résumé qu'on vient de lire ne peut rendre justice à la densité et à la minutie de l'analyse menée par Cécilia Francis et qui représente une contribution importante à notre compréhension du rôle de la culpabilité dans la genèse et le déploiement de l'oeuvre et de la vocation créatrice chez Roy, en même temps qu'elle creuse la dynamique sous-tendant cette « passion » fondamentale et le style—comme dit André Belleau—si « lisse » de la romancière.



Troubling the Academy

Danielle Fuller

Writing the Everyday: Women's Textual Communities in Atlantic Canada. McGill-Queen's UP \$75.00

Reviewed by Jeanette Lynes

Literary scholars and custodians of “high” culture have been slow to recognize “popular” culture as a legitimate form of knowledge or subject for study within the academy. The ascent of Cultural Studies in the last twenty years or so has, of course, altered this to a considerable degree. Nevertheless, Danielle Fuller’s observation of an inverse relationship between the “popular success” achieved by certain Atlantic women writers, on the one hand, and the “little academic attention paid” to these writers, on the other, suggests that canonical values, tastes, and ways of reading texts may still prevail. In Fuller’s terms, these values, tastes, and reading practices are, in essence, white, patriarchal, heterosexist, and privilege eloquent writing over the vernacular, and abstraction over the experiential—particularly the lived experiences of the disempowered, regionally marginalized, and those “othered” by mainstream culture.

The Atlantic Canadian women writers Fuller identifies as indicative of this critical problem of “recognition at home, yet under-recognition within the academy” include Rita Joe, Maxine Tynes, Sheree Fitch, Bernice Morgan, Helen Porter, and Joan Clark. These authors form the core of her eight-chapter book, which borrows its theoretical frames and methodological tools from feminist philosophy: most notably, Donna Haraway’s notion of “situated knowledges,” Dorothy Smith’s work on the everyday and, to a lesser extent, theories of orality. Fuller’s scholarship on Atlantic Canadian women writers is also based on at least ten years of interviews, “critical friendships,” and transatlantic research travel.

Fuller’s analysis of why these authors don’t constitute a comfortable “fit” within mainstream Canadian literary-critical discourses is compelling. Several factors leading to their critical marginalization, she argues, include their investment in oral traditions, allegiance to local presses (in an era of corporate multinational publishing), penchant for a documentary realism around women’s work that has, seemingly, limited academic appeal, and their determinedly non-post-modern faith in language.

Fuller skilfully contextualizes Atlantic women writers as cultural workers situated outside perceived centre(s) of power in Canada. After laying the critical ground for key concepts such as “textual communities,” “the everyday,” and “regionalism,” she provides a detailed account of “textual communities” in Newfoundland that recognizes the cultural agency and decisive role of grassroots initiatives such as writing groups, writers’ organizations, writers’ friendships, regional anthologies, local presses, and, in Newfoundland, the creative writing journal, *TickleAce*. Fuller elucidates how these grassroots initiatives have proven politically and culturally empowering, allowing the culture to define itself from the *inside* (as opposed to the “static stereotypes . . . that persist in mainstream Canadian culture”).

Her nuanced readings of fiction by Joan Clark, Helen Porter, and Bernice Morgan begin to redress the dearth of critical assessments of these writers. The book’s final three chapters focus on Sheree Fitch (a working class New Brunswicker), Maxine Tynes (an African Nova Scotian), and Rita Joe (a Mi’kmaq from Eskasoni) as popular performance poets whose work troubles sanctioned “academic” notions of poetic craft. Despite “increasing interest in the work of women writers, writers of colour, and Native writers,” why, Fuller asks, “are these three writers ignored by the academy?” She cites a tendency to canonize *particular* writers of colour and Aboriginal

writers as, somehow, “representative”; these canonizing gestures have excluded Tynes and Joe. Fuller delineates additional factors: these poets do not always adhere to “standard English.” Their political themes are often most effectively disseminated in “live” settings through the embodied medium of public readings. Their poems are accessible; Fuller’s suspicion that Canadian readers seem conditioned to value “academic” poetry (difficult, esoteric) over accessible (*apparently* “easy,” transparent) poetry is probably accurate.

I commend Fuller’s conceptual breadth and willingness to adopt a broad definition of texts and communities that includes non-canonical cultural productions such as women’s newspapers, “talk texts” (interviews) and the *Atlantic Women’s Almanac* (1987–96). These non-canonical texts are valuable documents of everyday life within the region. Given that Fuller discusses the importance of the Newfoundland journal *TickleAce*, she might have usefully considered for purposes of regional balance, the cultural impact of other long-standing creative journals such as *The Fiddlehead*, *The Antigonish Review*, and the now-defunct *Pottersfield Portfolio*. Nevertheless, *Writing the Everyday* makes an important contribution to the study of Atlantic Canadian literature and, in particular, under-recognized women writers situated in diverse constituencies across the region.

Goodbye to an Ideal

François Gravel; Sheila Fischman, trans.
Adieu, Betty Crocker. Cormorant \$22.95

Reviewed by Adele Holoch

At the funeral for his beloved aunt, Arlette, Benoît, the narrator of François Gravel’s *Adieu, Betty Crocker*, is infuriated when the presiding priest repeatedly misidentifies the woman Benoît remembers so fondly from his childhood. “Odette, Claudette,

Pierette, why not Bobinette the marionette while he’s at it? Her name is ARLETTE, I want to shout at him, her name is Arlette and it’s not all that complicated.” But as Benoît himself learns over the course of his narrative, Arlette’s identity was not nearly so straightforward, and the moniker he applied to the aunt he believed to be a perfect Montreal housewife, Betty Crocker, is itself a misnomer. The story of Benoît’s discovery of Arlette’s true history marks the third instalment of Gravel’s Fillion family saga, following *A Good Life* and *The Extraordinary Garden*. Like its predecessors, *Adieu, Betty Crocker* pairs a charming conversational style with thoughtful insights into intimate family dynamics—centreing, in this novel, on the limitations of a family’s perceptions of one another, and on the challenges of faithfully remembering and retelling a family’s history.

In the early pages of the novel, Benoît describes his childhood adoration for Arlette to his wife. Growing up in Montreal in the late 1950s and early 1960s, he explains, he wistfully watched the care his aunt Arlette took in her duties as a housewife, envying his cousins their crustless sandwiches cut into perfect triangles, their meticulously sewn Sgt. Pepper costumes—“absolutely identical to what the Beatles wore”—and their spotless home. “If anyone had asked me then to trade my mother for Aunt Arlette, I would have said yes without a hint of remorse: the sandwiches at our house always had a double crust and that crust was usually stale,” Benoît tells his wife. But upon Arlette’s death, Benoît learns a strange truth about his aunt from her children, Daniel and Sylvie: for the last thirty years of her life, the happy homemaker was housebound by a fear of leaving her home.

The remainder of the novel is devoted to Benoît’s investigation of Arlette’s illness. An academic with an interest in the rules and communications of organizations, he delves into his study of Arlette with his characteristic

zeal for research. "I do like nosing around. It's the first virtue of a researcher," Benoît declares. In his enthusiasm, however, Benoît neglects another virtue integral to researchers' work: that of impartiality. As his childhood construction of Arlette as a flawless, untroubled housewife falls apart, Benoît quickly goes about re-imagining her as a prisoner in her own home, bound to decades of pacing her linoleum floors. Despite his cousins' protests that Arlette was happy, in her way, the well-travelled Benoît remains convinced that such confinement must have been torture. "No one stays shut up inside for thirty years, it's inhuman. What crime did you commit, Arlette, to warrant such a punishment?" he asks.

In the last section of the novel, the dead Arlette speaks, explaining her life and her illness to Benoît in her own words. Her response suggests that she does not, indeed, regard her thirty housebound years as an imprisonment; in fact, she feels more confined by her nephew's particular construction of her past. At once flattered by his portrayal of her homemaking talents and resistant to his notion of her as a spineless Betty Crocker, she admonishes Benoît, "you have to be careful with stories; sometimes they also become prisons. . . . Normal people don't want to be shut inside a single story, Benoît, especially not in a story told by someone else because that someone wants to deliver a message, or seem intelligent, or understand himself better, or I don't know what."

Arlette's final exchange with Benoît brings to mind another relatively recent novel, Nancy Huston's 1993 Governor General's Award-winning *Plainsong* (published in French as *Cantique des plaines*), which traces a granddaughter's narrative of her grandfather's life. As Paula, the granddaughter, interrogates her grandfather, she says she hears his voice—but the novel's readers only hear his voice filtered through hers; they only experience his past from

her often-querulous perspective. The living can and do rewrite history, as Huston's novel—and the majority of Benoît's account—suggest. For the dead to take umbrage with their descendants' revisions is an unusual, and effective, narrative technique, a reminder that remembering and retelling can be an enormous responsibility. Like the other entries in the Fillion family saga, *Adieu, Betty Crocker* is richly rewarding, recommended for all readers, especially those interested in contemporary Quebec literature.

Those Burned Out Stars

Annick Hillger

Not Needing All the Words: Michael Ondaatje's Literature of Silence. McGill-Queen's UP \$75.00

Reviewed by Nicholas Bradley

Michael Ondaatje's poem "Birch Bark" is a reminiscence about a canoe trip the poet made with a friend, for whom the poem is an elegy. Ondaatje refers to friendship as "an old song we break into / not needing all the words." The poem provides both the title and the point of departure for Annick Hillger's study of Ondaatje's poetry and fiction. Hillger takes "Birch Bark"'s motif of wordless singing as the basis for examining the thematic and philosophical importance of silence in Ondaatje's works. Her analysis proposes that "Ondaatje's texts depict those moments when the subject faces the void of modernity." She suggests that figures of silence in Ondaatje's writings respond "to the loss of the divine *logos* within the secularized universe of modernity [and] ultimately point towards an epistemological realm situated beyond the one delineated by the logocentric tradition." Hillger draws on the writings of a host of philosophers and theorists in support, including Freud, Hegel, Derrida, Irigaray, Kristeva, Heidegger, and Deleuze and Guattari. She concludes that Ondaatje employs "the various bits and

pieces of a shattered logocentric tradition” in order to verify “the regenerative power of the creative process.”

After her opening explication of “Birch Bark,” Hillger investigates Ondaatje’s writings more generally. Her book comprises three principal sections. In the first, Hillger identifies various philosophical and metaphysical strains in Ondaatje’s works by examining several shorter poems and the long poems *The Man With Seven Toes* (1969) and *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid* (1970), together with the novel *Coming through Slaughter* (1976). In the second section, she concentrates on “Eventually the Poem for Keewaydin,” identifying Ondaatje’s biographical and intertextual connections to other Canadian poets to suggest that his poetry “breaks the cycle of reading the Canadian landscape as an expression of the people’s spirit.” She then treats *In the Skin of a Lion* (1987) and *The English Patient* (1992) to propose that Ondaatje revises “the white Anglo-Saxon concept of Canada.” She also compares *The English Patient* to Hugh MacLennan’s *Barometer Rising* (1941), claiming that Ondaatje’s novel “silences the myth of Odysseus’ homecoming that Canadian writers and critics have taken up.” And in the final section, she focuses on the novels, including *Anil’s Ghost* (2000), indicating that Ondaatje ultimately “rework[s] . . . patriarchal structures.”

Hillger convincingly illuminates an important aspect of Ondaatje’s writing. By considering the poems and novels together, she demonstrates the extent to which Ondaatje employs recurring motifs and images, her discussion of “Lilith” in relation to *In the Skin of a Lion* being a particularly good example of her effectiveness. Her book ranges widely, so perhaps it is inevitable that she must discuss certain texts briefly at times and selectively throughout. She passes over *Running in the Family* (1982) and *Handwriting* (1998), for example, as well as

“Pacific Letter,” like “Birch Bark” a poem about male friendship that employs images of silence. Also notable is “Translations of my Postcards,” in which Ondaatje writes that “a blank postcard says / I am in the wilderness.” The figure of the postcard seems especially important given that Hillger describes the eponymous image in “Birch Bark” as “an archetypal white page calling to be written upon.”

In my view, moreover, the complexity of meaning in certain passages of Ondaatje’s texts is sometimes greater than Hillger allows. She observes that the badly burned English patient, described by Ondaatje as having “volcanic flesh,” “resembles a volcano that has erupted with the fire contained within and is now but an extinct shell of its old self.” Yet Ondaatje’s descriptive phrase also suggests that Almásy’s charred skin has the colour and texture of rock, while the etymology of the adjective links Almásy, ironically, to Vulcan, the grotesque, misshapen god of technology and fire. Similarly, it is true that, when Ondaatje writes in “White Dwarfs” that “there are those burned out stars / who implode into silence,” the “star—once a metaphor for the divine order—now comes to stand for the disintegration of heaven.” But as Sam Solecki notes in *Ragas of Longing* (2003), the personification of “stars” also ascribes a human dimension to the celestial bodies.

Not Needing All the Words is a valuable addition to current criticism of Ondaatje’s works that is full of insights. It prepares for a wider examination of Ondaatje’s allusions and influences that would address, for instance, the role of silence in the poetry of Gary Snyder, who is invoked in “Signature,” or Robert Creeley, who supplies an epigraph in *Secular Love* (1984).



Place-ing Class and Gender

Franca Iacovetta

Gatekeepers: Reshaping Immigrant Lives in Cold War Canada. Between the Lines \$34.95

Wendy Schissel, ed.

Home/Bodies: Geographies of Self, Place and Space. U of Calgary P \$34.95

Reviewed by Anne L. Kaufman

Rethinking and rewriting historical narratives to consider the impact of class, the power of immigrant groups, and the influence of the media are necessary, long overdue, and politically complex. In today's global village, nations are increasingly troubled by their diverse inhabitants' wishes to have their voices heard and needs considered, and our tendency is to regard each wave of immigration, which necessarily adds to those clamouring voices, as a new or discrete event. Franca Iacovetta's *Gatekeepers* reminds us that this phenomenon is not a new one as she explores the experiences of immigrant groups in a cultural moment that identified conformity to a Canadian ideal as a national value.

Iacovetta begins her study with a vision that will surely be familiar to most of her readers, that of a nation experiencing the aftermath of a war via the television set and mass-media imagery through newsreels and print (in 1936, roughly two hundred homes in the world possessed a television but by 1948 that number had grown to one million in the United States alone; the CBC began broadcasting in 1952). Post-war immigration and the refugee problems faced by many countries were, for the first time, informed by and saturated with images of "emaciated survivors," "churned-up countryside," and "huge open graves." Nations responded with the creation of hundreds of camps for displaced persons, and it was in these camps that the "homeless and stateless" first encountered the gatekeepers of Iacovetta's title. And here,

too, the reader encounters the thesis of this study, that the post-war flood of immigrants led to an experiment in creating Canadian citizens out of a European diaspora. Iacovetta names the contemporary press, English language classes, dance, and the culture of food as gatekeepers to the immigrants' political, social, and emotional entry into the country as she provides a decidedly original take on the process of shaping today's Canada.

The premise of Iacovetta's book is compelling. I found myself wishing, however, both for a more focused argument and for some larger political and social context. Iacovetta refers to policies of the US State Department in comparing the quality of life in North America and the Soviet Union, for example, and she demonstrates ways the Canadian government used those policies as a starting point in their project. I would have welcomed further interrogation of these seemingly similar approaches for a clearer understanding of the singularity of the Canadian project. The book contains a sizable compendium of primary and secondary sources, archival information, and film titles, clearly a boon to teachers and designers of curriculum units.

Wendy Schissel edits a collection of essays thematically linked by the notion of a specific cultural geography. In three sections, the papers in this volume treat a wide range of issues from the disempowerment of birth mothers in 1950s and 1960s Canada, to post-9/11 female Muslim identity development, to the experiences of young mobility-challenged dancers. Some of the essays were initially presented at the "Lived Environments of Girls and Women" conference in July 2001, but all are informed in some way by the post-9/11 shift in Western consciousness. The collection is so diverse in nature, in fact, that the collection as a whole would probably be most useful as a central text in a methodology course or an introduction to gender studies, or in some other forum in which previously

marginalized voices may at last be heard.

In the twenty-first century, families are constructed in myriad ways. Sandra Jarvie's essay, "Silenced, Denigrated, and Rendered Invisible: Mothers Who Lost Their Babies to Adoption in the 1960s and 1970s," reminds us that the relative openness of the current atmosphere is a new development and urges us to attend to the victims of now outdated practices. The contribution from Mary Rucklos Hampton, et al., "Sexual Health of Young Women: Context and Care Make a Difference," provides a fascinating contrast, demonstrating the effect of changes in sexual and cultural mores and health-care systems. The authors make a compelling argument that "sexual health care of young women does belong within the domain of medical care, contrary to the dominant views of policy makers." The final essay in the collection, "Voices of Dancers with Mobility Impairments," by Donna L. Goodwin, Joan Krohn, and Arvid Kuhnle, deals with issues faced by children with mobility impairments and focuses on the Kids in Motion dance program in Saskatoon, asking probing and relevant questions about the limitations of body, perceptions of self, and insider/outsider perspective in matters of disablement.

On a practical level, *Home/Bodies* is a nice-looking volume but not too sturdy; by the time I had finished my reading for this review, pages were coming out of the binding.



La Polysémie de l'altérité

Dominique Laporte

L'Autre en mémoire. PUL 38,00 \$

Alessandra Ferraro, dir.

Altérité et insularité : relations croisées dans les cultures francophones. Forum Editrice 14,00 €

Svante Lindberg

Pratiques de l'ici, altérité et identité dans six romans québécois des années 1989-2002. Cahiers de la Recherche Université de Stockholm n.p.

Compte rendu par Jorge Calderón

Les différents essais de *L'Autre en mémoire* témoignent de la multitude d'approches qui sont utilisées aujourd'hui pour analyser les définitions et les représentations de l'identité et de l'altérité : narratologie, herméneutique, ethnocritique, théorie cognitive, anthropologie, théorie de la créolité et du métissage, etc. Donc, une série de lectures est proposée en fonction de méthodologies et de théories diverses pour expliquer la relation très complexe entre l'identité et l'altérité.

Certains essais sont remarquables par les lectures qui sont proposées et les hypothèses qui sont avancées. Par exemple, Étienne Beaulieu et Sarah Rocheville dans « L'autre incarnation » présentent une analyse particulièrement intéressante de *Vies minuscules* et *Vie de Joseph Roulin* de l'écrivain Pierre Michon. Les deux critiques concluent que la transformation de la lettre en image, et donc du *logos* en *opsis*, est le dépassement ultime. Il faut aussi noter le style sophistiqué de cet essai.

De son côté, Pratima Prasad relit l'œuvre la plus connue de Bernardin de Saint-Pierre dans « L'insularité, l'"indigénisme," et l'inceste dans *Paul et Virginie* ». Dans cet essai, Prasad s'intéresse principalement à l'épistémologie du colonialisme en fonction de la conception de la race et de la sexualité. Les problématiques explorées dans l'essai sont d'une grande actualité dans le monde universitaire contemporain, et dans ce contexte la qualité intellectuelle de la contribution de Prasad est indéniable.

L'Autre en mémoire peut intéresser plus précisément les spécialistes en études canadiennes parce que plusieurs essais étudient des textes et des phénomènes culturels du Canada. Entre autres, Kenneth Meadwell analyse le récit à partir de *Cantique des plaines* de Nancy Huston; Denis Gagnon explore la réalité sociale, politique et historique des Métis et de leur nation; et enfin François Paré, dans « L'itinérance et l'altérité en marge de l'Amérique francophone », établit un dialogue théorique autour de la conception de l'autre avec Emmanuel Levinas, Pierre Ouellet, Édouard Glissant et Patrick Chamoiseau. Il propose ensuite une interprétation d'œuvres de France Daigle. Notons que Dominique Laporte a intercalé dans le livre des poèmes de Charles Leblanc, de Lise Gaboury-Diallo et de Laurent Poliquin.

Le livre *Altérité et insularité*, quant à lui, est le résultat d'un séminaire qui a eu lieu en 2002 à l'Université d'Udine, et auquel ont participé des spécialistes de littérature ainsi que d'histoire des religions et des mentalités. Les contributions à ce séminaire, et par conséquent au livre, ont pour point commun la fonction de la relation entre l'île et l'Autre—l'île représentant dans ce cas une image privilégiée de l'espace de l'altérité. Les différentes études tentent, premièrement, de décrire les caractéristiques de l'altérité, ensuite elles répertorient les procédés utilisés pour assimiler l'altérité dans le cadre de valeurs européennes ou encore ces études démontrent l'impossibilité pour des Européens d'intégrer l'altérité.

Les études portent, entre autres, sur des relations rédigées par des missionnaires catholiques, des récits de simples voyageurs et bien sûr des œuvres littéraires. Par exemple, Alessandra Ferraro présente une analyse de la représentation du corps dans des textes de Marie-de-l'Incarnation, Pierre l'Hérault fait une lecture de *la Nuit* de Jacques Ferron, et Élisabeth Nardout-Lafarge s'intéresse à la fonction des archipels dans l'œuvre de Réjean Ducharme.

Dans « Montréal, le cosmopolite », l'Hérault souligne que Ferron peint dans *la Nuit* la ville comme un lieu de passage qui permet la création d'une nouvelle identité québécoise. Ferron décrit un Québec cosmopolite et métissé qui puise sa source dans le passé hybride de la Nouvelle-France. De son côté, dans « Archipels de Réjean Ducharme », Nardout-Lafarge remarque que l'insularité est liée dans les romans de Réjean Ducharme au développement des thèmes de la pureté et de l'autosuffisance du mythe de l'enfance. De plus, l'évocation du couple amoureux devient l'image d'une île isolée du monde. Pour ces raisons, l'idée de l'archipel informe les thèmes et la structure romanesque de l'œuvre de Ducharme. Ainsi, les interventions de l'Hérault et de Nardout-Lafarge devraient intéresser particulièrement les québécoistes! Toutefois, il faut noter qu'un grand nombre de textes d'*Altérité et insularité* sont écrits en italien.

Enfin, notons la publication de la thèse de doctorat de Svante Lindberg, dans les Cahiers de la Recherche de l'Université de Stockholm, intitulée *Pratiques de l'ici, altérité et identité dans six romans québécois des années 1989-2002*. Dans cette thèse, les questions d'altérité et de représentations de la figure de l'autre dans la littérature québécoise contemporaine sont étudiées en fonction de la relation entre la subjectivité, la collectivité et le nationalisme après le Référendum de 1980. Lindberg a choisi six romans québécois : le chapitre 3 porte sur *La Mort de Marlon Brando* de Pierre Gobeil et *L'Hiver de pluie* de Lise Tremblay; le chapitre 4 analyse *Là-bas tout près* de Rober Racine et *Oslo* de Bertrand Gervais; enfin le chapitre 5 prend en compte *Un homme est une valse* de Pauline Harvey et *Visage retrouvé* de Wajdi Mouawad. Lindberg s'intéresse, d'une part, à l'enracinement de la fiction et du sujet de la narration dans l'espace québécois, et, d'autre part, à l'éclatement de l'identité et à la fragmentation de l'espace dans ces romans post-référendaires.

Il est toutefois étonnant que dans le cadre d'un tel travail la littérature amérindienne ne reçoive aucune attention et que l'écriture migrante soit *presque* absente. Il aurait été important de considérer l'influence de l'œuvre de Bernard Assiniwi, Émile Ollivier, Dany Laferrière, Ying Chen, Sergio Kokis, etc., sur l'identité et l'altérité afin d'éviter de présenter une vision trop partielle du Québec contemporain.

Lire sous tous les angles

David Leblanc

La Descente du singe. Le Quartanier 18,95 \$

Compte rendu par Luc Bonenfant

Alors que la page de couverture de *La Descente du singe* annonce qu'il s'agit de « fictions », sa page de titre indique plutôt : « Textes brefs, courts ou pas trop longs à l'usage des habitués du bus, du métro, du tram, du train, de l'avion, de la station spatiale internationale, de la banquette arrière, de la plage, du banc public, et de tous ceux et celles qui préfèrent dévorer leurs livres à plat ventre sur leur lit ou dans la noble solitude des cabinets ». Comment ne pas au moins esquisser un sourire devant les jeux génériques inscrits dans ce sous-titre? Depuis l'idée selon laquelle la nouvelle (ou le texte bref) doit pouvoir « se lire entre deux stations de métro » jusqu'à celle demandant que la lecture (poétique?) se fasse dans l'isolement recueilli, se jouent ici de multiples clichés, tous rapidement court-circuités par l'absurdité d'une nomenclature qui pousse jusque dans ses derniers retranchements tout *a priori* littéraire. Le ton est donné. On pourra s'amuser tout en réfléchissant. Si la littérature, au Quartanier, se fait sérieusement, les auteurs ne s'y prennent pas au sérieux. La suffisance n'est pas de leur ressort malgré l'investissement dont leurs écritures témoignent.

Dans *La Descente du singe*, le loufoque et les dépaysements incongrus n'empêchent jamais la recherche exacte d'une phrase qui

ne cesse de se dédoubler. Par exemple le savoureux et bref « Interlude renaissant » :

Un mauvais peintre, reculant de quelques pas devant son dernier tableau, n'arrivait pas à se décider : s'agirait-il d'un vieux sage, de Socrate ou de la Sagesse? Son tableau, en d'autres mots, serait-il naturaliste, historique ou allégorique? « C'est étrange, se dit le mauvais peintre, l'image demeure la même pour l'œil, mais le seul ajout d'un titre permet de détourner les sens du spectateur et, ce faisant, d'amener son esprit ailleurs ». Intrigué par cette heureuse découverte, le mauvais peintre abandonna son tableau. Se consacrant tout entier à la recherche d'un titre, il retira ses images de la toile et se laissa envahir par cette idée mouvante qui fit du mauvais peintre un grand poète.

Ne croirait-on pas, en lisant ce poème réflexif, voir se dérouler une seconde fois l'histoire du bon vieux Théo? Gautier a en effet brièvement tenté une carrière artistique pour laquelle il n'était pas doué. C'est ainsi qu'il est devenu l'écrivain aujourd'hui consacré par l'histoire littéraire. Ou s'agit-il plutôt de celle de Daniil Harms, qui a brièvement fréquenté les cours de cinéma de l'Institut d'Histoire des Arts de Leningrad avant de devenir l'écrivain proscrit dont l'esthétique se situait aux antipodes du réalisme socialiste?

La mise en abîme est d'autant plus élogieuse qu'elle met en jeu la question de la place occupée par l'écrivain contemporain. Place historique d'abord, puisque le titre place le mauvais peintre de Leblanc dans une histoire où Harms, Gautier et les artistes renaissants le précèdent. Place contemporaine aussi, parce que le texte convoque l'idée selon laquelle la littérature et les arts s'appellent l'un l'autre. La Renaissance et le romantisme avaient postulé cela, bien sûr. Mais contrairement à eux, l'artiste contemporain du poème de Leblanc ne renie pas son œuvre, aussi mauvaise soit-elle. Plutôt, il la transformera en assumant *ce qui la fait*. Son projet—d'abord pictural, finalement

littéraire—semble plus important que le reste, ce qui en fait un artiste bien de notre temps. La qualité du poème de Leblanc, on le voit, c'est qu'il hésite entre plusieurs sens sans pour autant perdre sa grande et belle cohérence.

J'écris « poème » à propos de ce texte. C'est que les textes de *La Descente du singe* sont à mon sens des poèmes en prose. Nul réflexe essentialiste ici. Simplement, le rappel de la formule de Michel Sandras : « plutôt qu'un genre, le poème en prose gagnerait à être considéré comme un ensemble de formes littéraires brèves appartenant à un espace de transition dans lequel se redéfinissent les rapports de la prose et du vers et se forgent d'autres conceptions du poème » (*Lire le poème en prose*). *La Descente du singe* conjugue les formules diverses afin d'éprouver l'idée de « poésie » tout autant que celle de « poème ». Textes aphoristiques ou humoristiques, portraits ou narrations inopinées composent le paysage formel de ce recueil que n'aurait pas renié l'auteur des *Petits poèmes en prose*, à cause de sa diversité formelle justement. Bien sûr, l'esthétique phrastique de Leblanc doit certainement plus à celle de Daniil Kharms, dont elle retient la précision, le laconisme et l'ironie pour s'affranchir des conditionnements logiques du langage. À cause de l'ironie, on pensera aussi à Donald Barthelme, dont la tentation épiphanique des « short-short stories » n'est pas étrangère à une conception poétique de la fiction. Chez Leblanc, le réel n'existe pas comme condition mimétique, parce que la poésie oblige à le penser autrement. Et *poème en prose* n'y est que le nom d'un espace générique où la liberté des transactions formelles permet à l'écrivain de se situer dans un espace où les formes diverses n'excluent finalement pas le mot poésie qu'elles redéfinissent constamment. Il faut lire ce recueil, d'abord pour sa valeur intrinsèque, mais aussi pour découvrir le Quartanier, si on ne connaît pas déjà la maison.

Cadence, Country, Voice

Robert Lecker

The Cadence of Civil Elegies. Cormorant \$24.95

Reviewed by Nicholas Bradley

Dennis Lee's *Civil Elegies* is a sprawling, complex poem about, *inter alia*, civic engagement, Canadian complicity with American imperialism, and the connection between nature and the modern city—the “technopolis” epitomized by Toronto. As Robert Lecker points out in his valuable monograph, *Civil Elegies*, first published in 1968, has received little critical attention since the early 1980s. He bases his book on the premise that Lee and *Civil Elegies* deserve careful scrutiny (“I can think of few other poets writing at the beginning of the seventies who felt so fiercely about the relation between language, freedom, and identity”) and strives to demonstrate that the poem fundamentally enacts an individual spiritual and linguistic crisis rather than an overt political critique.

Lecker first briefly discusses *Civil Elegies* in the context of theoretical formulations about the Canadian long poem. He then advances his main argument that “The multiple struggles that Lee faces in articulating his lament are much more fascinating than the lament itself” and that “the most important political assertion in the poem” is that “freedom begins in abandoning connection, ambition, objectives. It means treating language as original and free.” This emphasis on the crisis of the self is illuminating. Lecker also helpfully includes excerpts of his own correspondence with Lee. But he too often resorts to hand-wringing instead of analysis: “I approach the poem. I want it to sit still . . . Yet it resists. It keeps lurching around . . . I redouble my efforts. *Sit still*. It won't.” This tells us nothing substantial about the poem that Lecker seeks to explicate.

Lecker's thesis proves overly reductive and excludes elements of the poem that

command attention. While he rightly acknowledges the paucity of critical writing on Lee, he does not address Jonathan Kertzer's discussion in *Worrying the Nation* (1998) of nationhood in *Civil Elegies*. Nor does he make use of Isaías Naranjo's article (2001) on the important Heideggerian aspects of the poem. Although he describes Lee's notion of *earth* as a "mode of existence tied to harmony with the natural world," he does not examine the thematic importance of pollution or Lee's awareness of ecological crisis in any detail. There are also more specific oversights. "I can see only the bread and circuses to come," Lee writes in the sixth elegy. Lecker suggests that "'bread and circuses' is an apocalyptic metaphor" but he overlooks the classical origin of the phrase. By quoting Juvenal's tenth satire ("panem et circenses"), Lee aligns himself with the Roman poet as a stern critic of a pandering government and a complacent populace. Lecker's view that "The power of *Civil Elegies* has nothing to do with the actual substance of Lee's complaint" can thus seem wanting. The poem has confessional elements but also demands to be read alongside politically charged works by poets as different from each other and from Lee as W.H. Auden, Robinson Jeffers, and Allen Ginsberg. *Civil Elegies* is a poem of individual and political crisis; a thorough reading of the poem would recognize the complexity of Lee's lament.



In Pursuit of Potential

Stewart Lemoine

At the Zenith of the Empire. NeWest \$18.95

Herménégilde Chiasson; Jo-Anne Elder,
trans.

Lifedream. Guernica \$15.00

Tim Carlson

Omniscience. Talonbooks \$15.95

Reviewed by Tricia Hopton

Life is a series of choices; society can be seen as a reflection of what we choose and how we contend with decisions. Three new Canadian plays explore varying perspectives on possibilities and prospective repercussions. The plays range vastly in setting, plot, dialogue, and style, though they are connected by a notion of life's potential. In these theatrical worlds, grasping hold of life's choices can have positive outcomes, while relinquishing control can be downright apocalyptic.

Penned by Albertan Stewart Lemoine, *At the Zenith of the Empire* harkens back to a significant time in Edmonton's theatrical history. In 1913, the Empire Theatre received a visit from the famed French actress Sarah Bernhardt. Lemoine's Bernhardt is a conduit for commentary on the state of the developing community and its theatre. Featuring an excellent introduction by Anne Nothof, this sharp and funny metatheatrical script offers a glimpse of the burgeoning community, its theatre, and the colourful characters who may have inhabited it.

Edmonton theatregoers are ecstatic to learn that Sarah Bernhardt's touring company will perform at the Empire. Although the town is equipped with its own resident theatre company, Sarah's visit brings the promise of new possibilities. She praises the High Level Bridge and reflects on the fortitude of the people who live in this cold northern town. Lemoine's Sarah embodies the optimism and promise that a new city must embrace. Near the end of the play she wisely muses

upon the spirit of Edmonton: “life in your city is not going to be lived as it is lived elsewhere, and that will be the charm of it. You’re being challenged to live free of old notions, and I want to think you’ll make the most of it.” The play and its characters embrace this statement. The script is occasionally self-reflexive and moves quickly to different locations and time periods, remaining witty and contemplative throughout.

Translated from French by Jo-Anne Elder, Herménégilde Chiasson’s *Lifedream* deals with possibilities too. Perhaps something was lost in translation, however, as the dialogue feels a bit heavy-handed: the characters are excessively loquacious. The script is almost entirely devoid of set description and stage directions, leaving much to the imagination of its director and/or audience. The plot relies on tricky interrelations: Gabrielle has been having an affair with Paul, who is married to Solange. Meanwhile, Solange is having an intellectual affair with her priest Thomas, who happens to be the brother of her husband’s mistress. All four manage to meet each other but even in the face of truth and confrontation, the characters remain focused on their own pursuits, failing to ever find a true connection.

In fourteen scenes, this script asks if there is any way to make *the* decision that will bring true happiness and success. Though options abound, no one ever finds satisfaction in their choices—even in their dreams. In *Lifedream*, the line between reality and the dream world is blurred for both the characters and the audience. Ultimately, these characters yearn for self-gratification through a consensus of mind, heart, and body. Regrettably, none of them succeeds. There are poetic moments in this rather cinematic play, but the resolution comes too easily.

Omniscience contends with possibilities in a very different way. Tim Carlson’s intelligent and exciting play premiered in Vancouver in 2004 and was nominated for a Jessie Richardson Award. Full of

powerful images and ideas, the play aims to amalgamate multimedia and live theatre by juxtaposing screens and music against live bodies and voices to convey its message about modern media and censorship both thematically and visually.

Set in “a city in the future,” *Omniscience* presents a world where everyone works and lives by the rules of Central (Carlson’s version of the television show *Big Brother*). Haunted and hunted by Central, state-employed documentarian Warren and his wife Anna, a war veteran with post-traumatic stress syndrome, simultaneously try to appease and escape this controlling force. Warren and Anna seek out places, both physical and psychological, where they can elude Central’s ever-present eyes. Their relationship suffers, as does their quality of life. Unlike the characters of Lemoine and Chiasson, Carlson’s characters have no real means of recourse as their choices have been virtually annihilated: Anna opts for a trail mix of drugs to contend with her fears and frustrations, while Warren unsuccessfully tries to inject some reality into the commissioned war documentary.

Omniscience fulfills Aristotle’s notion of mimesis in theatre, almost frighteningly so. It is a gritty and complex drama with a clear, important message about current trends such as the censorship of mass media, the lack of true human contact, and the easy access to information about individuals in our society. Carlson’s dialogue is cleverly sprinkled with Orwellian Newspeak-like phrases. The action is intense and there are enough layers to invite a second read.

From past to present to future, from optimism to realism to pessimism, there is exciting new Canadian terrain to be explored in these three plays. Although Chiasson’s present and Carlson’s future may appear cynically dire, Lemoine’s brazen Bernhardt provides a message of hope. Ultimately these are worlds of potential, full of potent ideas, relationships, and images.

Histories of Violence

Adam Lewis Schroeder

Empress of Asia. Raincoast \$29.95

Jim Bartley

Drina Bridge. Raincoast \$29.95

Reviewed by Wendy Roy

Many Canadian writers exhibit a near-obsession with our country's past. Further, almost every Canadian novel that can be classified as "historical" looks back on a violent or reprehensible segment of Canadian history. Two recent Canadian novels that broaden this focus to take a Canadian perspective on international affairs are Adam Lewis Schroeder's *Empress of Asia*, which aims its lens at Canadian experience in Japanese prisoner-of-war camps during World War II, and Jim Bartley's *Drina Bridge*, which examines a Canadian connection to the more recent wars in Croatia and Bosnia and their roots in World War II. Both books are challenging and disturbing, not only because they evoke shameful periods in international war history (some troublingly recent), but also because their narrators are men whose flaws include the kind of self-centred blindness recognizable, in greatly magnified form, in those who commit wartime atrocities.

Schroeder's *Empress of Asia* is narrated by Harry Winslow, an insular, racist, and often not very likeable seventy-something Vancouver car salesman. Harry's world is shaken when his beloved wife, Lily, dies of pneumonia. Lily's dying request—that Harry visit Michel Ney, an old acquaintance from their years in concentration camps in Indonesia and Singapore—sends him on a journey of discovery that forces him to reconsider his and Lily's past, and eventually his own self-deluding blindness. As first person narrator, Harry addresses his story to a beloved "you"—Lily—through three very distinct sections. In the brief opening section, set in 1995, Harry talks to

Lily about his response to her death. In the much longer second section, he remembers his experiences as a merchant seaman during World War II, his meeting with Lily in Singapore, and his years in prisoner-of-war camps. Finally, in the short final section, Harry as narrator returns to 1995 and to his fulfillment of his wife's request that he travel to Thailand, a trip that results in the revelation of a transformational secret from her past.

Schroeder's book poses questions about the potential ambiguity of personal moral standards and the nature of prejudice. While Harry's narrative outlines the concrete reasons for his bigotry against people of Japanese origin, it also reveals this prejudice to be a tragic flaw preventing him from seeing kindness and concern in people such as the nurse, Yuriko, who takes care of his wife during her final hours. Harry is a frustrating main character because of his narrow-mindedness and passivity. He falls into work as a sailor and then as a merchant seaman during the war (on the boat for which Schroeder's novel is named); he runs into Lily (his other *Empress of Asia*) in Singapore and haphazardly takes her up on her surprising suggestion that they immediately marry; he passively acquiesces to Michel's schemes during their time in and out of concentration camps. Harry is repeatedly paired with friends who both help and hinder him, and who, at least from Harry's perspective, are even more morally questionable than he is. The first is his youthful friend in Canada, Eric Shaw, who gets him his first job as a sailor and who incites a lifelong love for Fats Waller, but who also steals all his money. The most significant is the Frenchman Michel Ney, a black-marketeer he meets in a prisoner-of-war camp on the Indonesian island Celebes (now Sulawesi). Like Michel's namesake, the French hero of the Napoleonic wars who switched sides but who fought and died bravely, Harry's friend exhibits a

moral ambiguity that allows Harry, in the years after their incarceration, to deprecate their friendship. Michel's dealings with the Japanese guards indeed border on collaboration. But as readers eventually learn, Michel's care for Harry and for Lily has kept both of them alive, and in the process has enabled them to hide fundamentally life-changing experiences of war from one another. Their tragedy is that while Lily has kept a secret for fifty years to protect Harry, his response when the secret is at last revealed indicates that, while his narrow life would have been much more complex and harrowing had he not been so sheltered, it would at the same time have been richer and more rewarding.

Schroeder's novel provokes a reconsideration of official and personal history through the metaphor of blindness. The beriberi that Harry suffers as a result of malnutrition in the prisoner-of-war camp blurs his eyesight, but also gives him an excuse not to recognize significant characteristics of others and of himself. Harry averts his gaze in particular from his own ethically questionable acts. For example, while he has been told that if he escapes from the Celebes concentration camp, six other men in the camp will be killed, he allows himself to forget this detail. Michel, on the other hand, has clearly weighed this sobering fact and has considered the heavy responsibility escape might entail. With the belated help of his dead wife, Harry acknowledges that he must recognize his own moral failings before he can experience his life as a whole, encompassing both good and evil.

Bartley's *Drina Bridge* has not one but two morally ambiguous narrators, who operate in a complex narrative structure that unsettles and disturbs the reader. The book begins with an entry labeled "Bosnia, 1994," and the words "A basket of eyeballs. This I saw on the desk of General Zemko Izogorević, war hero of Serbia." In a passage so harrowing that I had to put the book

aside for two weeks before I could finish reading it, an unnamed narrator notes that his own eyeballs were still in his head, but only temporarily; he then claims, "I am already dead." When the narrator asks rhetorically how a blind man or, more to the point, a dead man can write, readers are compelled to question the accuracy of the narrative in front of them.

Chapter 2 introduces the book's second and more frequent narrator, Chris Maitland from Toronto. It also identifies chapter 1 as the first twenty pages of a memoir Chris has been reading, written by a thumbless Bosnian man who shares the first name of the infamous Slobodan Milosević. In 1991, Chris travelled to an Orthodox Christian monastery in Serbia, near the border with Bosnia, to investigate the family-of-origin of his dead lover, Pimm. Before Pimm died of AIDS, he had discovered adoption records showing he had been born in Yugoslavia at the end of the World War II. Chris' grief-driven obsession with tracking down his partner's family history leads him into a conflict zone; he stays on because he develops a new obsession with the monastic way of life and with one of the monks.

Chris' narrative, which takes the form of first-person storytelling interspersed with letters he writes and receives, and the fragmented narrative written by Slobodan in his refuge in the psychiatric wing of a Sarajevo hospital, together raise questions about the truth of personal, as well as collective, history. Both narratives move back and forth in time: Chris' from 1991 to 1995, during the wars in Croatia and Bosnia, and Slobodan's between his childhood experiences of World War II (1941-45) and his adult experiences of the Bosnian conflict (exactly fifty years later). In both, the writers repeatedly manipulate their own written records to present multiple versions of the same events. Slobodan, for example, provides three variations of what happened to him as a child living with his

aunt and uncle in the Bosnian countryside. In the first version, Ustasha soldiers (Croats who were allied with the Nazis) shoot Slobodan's uncle and rape his sister. However, this account concludes with the words, "As it happens, these events did not occur at my uncle's house." The second version, which follows immediately, describes a visit from a truck full of Chetnics (Serb nationalists), who attract the attention of a German plane; the bomb it drops destroys the farmhouse and kills Slobodan's uncle. Several pages later, Slobodan writes, "This is what really happened," and presents the third version, which his "gentle readers" are asked to take as definitive. In this final account, Slobodan's uncle leads his family from the destroyed farm toward the town of Višegrad, where the Drina Bridge of the book's title is located.

Although Slobodan says "I'll not dissemble again," he continues to write multiple versions of subsequent events in his life. Some of them take place on Drina Bridge, a location especially significant for Bosnians because of Ivo Andrić's Nobel Prize-winning novel *The Bridge on the Drina* (1945), a book about conflict and community in the area from the sixteenth century to World War I. (Bartley's title of course evokes Andrić's book, suggesting an updating of that conflict through World War II to the Bosnian Civil War.) Toward the conclusion of Bartley's book, Slobodan's sister calls into question a key traumatic incident in his childhood, which he says began on Drina Bridge, but which she claims happened to her and not to him. While I wanted to believe in and become emotionally invested in Slobodan's stories, I was compelled to question my trust in him as a narrator. His narrative demonstrated in a concrete way the potential inaccuracy of memory as a way of conveying personal and communal history. At the same time, as Slobodan describes atrocities—raping girls and boys, gouging out eyeballs, bombing

houses, massacring others because of their ethnicity—it becomes clear that while these events may not have happened to him or precisely as he describes, his accounts are nevertheless a form of "truth." Slobodan may be alive, and may still have his eyes, but he could just as easily be one of the dead or blinded. The basket of eyeballs of the opening sentence suggests that Slobodan is blind because he is powerless in the conflicts that engulf him, but as narrator he can obscure and illuminate by providing multiple possible "truths." As Slobodan concludes, and as Chris repeats, only "chance divides the actual from the true."

In comparison, Chris' alternative versions, often about his sexual experiences, seem much more trivial than Slobodan's blood-soaked alternative realities. Ultimately, Chris' stories emphasize the contrast between the intense suffering of the innocent participant and the self-centred dilettantism of the observer, for whom escape is always possible. Chris becomes increasingly involved in the nearby war—from seeing war dead buried in the monastery grounds to accompanying a fellow monk into Bosnia to rescue a niece—but as a Canadian citizen he remains outside its most devastating manifestations.

The conclusion to Bartley's book is unsatisfying because it is just as fragmented as the rest of the book. However, as in Schroeder's book, the literal and figurative blindness of the characters provides for an insightful if ultimately inconclusive consideration of wartime events and their reverberations fifty years into the future. The imperfect narrators in these two books suggest that lack of vision enforces not just repeated rewritings of historical narratives, but also the unwelcome repetition of human histories of bigotry and violence.



Recours contre le désenchantement

Paul Chanel Malenfant

Vivre ainsi, suivi de *Le Vent sombre*. Noroît 18,95 \$

Paul Chanel Malenfant

Rue Daubenton. Hexagone 17,95 \$

Luc Perrier

Le Moindre vent. Noroît 23,95 \$

Compte rendu par Isabelle Miron

Le recueil *Vivre ainsi* suivi de *Le Vent sombre* de Paul Chanel Malenfant est composé, comme son titre l'indique, de deux parties. La première, divisée en cinq sections, est tout entière tendue vers le projet d'explorer le lieu de la parole, que le poète présente comme étant également celui de l'être. *Vivre ainsi* traverse, en un parcours intime allant de l'embryon à « l'automne de [l]a vie », le « temps amniotique », les souvenirs d'enfance du poète, son rapport à l'écriture et au poème, à la mort et aux paysages marins. L'écriture sereine et amplement métaphorique creuse son rapport à l'origine et s'exerce, ce faisant, à « interroge[r] l'équilibre sonore du monde », en une posture existentielle investissant le poème à la fois comme moyen d'entrer « dans la durée du monde » et comme recours contre « les risques d'abandon ». *Le Vent sombre* est quant à lui écrit dans un style plus vivant, qui se veut proche du rythme de l'enfance thématifiée dans les poèmes. Cependant, les souvenirs du poète le mènent rapidement à creuser ses rapports avec ses disparus (père, mère décédés et frère suicidé) et à la guerre. L'écriture poétique étant ici alchimie, le rapport à la mort est, à la fin de cette partie, retourné en un rapport à la vie, pour lequel le poème offre le signe le plus tangible du vivant.

Une fenêtre ouverte « sur le vide morne de l'espace parisien » ouvre le recueil *Rue Daubenton*. Prolongeant le travail de mémoire amorcé avec son roman *Quoi, déjà la nuit?* (Hexagone, 1998), le récit *Des airs de famille* (Hexagone, 2000) et le recueil *Vivre*

ainsi suivi de *Le Vent sombre*, le poète entrelace, à partir de cette « chambre d'écho » de la rue Daubenton, les souvenirs de voyage et d'enfance. Écrit sous le mode du fragment et de la poésie en prose, ce travail d'auto-fiction tient tout entier dans l'appel de la rêverie que provoque la fenêtre « propice à la pensée », mêlant, ce faisant, « vérités et mensonges de l'écriture ». Au centre de ces rêveries poétiques figure l'inguérissable « mal d'être » du poète, auquel il n'a de cesse de rattacher les multiples figures de la mort : celle du petit frère Olivier, du frère suicidé, des grands-parents et des parents, et auxquelles on peut rattacher, comme en une mort vivante, la folie. Mais à l'instar du recueil *Vivre ainsi*, Paul Chanel Malenfant puise la force de « ratiss[er] les marées basses » et, sans relâche, dénude la vie de son sens dans « l'impuissante consolation du poème ».

Composé de douze parties, le recueil *Le Moindre vent* de Luc Perrier s'inscrit dans une poétique de douce dénonciation du mode de vie moderne désenchanté. Écrit pour l'essentiel sous forme de poèmes en vers, le recueil inclut également un dialogue, des textes de réflexion et de fiction, et use dans l'un comme dans l'autre texte de nombreux jeux de langage et de métaphores filées d'influence surréaliste concourant à faire du langage poétique le moyen par excellence pour contrer le désenchantement. Ainsi, à l'enfance en allée se substituent « l'imagination, la création ». « Cinq minutes de poésie par jour ramèneraient le bonheur sur terre », affirme d'ailleurs le poète qui, après les interpellations aux grands (« nous ne voulons rien savoir / de vos déclarations de guerre ») comme aux petits responsables de la dépoétisation du monde (« l'espérance ne compte plus / dans vos jeux vos danses / vous allez si vite / au volant d'heures fauchées »), s'en détourne : « retourne à tes poussins / au bleu du ciel à la neige / ne leur cède pas la joie / l'insaisissable qui t'habite / quand la mouette / t'emmène avec elle ».

Resisting Globalization

Jerry Mander and Victoria Tauli-Corpuz, eds.

Paradigm Wars: Indigenous Peoples' Resistance to Globalization. Sierra Club \$23.95

Nigel Reading and Gary Wyatt

Manawa: Pacific Heartbeat: A Celebration of Contemporary Maori & Northwest Coast Art.
Douglas & McIntyre \$35.00

Reviewed by Niigonwedom J. Sinclair

Global economic “progress,” particularly by “first-world” nations, has depended on the violent conquest, subjugation, and exploitation of Indigenous nations. Nowadays, multinational corporations (MNCs) have joined the colonial project and use international trade law to plunder Indigenous cultures for commodifiable resources. Native peoples have met these new invasion attempts with forceful resistance, asserting their sovereignties through art, writing, and international lobbying.

Two recent books document this cacophony. The first, *Paradigm Wars*, edited by Jerry Mander and Victoria Tauli-Corpuz, is a bold, confrontational text that documents how the neo-liberal agenda of global economic institutions, particularly the World Trade Organization (WTO) and the International Monetary Fund, foster a global climate where resources are required to feed a “never-ending exponential economic growth.” Indigenous nations, which stubbornly remain stewards of most of the world’s remaining resources, are left to fend off unprecedented assaults on their claims, ethics, and knowledges by nations and MNCs hungry for maximum profit.

In this powerful anthology, twenty-seven intellectuals and activists assert that globalization should learn from and make space for Indigenous ideologies and practices, not vice versa. Principles such as common property traditions, agricultural biodiversity, and cooperative relationships with nature will be “crucial if we are to save

whatever is left of the planet’s cultural and biological diversity,” writes Tauli-Corpuz, but this will only be possible if we protect Indigenous nations’ “right to remain separate and distinct.”

But if today’s climate is any barometer, Indigenous sovereignty is not on the global trade agenda. Native nations continue to have their rights denied (as ongoing US atomic bomb testing in the Marshall Islands and human rights abuses in South America attest), their lands mined for resources (such as oil in the territories of the Ogoni, U’Wa, and the Bagyéli, gold in Western Shoshoni lands and fresh water in communities across the world) and their medicines, sacred objects, and intellectual property stolen (and “legally” patented by MNCs). In the book’s most ironic example, Mark Dowie shows how global environmental conglomerates such as Conservation International, the Nature Conservancy and the World Wildlife Fund also follow this anti-Indigenous trend, lobbying for national parks and “wilderness” areas made from Native lands (thus making those communities “conservation refugees”). *Paradigm Wars* is essential reading for global citizens who give money to save the rain forest, hang dream catchers on our dashboards, and eat flour tortillas with our dinner—who all play a part in the exploitation of Indigenous peoples.

The book also does a good job of recording some strong examples of how Indigenous communities have used the global economy to create sustainable industry (such as ecotourist programs by communities in Belize and Australia), fought their subjugation, and forged alliances with other movements, as listed in the section entitled “Turning Points.” Successes at the United Nations, the *campesino*-led revolution in Bolivia, and the use and sale of eco-friendly wind power by savvy US Indian tribes all show encouraging trends. The text would have been more balanced if it spent more time studying these examples and engaging with the

critical issues economic self-sustainability raises in a capitalist-driven world as well as with how these struggles have inspired moments of Indigenous agency, adaptation, and innovation.

The text is blatantly activist, bordering on heavy-handed, but perhaps with so urgent an issue, it should be. Of essential value are the excellent resource lists of activist organizations and copies of Indigenous-led international agreements, such as the UN Draft Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDDRIIP) and the Mataatua Declaration. Of course, more advocacy and research must be done. As Tauli-Corpuz reminds us, “There is no slowing down,” for Indigenous peoples must continue to speak, act, and organize, ensuring that “governments, corporations, intergovernmental bodies and even social movements and revolutionary groups deal with the indigenous question if they operate in indigenous territory.”

Indirectly embodying the calls for Indigenous political movements is the beautifully crafted and powerful *Manawa: Pacific Heartbeat: A Celebration of Contemporary Maori & Northwest Coast Art*, edited by Nigel Reading and Gary Wyatt. The collection, containing over sixty works from thirty-one Maori and fifteen Northwest Coast First Nations artists, chronicles the intellectual-aesthetical collaboration between these two Indigenous groups, culminating in a 2006 public showing at the Spirit Wrestler Gallery in Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada. Against the backdrop of a nation that continues to refuse to affirm the UNDDRIIP and situated in a city that planned its 2010 Olympic bid around the illegal seizure of First Nations lands (and unveiled a logo that bastardizes and steals Inuit knowledge while ignoring local cultures), this book assures us that Indigenous voices continue to resist erasure and live lives on their terms.

The book is sharp, historical, and gorgeous, explaining in detail how the artistic

legacies of both peoples are tied together by three central themes: *Whirirangi: Woven Heavens* (Sky), *Moanauri: Oceanic Bloodlines* (Water), and *Papawhenua* (Land). Foregrounding the pieces (all of which were commissioned) are excellent historical essays, highlighted by a phenomenal tracing of Maori art by Te Kahui Maunga artist Darcy Nicholas. The three themes divide the book and give shape to pages filled with intertribal collaboration, speaking to powerful relationships between earth and human, spirit and body, north and south. Beneficial are the explanations of each piece by the artist, but often it is in examining the pieces in conversation that more teachings emerge. For instance, while examining two pieces, “Caged Culture” by Ngati Kahungunu painter Sandy Adsett and “Hilang—Thunderbird—Supernatural Being” by Haida painter Robert Davidson, I found connecting thoughts of cultural transformation and fluidity. In Stan Bevan’s “Frog and Raven Warrior” and Lewis Gardiner’s “Whiria Te Kaha . . .” there are reminders of the importance of genealogy, animal relations, and ancestral memory. The book’s themes are essential starting points, but it is in the ceremony of reading, thinking, and comparing that one finds messages containing humour, hunting, giving, gluttony, sharing, balance, destruction, beauty. *Manawa* is a powerful example of the possibility of Indigenous collaboration, politically and socially, and how important these voices are in teaching us diversity, not neo-liberal homogeneity. It is a powerful and persuasive argument that Indigenous cultures must be supported in their efforts to remain sovereign and distinct on their own terms, without regard to the needs of economic “progress.”



Empowering the Heroine

Carol Matas

The Burning Time. Orca \$9.95

Raquel Rivera

Orphan Ahwak. Orca \$8.95

R. Patrick

Prisoners Under Glass. Scroll \$20.95

Reviewed by Kristen Guest

Though ideas about traditional gender roles for girls have changed significantly over the past twenty years, critics of children's literature, and especially of fiction for young adults, have worried that young women continue to play supporting roles in adventure fiction. In the three works considered here, however, young heroines are not only models of strength and resilience, they are also leaders who face physical and emotional challenges head on.

The Burning Time, by Carol Matas, follows the experience of Rose, a young woman coming of age in a small community in seventeenth-century France. Central to the story is the impact on Rose's family and village of trials for witchcraft by the Catholic Church. The narrative begins with a short, untitled preface that sets an ominous tone, warning "[t]he women, accused, have been silenced." In the first chapter, which introduces life in the village, the "I" who speaks remains indeterminate. When Rose's father is killed in a riding accident, however, normalcy ends, and she emerges as the text's central consciousness and speaker. This shift adroitly expresses the movement of Rose and her mother, Suzanne, from protected members of a family, to women forced by circumstance to care for themselves. Their story focuses not on helplessness—Suzanne is an accomplished, independent woman who holds status in the community as a healer and who immediately expresses her desire to continue running the family's farm. Instead, Rose's story highlights the opportunism of individual men and of

patriarchal institutions, which engage in conscious victimization of women to seize their property and undermine the status of their knowledge. When Suzanne is imprisoned and tortured as a witch, Rose, too, is pursued. In hiding, she learns to resist the narratives forced on women—both actually, as forced confession, and socially, by the societies they inhabit. The postscript closing the narrative highlights Rose's ability to persevere. Having been exonerated, and rejoining her village as a healer and property owner, Rose seems to have triumphed. Despite her success, she warns of the need for vigilance, reminding readers of the larger historical world she inhabits, in which women's place in society is tenuous.

Like *The Burning Time*, Raquel Rivera's *Orphan Ahwak* examines the effects of trauma on the character of a young woman, Aneze. As a member of a close family and First Nations community, Aneze has a strong sense of identity. This is shattered, however, when enemies attack their camp and Aneze is the lone survivor. The narrative begins as Aneze attempts to process the cataclysmic effects of the attack. Physically, she is wounded; mentally, she is devastated by the horrific scene in which she regains consciousness. What are described as the "pictures in her mind" that she must close out to survive position her as alien to herself and her own emotions. The progress of the chapter titles highlights Aneze's journey from "death," in the book's opening, to a new connection with the natural world, and finally, a return to society and personal identity. As part of this physical and spiritual journey into the frozen north, Aneze takes on a new identity as "Ahwak," the orphaned hunter. Addressing her vulnerability as a female by masquerading as a boy, she hones protective and provisionary skills usually associated with men in her culture in a narrative form—adventure fiction—that frequently focuses on male experience. If this identity allows her to

begin the process of healing, however, it does not offer a final place for her, and she ultimately moves back to the south, reconnecting with others like herself. In doing so, she maintains the strength associated with "Ahwak," but also merges it with the feminine knowledge of Aneze, derived from the teachings of her mother and grandmother.

R. Patrick's *Prisoners Under Glass* works within the fantasy genre to chart the growing strength of a present-day heroine when faced with the loss of her mother. The plot of *Prisoners Under Glass* works within the conventions of fairy tale, but offers the twist of merging usually gendered elements of the form. Though the loss of her mother and subsequent remarriage of her father situate Rachel according to the narrative conventions of unprotected girlhood, her response replaces feminized passivity with the active engagement usually associated with fairy-tale heroes. This effect is further highlighted by the skills Rachel and her friends bring to the challenges of battling the sea witches who have not only bewitched Rachel's father, but also rendered their other victims "prisoners" under glass by freezing them as souvenirs in glass paperweights. Over the course of their journey, Rachel must learn to harness and trust her own magical powers and, in doing so, takes a leadership role in their crusade. With her are Justine, a conventionally pretty girl who is also a math genius, and Sam, Rachel's best friend whose talents are in music and languages. Such reversals not only challenge traditional representations of the strengths of girls and boys (reversing the triad central to the Harry Potter series), they also allow Patrick to explore the challenges associated with growing up female in contemporary western culture. Rachel must thus learn not only to trust her inner strength, but also to see beyond superficial judgments about beauty and femininity.

Taken together, these three novels offer an interesting revision of traditional

representations of femininity in young adult fiction, reminding us of the historical and contemporary structures of inequality.

A Complicated Welcome

Peter Melville

Romantic Hospitality and the Resistance to Accommodation. Wilfrid Laurier UP \$65.00

Reviewed by Markus Poetzsch

Peter Melville's *Romantic Hospitality and the Resistance to Accommodation* sets out to widen critical theory's so-called "ethical turn" by applying contemporary discourses on hospitality and related theories of alterity to paradigmatic late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century scenes of welcome and unwelcome. Guided by the idea that hospitality, at least in its ideal state, is conceptually, structurally, and practically impossible given its tendency to re-inscribe fundamental inequities between host and guest, self and other, Melville's text locates the various instantiations of that impossibility (and the struggle to overcome it) in the works of four Romantic writers: Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Immanuel Kant, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, and Mary Shelley. Melville's engagement with the literary and philosophical "pre-texts" of Rousseau and Kant, as well as more representative English Romantic works by Coleridge and Shelley, ensures a compellingly interdisciplinary study, one that crosses genres as frequently as the thresholds of home and nation are crossed in the various scenes of accommodation that unfold before the reader's eyes.

Adopting (and at times adapting) a Derridean formulation of hospitality in which the guest as other appears in a multiplicity of guises and contexts, Melville explores textual moments as various as Rousseau's retelling of the brutal Biblical tale of the Levite and his concubine in *Le Lévitte d'Ephraïm*, Kant's strictures on proper dinner-party etiquette from

Anthropologie in pragmatischer Hinsicht, Coleridge's textualization of competing hospitalities in "Christabel," and Shelley's anthropomorphization of the plague as apocalyptic "visitant" in *The Last Man*. What these apparently disparate and unrelatable moments and texts of accommodation have in common, Melville argues, is that though they "inevitably impose a certain violence on the others that they welcome or exclude, they nevertheless situate themselves in an 'ethical' space that renders each scene of reading the foreign an experience of responsibility." Melville's analyses of the complexities of that ethical space—what may, more properly, be termed an ethical crisis—are consistently subtle, nuanced and productive of a host of questions that continue to press in upon us for answers. His close readings, even where they deal with isolated or tangential scenes of hospitality that do not illumine a work as a whole (such as Kant's deployment of the figure of the "Asiatic Turk" in *Anthropologie* or Coleridge's uneasy reconciliation of two hospitable obligations in the compositional narrative that frames "Kubla Khan"), are compellingly rich and expansive.

It is rather surprising, then, that in distilling a Romantic theory of hospitality to an engagement with otherness that always "enable[s] the alterity of the stranger to remain *strange*"—a conclusion that, as the text reminds us, in fact prefigures the work of Derrida—Melville somewhat puzzlingly (and, dare one say, *inhospitably*) occludes the role of the reader in arriving at that, or indeed any other, determination. It is not the critic, according to Melville, who deduces such a theory from the evidence of text; rather, the texts themselves "produce a theory of hospitality" (emphasis added), one that apparently pre-exists the reader's entrance on the scene. Forestalling the very open-endedness of the texts he reads, their very "strangeness," Melville asserts that they offer clear ethical directives to the reader,

not least the "demand that we . . . attend 'with care'" to the other. While such a reading is perhaps congenial to the modern critic's ear and morals, it oversimplifies texts whose representations of the stranger are also at times troublingly xenophobic and even racist (the "negro half clad" who functions as the very embodiment of foreign infection in Shelley's *The Last Man* is a poignant example). Melville's ultimately redemptive reading of such passages, or rather, his subsumption of them in an overall pattern of benevolent responsibility elides the very element of hostility that, as he himself acknowledges, functions always already in apposition to the ideal of hospitality.

The Lady and The Vamp

Yuzo Ota

A Woman With Demons: The Life of Kamiya Mieko. McGill-Queens UP \$34.95

Joan Itoh Burk

One Chrysanthemum. Brindle & Glass \$24.95

Reviewed by Marilyn Iwama

A Woman With Demons is historian Yuzo Ota's meticulous and fond introduction to Mieko Kamiya (1914-79), the polyglot, mystic, classicist, psychiatrist, neurologist, and eventual "good wife, wise mother" whose life spanned the two World Wars and three continents. Ota suggests that existing scholarship on Kamiya leans to hagiography, in part because Kamiya managed her prodigious accomplishments at a time when the Japanese cultural milieu harshly circumscribed women's lives. Scholars have also spun a narrative of sacrifice around Kamiya's work with leprosy patients. Not only does Ota propose a more balanced account of Kamiya's complex personality, he promises to treat both the profound significance of Kamiya's vocation as a writer and the lingering despair caused by the accidental death of her young fiancé, Kazuhiko Nomura.

From the significant body of Kamiya's published work, Ota concentrates on her autobiography and the influential book, *What Makes Our Life Worth Living*. He also draws heavily from the diary of Kamiya's husband and her own unpublished writings, or *shuki*. Ota highlights Kamiya's mid-life, arguing against the popular perception that charitable obligation prompted her service to leprosy patients. At the very least, her *shuki* suggest that Kamiya came to believe that the effects of Nomura's death and her own tuberculosis placed her in a physical and psychological position parallel to that of leprosy patients. Ota contends that Kamiya's dedication to easing their suffering sprang from both compassion and her identification with them.

Ota's study is preoccupied with certain complexities, or "contradictory" aspects, of Kamiya's personality. In this cause, he conflates the textual voice of Kamiya's *shuki* with her lived self, repeatedly citing the *shuki* as "evidence," concluding that the text reveals Kamiya's life as "Mieko herself understood it." Ota's submission to the text as mirror is puzzling, given his understanding that Kamiya's awareness of the "sorcery" of language underwrites her *shuki*. Equally perplexing is his selective attention to historical and social context.

Kamiya's peripatetic life was spread over several childhood years in Switzerland, a couple more in the US, some months in Paris, and time in several different Japanese cities. She also attended various American and Japanese universities. The family moved to New York in 1938, when Kamiya was in her early twenties, possibly to protect her liberal father from mounting militarism in Japan. Before Japan joined World War II, Kamiya was back "home." Ota acknowledges that the war affected Kamiya in many ways, yet he resists addressing its more provocative implications. Midway through the war, Kamiya exchanges her cosmopolitan questing for nationalist enthusiasm. By the

war's end, her "liberal" father was situated solidly within Japanese government circles as Minister of Education. The book would benefit from a bolder look at such wartime ambiguities.

Ota is equally discriminating about the impact of Japanese social conventions and ideas of female selfhood. Yes, Kamiya's parents were quite unlike each other and, as records of her self-analysis suggest, Kamiya's personality often seemed contestably marked by each. However, it is only outside of Japan that Kamiya reflects on her "antinomious" self, recognizing that she is always at odds with "existing ideas and existing systems." In light of Kamiya's adult enthusiasm for Japanese culture, broader consideration of these systems may have deepened Ota's analysis of what Kamiya named her "monstrous" and "unnatural" self. Other quibbles concern irritants of convention only. *A Woman With Demons* is a persuasive text, tenderly written.

Joan Itoh Burk's novel *One Chrysanthemum* picks up the historical thread of women's lives in postwar Japan through the character of Misako Tanaka, a clairvoyant young woman from rural Niigata. Misako realizes her modern "love marriage" has foundered when she sees a vision of her husband, Hideo, in bed with his mistress. Through a series of unlikely coincidences, Misako finds herself summarily divorced and living the Tokyo high life with her childhood friend, Sachiko. Sachiko has undergone a Cinderella transformation, thanks to plastic surgery and the aid of a cannily benevolent nightclub owner. Already a talented and well-connected fashion designer when she reunites with Misako, Sachiko soon catapults to fame and riches, eventually enjoying her own fling with Hideo in her bedroom just down the hall from Misako's.

However predictable its romance, *One Chrysanthemum* remains this side of popular fiction because it is also a contemplation of religion and mysticism in modern Japan.

Misako's grandfather is a Buddhist priest. When desiccated bones of a young woman turn up in the garden near his temple, the priest officiates at their cremation but is compelled to keep the ashes. He recalls an episode when the child Misako came running with tales of a young woman who had fallen into the pond where Misako was playing. In reality, no such incident occurred—at that time. Suspecting that the “lie” for which he scolded Misako was actually a vision, her grandfather calls in another priest, Kensho, who has knowledge of clairvoyance. This priest is of mixed blood, with complicated stories of his own, and soon enough we witness a growing but fraught relationship between him and Misako. Romance eventually yields to mystery, and justice—both legal and moral—is served.

Although it could be trimmed, the plot twists and Itoh Burk's facility with dialogue propel the story along. There are lovely exchanges between the awkward Kensho and the equally displaced Misako. Similarly, the relationship between Misako and her grandfather's junior priest, Teishin, unfolds with grace and charm. Some characters—Misako's mother-in-law and stepfather in particular—are complex and convincing, while others—Hideo, Sachiko, and Auntie Kaz, the nightclub owner—play predictable, stereotypical roles.

At times, the story stalls under the load of too many subplots and far too much interpretation of Japanese history, language, and cultural practice. The latter intrusions may spring from Itoh Burk's position as an inside outsider: she was married for thirteen years to a Japanese and, like Misako, lived in an agricultural area of Niigata. Some of Misako's own reflections sound like those of a cultural visitor.

I find that the most significant obstacle to appreciating *One Chrysanthemum* is Itoh Burk's insistence on educating her reader. This interpretive commitment means that a fine passage of dialogue or description is

often followed, preceded—or even interrupted—with textbook material. Redundant translations (*haori* coat, *tokonoma* alcove, and so on) also detract from the moments of fluid lyricism in, for instance, many of the temple and nature passages. At times, Itoh Burk's voice beautifully evokes the Korean poet, So Chong-Ju, especially his poem, “Beside a Chrysanthemum.” Should a revised version be under consideration (and I hope it is), it would be wise to subsume language and culture within the rich texture of this story.

Bullshit Nations

Morris Panych

What Lies Before Us. Talonbooks \$15.95

Raul Sanchez Inglis

In the Eyes of God. Talonbooks \$17.95

Reviewed by Sarah Banting

The grimmest joke in Panych's *What Lies Before Us* is made at the expense of Canadian nationhood.

The play is set in 1885. Scots and English railroad surveyors Ambrose and Keating, and Chinese labourer Wing, are stranded together in a Rocky Mountain wilderness. Gradually realizing that they have been abandoned there by the Major, the leader of their expedition, and imprisoned by a rock-fall that surrounds their camp, the two English-speaking men debate the value of the nation-building project (among other things) while awaiting their slow deaths. Wing, meanwhile, busies himself round the camp. Keating believes in God, in the authority of great men (like the Major, or Alexander), and in heroic human enterprise. For Keating, the railroad's eventual completion will justify its construction. Indeed, he points out, if the railroad already existed, they would not be trapped in the wilderness. For skeptical Ambrose, the Major is a “megalomaniacal gasbag” and the search for an east-west route through

north-south running mountain ranges is an insane project. "It's all a myth; this whole toe-freezing enterprise," he says. "Do you know what a nation is, Keating? It's a people. Not a railroad. . . . They want to build a fantasyland here, Keating. Push aside a real people to put in an imaginary one. Tell [the Major] they won't do it. Because in order to build a great lie of a country, you need a population that lies to itself. And that won't happen." Panych's joke is that even Ambrose has his illusions. Canada will accept the lie that comes before "us"; it will pretend to itself that a connected landscape makes a united people.

Inglis' *In The Eyes of God* proposes that America too is a nation "built on bullshit." Hollywood talent agent Tench, his partner Fergus, and their mentor Julius work in a mercilessly competitive, brutally misogynist industry based on the creation and sale of stardom, an ephemeral and illusory product. In their struggle for dominance, the men cultivate what Tench identifies as an attitude of "complete disregard" for ties of human sympathy. They fuck women to destroy them. They betray each other. And they murder Linne Callow, their toughest competitor. According to Tench, to be cut-throat and a salesman is to be unabashedly American: "Business is our [national] life blood. . . . there are still dissidents out there that want to blame Corporate America for all the evils of the world. They look at people like us and say we're bullshit. (*Beat.*) Get a fucking brain. There's bullshit all around."

What Lies Before Us is the stronger play. Panych neatly balances existential questions with funny dialogue and pleasingly absurd characters. Keating and Ambrose are such an odd couple that even at the ridiculous and pathetic moments of their respective deaths (of rabies; of starvation and gangrene) their irritation with each other's stubbornly opposite point of view keeps vigorously alive the play's debates about faith and historic achievement and prevents the men

from getting maudlin. While Wing remains the stereotype of an enigmatic Oriental until the final scene, it is clear that the character represents only what the other men are able to see in him. Panych has Wing deliver in Chinese the play's final, bitterly funny, revelation about the blind folly and bad luck of their demise in the wilderness, and the switch to another language points out how closed to other cultural perspectives was the nation-building project.

The strength of *In The Eyes of God* is the graphic clarity of its portrait of survival-of-the-cruellest business culture. The murder scene is brutal, the misogyny is pervasive, and the point—that even the business of selling illusions rests on the macho body's power to dominate and destroy—is thoroughly made. Inglis' attempt to add nuance to the characters, by suggesting that cruelty is not born but bred, is unconvincing. Like Tench's Corporate America monologue, the play's stark clarity makes for gripping but not illuminating theatre.

Literatures, Nations, Regions

Jaume Pont; François-Michel Durazzo, trans.

Vol de cendres. Noroît 17,95 \$

Mercedes Roffé; Nelly Roffé, trans.

Définitions mayas. Noroît 15,95 \$

Licia Soares de Souza

Utopies américaines au Québec et au Brésil. PUL 20,00 \$

Reviewed by Rita De Grandis

Vol de cendres, a translation by François Michel-Durazzo of Catalan Jaume Pont's poetry, is imbued with death, emptiness, loss, and absurdity. The poems are an expression of the contradictions of human existence. They convey the tension between the metaphysical aspirations of man and Eros, between love and death. Pont's poetry

is strongly reminiscent of the poetry of Juan de la Cruz, Georges Bataille, Wallace Stevens, Charles Baudelaire, T.S. Eliot, and Ezra Pound.

Définitions mayas by Mercedes Roffé is another translation from the Spanish, by Nelly Roffé, of poems whose universe is made of apparently insignificant words, but words that express nonetheless contradictions, hopes, and disillusionment. The title, borrowed from a series of texts gathered by ethnologist Allan Burns, grounds the poetry in a pan-American vision.

Utopies américaines au Québec et au Brésil, by Licia Soares de Souza, uses a combination of analytical approaches, including theories of hybridity, cultural heterogeneity, cultural anthropophagy, popular culture, and *utopiecritique* to compare two aesthetically unrelated literatures of the 1930s.

The first comparison is between *Menaud maître-draveur* by Félix-Antoine Savard and *Mar morto* by Jorge Amado, in which the waters function as a symbolic cradle of American myth. In *Mar morto*, the Atlantic Ocean symbolizes a place of renewal through the encounter of the Amerindian, the black, and the white races. Like a division between land and sea, individual classes live as destinies embodying the sea of a mystic aura. A denotative dematerialization of history, told by musical rhythm, is realized by a mythic object, the African goddess of the sea, Iemanjá, a variant of the siren, as a religious figure of African culture. Amado recuperates myths of ancient slaves, constructing utopic images to avoid the hardships of the social reality. In *Menaud maître-draveur*, the Black River is the site of struggle within a series of cultural practices between *conquistadores* and “savages.” Mountain and river have positive and negative meanings, allowing for a particularly utopic type of civil society and a dangerous site of death—Joson, Menaud’s son, dies in the rafting of timber. *Menaud maître-draveur* is a new version of the *coureur des bois*,

of the nomad and of the woodsman, and presents fundamental dualisms that express themselves in the opposition between mountains and prairies, the dualism of characters, nomadic and sedentary, and, within Menaud himself, between dream and action, between his will to hunt intruders and his inability to do so.

The second comparison between *Trente arpents* by Ringuet, pseudonym of Philippe Panneton, and *Terras do sem fim* by Jorge Amado, demonstrates the convergences and divergences of spaces in these two novels. *Trente arpents* is structured over the rhythm of the seasons and of its protagonist, Euchariste Moisan, whose perilous family life sets the stage for his relationship to the land. The conflict, a dispute over land, takes Euchariste and his neighbour Phydime to litigation, paralleling the dispute between the colonels in *Terras do sem fim*. Ringuet shows not only the contradictions in the conditions of ownership, but also the cultural elements to reflect on those contradictions. *Terras do sem fim*, unlike *Trente arpents*, tells the story of a departure by boat of numerous reclusives to the land of Ilhéus, where they discover the culture of the golden fruit, the cacao, the source of their future fortune. Colonel Sinhô, the protagonist, owns land resulting from a violent conquest, in contrast with the Québécois novel, where land is inherited. Therefore, land, death, cacao, and money form a chain of destruction, suppressing the utopic spirit.

The third comparative analysis between *Un homme et son péché* by Claude-Henri Grignon and *São Bernardo* by Graciliano Ramos, illustrates the American myth, suggested in the accumulation of money and the will to possess. Seraphin’s accumulating obsession destabilizes the dichotomy individualism/collectivity. Land becomes a metaphor for money and the novel moves from the symbolic level to the cultural, appealing for mass-culture appropriations (radio, TV, and the movie). *São Bernardo*

is the name of a farm bought by Paulo Honório, an adventurer and nomad, who after having endured the hard life of the *sertão*, makes a fortune and becomes owner of the fertile land. Honório, capitalist-colonel, represents the ambiguities of the modern and of the traditional in the backlands (*sertão*). Grignon places the emphasis on the avarice of Seraphin in his search for power, while Ramos focuses on the relationships of belonging, property, and domination, resulting from the egotism of his anti-hero. Both characters look for women who can be useful for domestic work; Seraphin's wife Donalda is sacrificed to death, and Alexis, with whom Donalda has an adulterous and incestuous relationship, is the double who represents the mythic hero that allows all possibilities to occur. In Ramos' novel, Madalena is a teacher, incorporating the social ideal of reform that coincides with the intellectuals' ideals of the 1930s, as she becomes the antithesis of her husband.

De Souza suggests that, from the *utopic-critique* perspective, these novels have a strong presence of utopic-myth configuration, exposing the neutralizing power of myth. Her assumptions are based on some of the major critics of utopia (Louis Marin, Raymond Trousson, and Lucie Villeneuve). De Souza's analysis examines how fiction produces and is produced by the ambivalent and contradictory discourses that construct the New World. Utopic configurations provide a sense of identity as American myth, which, in Jean Morency's notion of a myth, entails transformation and birth. Her hypothesis is that the materialization of a utopic ideology neutralizes the contradictions of an Old World that has been displaced to new spaces for birth.

De Souza's comparative study demonstrates to what degree Québécois and Brazilian literatures are dynamic inter-related processes. A new inter-American comparativism has become fruitful since

its beginnings in the 1970s. In the 1990s, under the postmodern paradigm of diversity and multiple sites of power relations, the hegemonic tradition of comparative literature between European cultures and their colonial counterparts has given rise to a revitalization of comparative studies among the literatures of the New World. These studies have reclaimed the term *America* from US appropriation, echoing Martí's *Nuestra América*, a call for inter/trans-Americanism. Furthermore, the three texts reviewed show how the Québécois intellectual arena has opened to other minorities or regional literatures, such as the Catalan, and to a minor literature in Spanish within the limits of such a field.

Serious and Frivolous

Steven Price

Anatomy of Keys. Brick \$18.00

Kevin Roberts

Writing the Tides: New and Selected Poems.

Ronsdale \$16.95

Ken Norris

Dominican Moon. Talonbooks \$17.95

Reviewed by Bert Almon

The great escape artist, Harry Houdini, was supposed to communicate from beyond the grave if there was really an afterlife. His wife waited to hear from him every Halloween (he died on 31 October 1926) for ten years. The closest we can come to post-mortem messages from Houdini is by reading Steven Price's brilliant book about him. The work is unified by recurring images of lock, key, rope, knot, and trunk, all of which have rich symbolic associations, as Eli Mandel recognized in the first line of his classic poem, "Houdini": "I suspect that he knew that trunks are metaphors." We have many biographical sequences in Canadian poetry. This one is fittingly marked by formal virtuosity, with poems written in couplets and stanzas and even in prose. Houdini was a

man who wriggled out of constraints, so his poet should struggle with forms. The escape artist reaches some of the deepest fears in his waiting audience, fear of confinement (terror of being buried alive is the strongest form), fear of drowning, fear of suffocation. The straitjacket reminds us of the shroud, and the trunk is a kind of coffin. Mortality is a powerful engine in this book, which explores fear of death as a prime source of art. Houdini's father dies, then his mother, and the impact on their son is immense. Here and there we get portents of Houdini's eventual death from peritonitis. As Price says, the man who could escape anything "could not escape the strict stanzas of his days." And yet the character has an intensified sense of beauty, because the man who struggles out of darkness appreciates the light. Freedom is also a motif in this dense and thoroughly *written* collection. In his "Proverbs of Escape" (inspired by William Blake's "Proverbs of Hell"), Price says "No release without being bound." And the last proverb declares: "Compassion. Attention. Praise. An anatomy of keys. / To leave the self is love." Price's Houdini is capable of love and is therefore free. Houdini's wife kept a candle burning by his picture, but when ten Halloweens passed without a message from his spirit, she blew it out and said, "Ten years is long enough to wait for any man." Steven Price has lit the candle again.

Kevin Roberts has created an impressive body of work since his first collection, *Cariboo Fishing Notes* (1973). It is a rare poet whose selected poems can run to two hundred pages and not seem padded. Roberts' variety of subject matter is astonishing: he has written outstanding poems about fishing that convey a powerful rapport with the natural world, and he can also look perceptively at the dark history of coal mining in Nanaimo or at the rather comic cultural collisions between a visiting Canadian professor and Thai society. Although most of his work grows out of observation,

largely of the natural world, one exception represented here is "Stonefish," a narrative of Gauguin in the South Seas, one that does not founder in the surf of picturesque description. It is humorous, grim and unsentimental: no rhapsodies on genius. His account of a visit to his native Australia, "Red Centre Journal," is not as disjointed as the title might imply: it is a focused consideration of the land and the place of both Aboriginal and white communities in it. One of the high points is the moment when he sees a single bare footprint crossing his on tracks in the desert sand. He is as astonished as Crusoe, but fails to find a Friday. There are no subservient Fridays—that colonial dream—nowadays. As Roberts points out just before, the poet Kath Walker reclaimed her identity as an Aboriginal by going back to a tribal name, Oodgeroo.

A high-water mark in his career comes in "Cobalt 3," highly personal reflections on being a cancer patient and enduring gruelling treatment for non-Hodgkin's lymphoma. These poems are depictions of radiation and chemotherapy, unsparing but not without a dark humour that serves as a marker of courage. He is especially good on the grotesque transformation of a chemotherapy patient's appearance—his own—during the treatment. He captures a moment when a child in Safeway says to his mother, "*He looks like Charley Chipmunk!*" Roberts observes that patients in their gowns look like green bottles, and he makes an ominous allusion to a children's song: "Ten green bottles / Hanging on the wall / And if one green bottle / Should accidentally fall / There'll be nine green bottles / Hanging on the wall." Fortunately, he was not one of the bottles that fell.

The final section, "New Poems," deals mostly with his trip to Thailand and his marriage. The outstanding love poem actually comes early in the book, one of the poems from *West Country* entitled "Aubade: Exeter." It is beautifully paced, full of bodily

perceptions and strong images: “the fist of night / opens on a pearl / glowing about my lids.” In the prefatory title poem of this collection, Roberts suggests that there is no certainty in life, only the ebb and flow of the tides, both the tides of nature and the “tide in the affairs of men” that Brutus speaks of in *Julius Caesar*. But it seems certain that *Writing the Tides* was one of the outstanding books of 2006.

Ken Norris’ *Dominican Moon* is less a collection of poems than an accumulation of diary entries with line breaks. It is hard to say that lines can be slack if they could not conceivably be tight. The book chronicles a series of love affairs in the Dominican Republic, with Kirsi, Jenny, Stefani, and Matilde, affairs often described crudely, with the women poorly differentiated. Although the narrator claims to have great passions, nothing in the imagery or the rhythms of the poetry conveys real emotional pressure.

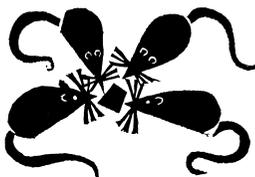
KIRSI APPEARS

Totally new hair.

I miss the old hair.

But still almost faint
watching her walk away.

The reader is not inclined to take this giddiness seriously. It is sad that he twice refers to the influence of Wallace Stevens, an immensely fastidious and inventive poet. But Stevens travelled very little and based his tropical poems on a few brief trips—and his powers of imagination. One poem in Norris’ book, “Message,” says, perhaps prophetically: “Your great poems / are waiting for you / in a suitcase / marked ‘Asia.’” But sometimes it is better for a poet to stay home and struggle with his craft.



Egodocuments

Julie Rak, ed.

Auto/biography in Canada: Critical Directions.

Wilfrid Laurier UP \$32.95

Marlene Kadar, Linda Warley, Jeanne Perreault, and Susanna Egan, eds.

Tracing the Autobiographical. Wilfrid Laurier UP
\$32.95

Reviewed by Gillian Whitlock

These two volumes from Wilfrid Laurier Press introduce an exciting and substantial body of new work in autobiography studies. *Tracing the Autobiographical* is part of the WLUP Life Writing series, which promises an ongoing commitment to publishing life writing and life writing criticism. Both of these edited volumes are dedicated to the memory of Gabriele Helms, the Canadian scholar whose death in 2004 saddened the international community of scholars in life writing. News of Gabi’s death reached her Antipodean colleagues on the hot summer’s first day of the new year, and the memory remains a sharp reminder of how professional relations become deeply and personally felt. Both editions bring together recent work on Canadian texts by Canadian scholars—Gabi’s peers, along with Gabi’s last published pieces. It is indicative that these contributions are diverse: an essay on reality television in the Kadar, et al. collection, and on the Holocaust in Canadian autobiography in the Rak edition. The latter essay is co-authored with Susanna Egan, which is also indicative. In Canada now, the leading scholarly researchers in this field are at work collaboratively, and they are both surveying and shaping a field that is increasingly diverse, cross-disciplinary, and in multimedia forms.

This is immediately apparent in *Tracing the Autobiographical*: firstly in the multiple editorship, and secondly in the diversity of the contributions. The point is made in the Introduction: “the varieties of representation

of the autobiographical are multiplying” to include unlikely documents (an art exhibit, reality TV, chat rooms on the internet) as well as familiar literary genres such as the play, the long poem, and the short story. This is a fascinating collection, full of innovative reading practices and “egodocuments.” There are new ways of thinking about some autobiographical classics such as *Halfbreed* and *Steveston*; approaches to the autobiographical as it is staged on the internet, reality TV, the theatre, Indigenous writing, and in our most intimate domestic space; comparative essays that look to the Middle East and Australia; and new work on the Holocaust and post-memory.

Both of these collections indicate the importance of feminist criticism as a driver of autobiography criticism in Canada; however, the influence of other critical traditions—post structural, post colonial, and national—is clear. In Kadar, there is a shared interest in generic similarities across a variety of autobiographical texts. All of these critics are attuned to the more performative notions of selfhood, the contingent and historical projections of the self in texts. This epistemological coherence is less evident in the Rak edition, and this is in part because it turns to some topics that Kadar, et al. recognize but do not include: disability and mental illness, queer theory, and more multidisciplinary perspectives.

Julie Rak’s succinct introduction to *Auto/biography in Canada* is written with a sharp eye on some of the critical questions a reviewer might raise. Why an edition on critical directions in auto/biography in Canada now? It is twenty years since the first book collection dealing with autobiography and Canada was published (by K.P. Stich in 1988), and it is almost a decade since Shirley Neuman’s germinal essay “Reading Canadian Autobiography.” Why a nation-based collection? Rak is quick to eschew a nationalist framework and to assert the centrality of autobiographical production to discourses

of national identity, to the imagining of the nation. What interests Rak are the various disciplinary perspectives in autobiography study now, the proliferation of types of representation, and, most importantly, what she perceives as the shift from the generic to discursive understandings of life narrative that underpins an expansion of the field to include electronic media, visual arts, and disciplines such as cultural studies and social work, among others.

Rak is silent on the provenance of these essays, and the muster does struggle to encompass her expansive vision of the field (which emerges more satisfactorily when these two editions are read together) and her optimism on the coexistence of different epistemologies and disciplines in the field of auto/biography in Canada. Given this, some editorial commentary on how the essays were selected would have been appropriate. A number of the essays present further scholarly work on texts which have emerged as iconic for contemporary Canadian criticism: *Mothertalk: Life Stories of Mary Kiyoshi Kiyooka*; *Stolen Life: The Journey of a Cree Woman*; and a return to the Grey Owl controversy in the light of recent debates about imposture. Debates amongst Canadian critics about critical issues in literary autobiography such as authority, authenticity, appropriation, and authorship recur across these two editions; so too does attention to the specific cultural, economic, and historical circumstances that affect the production and reception of autobiography.

However, as Rak’s introductory remarks suggest, the intention of her edition is to exceed the boundaries of literary criticism. The collection addresses this most specifically in the inclusion of essays grounded in social work and disability studies, which introduces some interesting differences. There is, for example, no agreement across these contributors about the performative and discursive production of selfhood. Although ideas of changing technologies

of the self emerge powerfully in essays on the obituary, on camp and kitsch in celebrity autobiography, and recent Quebec and migrant women's writing, in others, ideas about an essential self are fundamental. For example, some contributors address autobiographical writing as therapy in writing-for-healing circles, or as a source of insights into disorders such as autism and Asperger's. How can non-speaking persons labelled intellectually dis/abled "get a life" beyond the institutional constraints of the case file? Imagining the contributors to Rak's volume together in the same room is an interesting exercise; however, one imagines that here, as in other feminist projects, recourse to the importance of strategic essentialism might bring what are substantial intellectual and political differences to something like reconciliation.

These two editions together present new essays by the leading scholars in the field, and there are many gems amongst them. Autobiography writing and criticism is now sharp and exciting, and as it happens much of the best is also Canadian.

Un autre Montréal

Sholem Shtern

Nostalgie et tristesse : mémoires littéraires du Montréal Yiddish. Noroît 29,00 \$

Alessandra Ferraro et Anna Pia De Luca, dirs.

Parcours migrants au Québec : l'italianité de Marco Micone à Philippe Poloni. Forum 15,00 €

Compte rendu par Jean-Sébastien Ménard

Sholem Shtern expose dans *Nostalgie et tristesse* les souvenirs de ses fréquentations littéraires. Avec lui, nous allons à la rencontre de la littérature yiddish : de ses revues, de ses organisations et de ses écrivains, dont Zishe Weinper, Mani Leib, et Sholem Asch. Traduite par Pierre Ancil, cette œuvre nous permet de nous familiariser avec l'univers d'un Montréal « autre » et nous démontre avec aisance que

la montréalité est partagée par « plusieurs communautés à partir de bases culturelles et religieuses très différentes à l'intérieur d'un espace relativement restreint ».

Nous revisitons ainsi la ville grâce aux propos de Shtern qui nous parle de son milieu et d'une littérature en pleine ébullition et ouverte sur le monde. Celle-ci multiplie les publications et les lectures publiques tout en s'inscrivant dans un réseau prenant source sur le vieux continent pour arriver à Montréal après avoir transité par New York et Toronto.

Montréal, lieu de passage, de discussion et de poésie, où même la croix du mont Royal inspire ces poètes qui ont pour but d'écrire « des ouvrages en langue yiddish qui soient canadiens, argentins ou américains, et qui reflètent de près l'histoire récente de ces pays et leurs aspirations récentes ».

Rares sont ceux qui, en passant dans l'avenue des Pins, devant le théâtre de Quat'Sous, emplacement d'une ancienne synagogue, se souviennent de tout le passé qui y repose et qui témoigne de la richesse culturelle et littéraire de Montréal.

Parcours migrants au Québec, pour sa part, propose une suite au rendez-vous que s'étaient donné à Udine, en 2004, des écrivains, des artistes italo-phones et des critiques. Il réunit les études consacrées à l'aspect francophone de la production, faisant ainsi suite à *Shaping History. L'Identità italo-canadese mel Canada anglofono* et à *Writing Beyond History: An Anthology of Prose and Poetry*.

Marco Micone y trace le parcours de l'immigration italienne au Québec et réfléchit à la notion d'italianité. Selon lui, le Québec a adopté l'interculturalisme et permet de rester plus près d'une certaine latinité, alors que le Canada anglais adhère au multiculturalisme et s'avère plus perméable à l'influence américaine. Au Québec, il y a « non pas de fusion mais une rencontre et une transformation des cultures en présence sans qu'aucune d'entre elles ne soit phagocytée ».

De son côté, Pierre L'Hérault s'intéresse à l'œuvre de Micone et à son travail d'autotraduction. En ce sens, L'Hérault réfléchit principalement au rapport que l'écrivain entretient avec ses origines et son pays d'accueil. Jean-Paul Dufiet se penche plutôt sur le « plus-que-français » de l'auteur, lequel choisit d'écrire en français sans pour autant renier son identité italienne puisque, « même si cette langue italienne n'est pas l'instrument du dialogue, elle n'en reste pas moins très présente, qu'elle soit suggérée ou évoquée ».

Katalin Kürtösi, pour sa part, s'intéresse à la perception du peuple italien dans le théâtre canadien alors qu'Élisabeth Nardout-Lafarge étudie l'italianité de l'œuvre de Carole David, « moins volontiers identifiée à la littérature migrante qu'à la mouvance féministe ». Stefania Cubeddu, elle, se penche sur l'éclatement identitaire des immigrants et leur intégration difficile au sein de la société d'accueil, en revisitant l'œuvre théâtrale de Micone. À son tour, Elena Marchese réfléchit à la quête identitaire des Italo-Québécois, à son morcellement et à sa fragmentation à partir cette fois des œuvres de Bianca Zagolin et de Philippe Poloni, « deux voix . . . importantes . . . puisqu'elles contribuent à définir l'espace de l'exil et de l'identitaire ». Puis, Mirko Casagrande poursuit la réflexion à partir des écrits d'Antonio D'Alfonso et envisage la création d'une italoophonie.

Chez Anna Carlevaris, il est question de Guido Nincheri, artiste et décorateur intérieur surnommé le « Michelangelo de Montréal », qui a peint une fresque de Benito Mussolini pour commémorer les accords du Latran. Chez lui, l'art est utilisé « as an instrument in the work of becoming Italian ». Comme l'avance Sherry Simon, en s'intéressant à l'église Saint Michael's du Mile End, décorée par Nincheri, « son statut d'immigrant . . . l'identifiait aux arts mineurs de la décoration ».

Concluant l'ouvrage, Valeria Zotti propose d'introduire des entrées québécoises dans

les dictionnaires bilingues italien-français et français-italien, rappelant que les immigrants contribuent à redessiner la culture et l'identité du Québec.

De l'art et de la vie

Carmen Strano

Le Cavalier bleu. Triptyque 20,00 \$

Sergio Kokis

Le Fou de Bosch. XYZ 24,00 \$

Compte rendu par Sandra Hobbs

Ces deux romans nous invitent à réfléchir sur le rapport entre l'esthétique et l'éthique dans la vie moderne, tout en empruntant des voies très différentes pour parvenir à cette fin. Dans *Le Cavalier bleu*, il s'agit d'un groupe d'artistes du cinéma allemand qui se rendent au château d'Hochsburg vers la fin de l'été 1938, hôtes d'un cinéaste proche du parti nazi. Cette invitation leur permet de frôler le pouvoir, incarné par le ministre de la Propagande et de la Culture, Joseph Goebbels. Pour ces personnages aux marges du pouvoir, c'est une rencontre fatidique avec le dogme nazi, qui assujettit l'art aux exigences du pouvoir. Cette opposition entre l'art et l'idéologie constitue donc le moteur de l'intrigue, qui fait de l'échec personnel de chaque personnage une métaphore de l'échec de l'opposition au régime nazi. À cette problématique fondamentale s'ajoutent les questions de la spiritualité et de l'au-delà, car la narration de la fin du roman est assurée par certains personnages après leur mort. Paul, le protagoniste du roman, se dirige vers une mort violente à cause de son refus de rédiger des textes de propagande pour Goebbels; sa sœur Anneliese entame une liaison avec Goebbels, subjuguant ainsi ses valeurs à sa soif de renommée; Viola trompe son mari avec Paul, mettant fin à son mariage; et Julius, qui ne désire rien de plus que de s'intégrer au parti nazi en démontrant sa fidélité à l'idéologie officielle, se livre à

ses nombreux vices: opium, convoitises charnelles et matérielles, violence, haine. Se déroulant dans une unité de temps, de lieu et d'action, le roman tient de la tragédie grecque, mais sa narration imbriquée donne une saveur postmoderne au récit. Les différents personnages racontent les mêmes événements selon leur point de vue; à leurs récits s'ajoutent de courts textes philosophiques et politiques. Le cavalier bleu du titre renvoie au groupe d'artistes impressionnistes, dont les principaux membres furent Kandinsky et Marc, qui représentaient les valeurs humanistes endossées par Paul et ses proches. Bien que ces valeurs soient piétinées par Goebbels, Julius et les nazis, l'on peut considérer qu'elles triomphent dans les passages oniriques du roman où Paul et Julius livrent des récits d'outrage. Les visions de l'avenir fournies par Paul au sujet des atrocités de la Deuxième Guerre mondiale sont par contre superflues: le lecteur ne connaît que trop bien les événements historiques qui suivront.

À l'instar du *Cavalier bleu*, *Le Fou de Bosch* tisse des liens étroits entre l'art pictural et l'écriture. Le roman met l'accent par contre sur un seul personnage, un énergumène dont le combat intérieur entre la raison et la folie est aux antipodes des grandes questions sociales soulevées par Strano. En effet, le lecteur assiste à la disparition d'une identité: la narration omnisciente, qui ne quitte que rarement le point de vue du protagoniste du roman, nous plonge dans les délires de Lukas Steiner, commis à la bibliothèque municipale de Montréal. Un jour, en proie à une paranoïa toujours grandissante, Steiner s'imagine modèle du peintre Jérôme Bosch et se voit dans tous ses tableaux comme le Christ ou saint Jacques. Cette révélation l'incitera à effacer soigneusement toute trace de son existence à Montréal et à s'envoler vers l'Europe en adoptant une nouvelle identité inventée de toutes pièces. Ce mouvement de déconstruction et de reconstruction de l'identité,

accompagné d'une fuite non pas en avant mais plutôt en arrière, amène Steiner à affronter son passé d'ancien résident de l'orphelinat du Mont-Cashel à Terre-Neuve, où, s'il n'a pas été victime d'abus sexuel, son avenir a néanmoins été compromis en raison de son isolement affectif. Après avoir visité les principaux musées européens possédant des tableaux de Bosch, Steiner se lance sur la route des pèlerins vers Saint-Jacques de Compostelle, au bout de laquelle son identité se dissout une fois pour toutes avec son suicide dans l'océan Atlantique. À mesure que le passé de Steiner nous est révélé, et qu'il abandonne progressivement son identité, sa foi chrétienne augmente et ce, malgré son dégoût pour l'institution qui l'a élevé. L'Église catholique l'a peut-être empêché de nouer des rapports sains avec autrui, mais elle lui a fourni la seule identité collective à laquelle il puisse s'intégrer. Le symbolisme religieux et moral des tableaux de Bosch prend donc une signification tout à fait personnelle pour Steiner, l'aidant à se réconcilier brièvement avec un monde hostile. Autant ce roman s'inscrit dans l'œuvre de Kokis, axé comme il est sur les thèmes de l'exil, de la folie et de l'isolement social, autant il s'inscrit aussi dans la tradition québécoise, rappelant par exemple *L'Hiver de force* de Réjean Ducharme par son dépouillement conscient et successif des biens matériels, l'aliénation sociale et la perte d'identité personnelle.

More Than Passing Thoughts

Charlotte Sturgess, ed.

The Politics and Poetics of Passage in Canadian and Australian Culture and Fiction. CRINI 20.00 €

Reviewed by Penny van Toorn

The concept of *passage* serves as a useful focal point from which to examine the papers published in this anthology. Charlotte Sturgess' arrangement of the

papers and solid introduction, "Australia and Canada: The Tropes of National Culture, the Culture in Literary Tropes," provides a coherent conceptual framework that connects cultural politics and narrative strategies. Sturgess also contributes an engaging paper entitled "'Transliterations': The Poetics of Cultural Transfer in Larissa Lai's *When Fox Is a Thousand*."

The collection begins with Françoise Le Jeune's analysis of the writings of Susanna Moodie and Catharine Parr Traill in terms of the concept of "passage" developed by French ethnographer Arnold Van Gennep. Sheila Collingwood-Whittick shifts the focus to Australia and Patrick White's *A Fringe of Leaves* (1976), an Australian historical novel based on records of the life of Eliza Frazer, a sea-captain's wife who survived the 1836 wreck of the *Stirling Castle* off southern Queensland, and lived with an Aboriginal band in a state of "savagery" before returning to "civilized" society. As Collingwood-Whittick suggests, *A Fringe of Leaves* was part of the white noise that attempted to drown out the emerging voices of female and Aboriginal Australians in the 1960s and 1970s. In a different vein, Lisa Hayden's "In the Passage of Fame" examines the different ways in which Carol Shields and Margaret Atwood depicted and managed literary celebrity, and argues that "the media does not simply impose an uncontested formation of celebrity onto Shields and Atwood."

The highlight of this collection is the section on Indigenous writing. In "Two-Spirits and Tricksters: Cross-Cultural Transpositions in Tomson Highway's *Kiss of the Fur Queen*," Susan Billingham reads Highway's novel as "a myth-making transfiguration of (partially) autobiographical experiences shared by the author and his brother René in a Roman Catholic residential school." From the mid nineteenth century to the 1970s, Indigenous children's experiences of physical and sexual assault were by no

means uncommon in North America and Australia. Focusing on the former, Billingham analyzes four modes of transposition in Highway's novel: transposition of genres, transposition between the oral and the written, transposition between languages, and transposition of language and music (the last especially relevant to Highway, a classical pianist). Faced with what may seem to be the intertwined complexities of *Kiss of the Fur Queen*, Billingham's analytical approach generates a clear, informed engagement with Highway's seriously humorous *tour de force*.

Ian Henderson's, "Readers' Rites: Surpassing Style," addresses performances of fictional and factual selfhood. In 1965, Colin Johnson's *Wild Cat Falling* was hailed as the first novel written by an Australian Aboriginal author. Three decades later, Johnson was publicly outed by his sister, who revealed that he was not Aboriginal but of African American descent. As Henderson's paper indicates, however, Mudrooroo's writings, like his life, drew attention to crucial questions about "Aboriginality" and how it is manifest (or not) in written texts. What properties of language and narrative, if any, distinguish Aboriginal writing from non-Aboriginal writing? Why is passing often undetectable? As well as examining the text that, for thirty years, was deemed the first Aboriginal-authored novel, Henderson discusses passing in Ivan Senn's award-winning feature film, *Beneath Clouds* (2001).

The highlight of this collection was Taina Tuhkunen's scholarly, deftly theorized discussion of "The Poetics of Passage in Thomas King's *Truth and Bright Water*," which foregrounds the novel's invocation of the "moveable and edgy mindscape of present day 'Indianness.'" Tuhkunen describes King's evocation of a postmodern Indian world where intertextual connections destabilize authentic abiding realities. Tuhkunen engages with King's

multicultural allusions, placing particular emphasis on his Hollywood cinematic references or “filmic intertexts.” She argues that elements of filmic representation become part of the novel’s texture, in so doing, “revealing the ability of moving pictures to shift about, not only on screen but beyond the limits of the intended space of projection.” Tuhkunen reads *Truth and Bright Water* in terms of King’s textual categories: the “tribal,” “polemical,” “interfusional,” and “associational.” As well as teasing out King’s literary and cinematic allusions, Tuhkunen reads his writing in relation to modernist European painting. If Magritte’s painted image of a pipe is called “This is not a pipe,” King’s depictions of “authentic Indians” might well be entitled “This is not an Indian.”

Charlotte Sturgess, in “Transliterations’: The Poetics of Cultural Transfer in Larissa Lai’s *When Fox Is a Thousand*,” examines a novel in which interwoven stories resemble those of the *Arabian Nights*. Detours keep the story and the story teller alive. The Fox’s tales of nomadic adventures use “a poetics of the nomad,” that entails “the desire for an identity made of transitions.”

David Coad’s “Becoming Julia: Passing as a Male-to-Female Transsexual in Australia” offers a partly critical account of Ruth Cullen’s film *Becoming Julia*. Here, autobiography functions outside of the realm of the literary as one of the legal requirements that must be met by those who seek sex reassignment surgery. The film has two parts, “Paul” and “Julia.” Coad opposes this division because the idea that a person can become someone else “between two frames of celluloid” is misleading.

While Julia’s transformation was intended and carefully planned, the metamorphosis of Robert Rose from football star to quadriplegic was entirely unexpected. Christine Nicholls discusses the repercussions of a horrendous car accident that occurred in 1974. Family memory is

also a focus of Jill Golden’s “Truth-Telling: A Passage to Survival in Doris Brett’s *Eating the Underworld: A Memoir in Three Voices*.”

In “Kroetsch’s Pedagogy of the Precarious: A Reading of *Gone Indian* (1973) and *The Hornbooks of Rita K* (2001),” Claire Omhovère traces connections between Kroetsch’s early and late work. Moving from the dry cold of the Canadian prairies to the humid warmth of Brisbane, Deirdre Gilfedder investigates the “Indivisible Boundaries in David Malouf’s *12 Edmonstone Street*.”

The diversity of these essays does not leave a sense of scappiness or incoherence. This lively, varied collection helps internationalize Canadian and Australian literary and cultural studies.

Urban Structures

Timothy Taylor

Story House. Knopf Canada \$34.95

Reviewed by Brandon McFarlane

Timothy Taylor’s *Story House* contains many of Canadian literature’s emerging characteristics—globalized urbanism, characters defined by their profession, and conservative literary aesthetics—shared by such contemporaries as Russell Smith, Vincent Lam, and Michael Winter. The novel explores a lifelong feud between two half-brothers fathered by famous Vancouver architect Packer Gordon. The father arranges boxing lessons for the brooding teens, Elliot who becomes a punk businessman and Graham who becomes an architect. The lessons culminate in a boxing match that ends in the life-threatening knockout and hospitalization of Elliott. Years later, the brothers attempt reconciliation after they discover that the building housing the boxing gym was likely Packer Gordon’s first creation. This building becomes the “Story House” of the title. They begin a restoration of the decrepit structure, funded and filmed by a Hollywood TV producer, only to end

up sparring on the rooftop with television cameras rolling. The building collapses and Elliot is once again knocked out under the building's rubble.

The story is set in Los Angeles, Vancouver, and Seoul, with Vancouver hosting the bulk of the action. Taylor presents Vancouver as a post-metropolis that contains microcosms of other world cities. The ethnically diverse Vancouver Downtown Eastside contains both Graham's studio/office and Elliot's organized crime gang's bar/office. The brothers' professions similarly demonstrate Vancouver's connection to the larger world. Graham's various architectural projects—located in Los Angeles, Tokyo, and Santa Monica—combine with his father's buildings located around the world to exhibit the spatial plurality encouraged by a globalized world economy. In turn, Elliot travels between Vancouver and Korea to set up a network of reproduction merchandise manufacturers. The Korean cityscape is exoticized as Elliot relishes its hyperbolic consumerism:

Down into the Myung dong shopping district and the lights of International Everywhere. U2 pumping out of the bibimbap houses and the Seattle's Best Coffee and the A&W. Shopping tribes in midsplurge trance out front of the Lotte store, staring up its illuminated sides. Down, past this, into the streets where they did nothing but repair scooters, or fix chairs, or sell pets. Acres of parakeets. Cage towers of dogs. And all the way out and downward through the city, into Dongdaemun in a stunned and expressionless march, Elliot's heavy boots pounding out the cadence of a song from a previous and foggily remembered life.

The frantic narration mirrors Elliott's fanatical counter-cultural ideology. The "Cult Fashion Mall" described here embodies the idealism that Elliott infuses into his criminal activities. The forged watches, sunglasses, and basketball jerseys that he imports to Canada from Asia are intended

to correct the extravagances of Western consumerism where products are fetishized excessively beyond their use value. In terms of city space, the presence of the Western franchises amongst the street vendors indicates that the seemingly exotic Asian city participates in a similar creolization of space as Vancouver and Los Angeles. Vancouver's Downtown Eastside, which hosts the city's Chinatown, could be described in a fairly similar manner to Myung dong. Elliot's activities do not change the city's physical structure, but rather how the space is used. In a sense he imports the energy and mobility of the Cult Fashion Mall's street life along with the replica merchandise. The brothers' dichotomous business lives reveal a neighbourhood's embodiment of world cities. The heterogeneous city is becoming a major player in Canadian literature and Taylor, perhaps more so than his contemporaries, has eloquently evoked a dynamic neighbourhood.

Like Winter and Lam, Taylor's urbanites are globe-trotting businessmen who can make themselves at home in any city. What is perhaps most striking about much recent Canadian fiction is the extent that profession defines character. Like Lam's jargon-heavy doctors or Smith's bicycle couriers, Taylor's characters are unable to escape the discourses of their work-life. The dialogue unceasingly focuses on characters discussing their favourite architect, their approach to space, and their thoughts on structure. Although it is fitting for the book to feature architectural terminology, the result is a book saturated with technical jargon. The bulk of the novel's metaphors, symbols, and images are inspired by architecture; for example the unidentified narrator describes Graham's emotional state as "a blur of Lubetkin blue across a ridge line hunkered over by darker sky." While the dense architectural terms are a refreshing addition to Canadian literature and there is a certain

beauty in the non-satirized excesses of designer-speak, the extensive use of specialized language is at times tiring and confusing.

The primary motivation behind the use of the professional lexicon seems to be a strong devotion to the realist form. *Story House* is one of the many contemporary novels that abandon the conventions of postmodernism in favour of an aesthetic that has more in common with modernism. There is no self-conscious narrator who deconstructs the novel's literary and ideological moves. It is tempting to suggest that *Story House's* use of ekphrasis and architectural theory is a sustained statement regarding the novel's aesthetic philosophy, but there are too many conflicting ideas about what makes a good building or a good story to attribute one specific theory to the author. Taylor's narration relies heavily upon focalization and psychological realism. As the text enters the minds and memories of various characters, the language appropriately changes to complement the individual's psychological state. A large part of the novel's charm originates from the seamless transition between the present and the past. An increasing group of Canadian authors, including Taylor in *Story House*, demonstrates an aesthetic link to earlier urban writers such as Irene Baird, Morley Callaghan, and Mavis Gallant. Whether a rejection of postmodernism or a reinvigorated investigation of Canadian cities is motivating these aesthetic decisions remains to be debated. It is certain that something new is occurring in Can Lit and Taylor's lucid writing exemplifies the defining style of an increasingly large group of writers engaged in Canadian literary urbanism.



Emily Carr: A Reappraisal

Ian M. Thom, Charles C. Hill, and Johanne Lamoureux

Emily Carr: New Perspectives on a Canadian Icon.
Douglas & McIntyre \$75.00

Reviewed by Linda Morra

Emily Carr: New Perspectives on a Canadian Icon corresponds with the recent nationally touring exhibition on Canadian artist Emily Carr, which was collaboratively organized by the National Gallery of Canada and the Vancouver Art Gallery. The timely exhibition forms part of Vancouver Art Gallery's seventy-fifth anniversary celebration, as it also responds to Carr's broadening appeal on an international stage. Curators of the exhibition, Johanne Lamoureux, Ian M. Thom, and Charles C. Hill, have authored three of the catalogue essays. Their essays are accompanied by those of an impressive lineup of distinguished scholars, including Jay Stewart, Peter Macnair, Shirley Bear, Susan Crean, Marcia Crosby, Gerta Moray, and Andrew Hunter. Comprised of a prismatic collection of essays that filters existent information about Carr, this catalogue thus sheds further light on her life and art, adds fullness and complexity to the debates that exist, and recontextualizes those debates in burgeoning fields of critical inquiry.

The first two essays look at an early period of Carr's artistic development. Stewart and Macnair open the catalogue with their examination of Carr's voyage in 1907 to Alaska with her sister, Alice, and take stock of the critical work that followed Carr's assertions that her journey there was "pivotal in changing the course of her art." To do so, Stewart and Macnair make reference to the surviving fragments of her "Funny Book," a journal that she kept on her trip and that seems to have been lost. Excerpts from the journal, however, were published in 1950—and are beautifully reproduced in this catalogue. Using these

fragments, they analyze her early approach to First Nations iconography and conclude that Carr not only “mis-remembers” what she saw on her trip but also ascribes greater significance to it in relation to her understanding of Native art and culture. This essay is followed by Lamoureux’s assessment of the pivotal influence of French Modernism on the work of Carr, often downplayed because of a lingering belief that surfaced in the period: “An original Canadian art” would only emerge if it were free of the “insidious influence” of such cultural capitals as Paris. Lamoureux thus astutely redresses the critical neglect of Carr’s trip to France in her examination of the impact of French Modernism upon her work.

A few of the essays that follow examine how Carr was represented both in exhibitions and by other critics or curators. Shifting from work that was written *by* Carr, Ian Thom looks to that body of work which has been written *about* her. His critical trajectory begins with Ira Dilworth, Carr’s editor, trustee, and literary executor, and encompasses the likes of Lawren Harris, Edythe Hembroff-Schleicher, Maria Tippett, and Doris Shadbolt. Gerta Moray then analyzes the three national Carr retrospectives of 1945, 1971, and 1990 to demonstrate how they each served distinctive national and cultural agendas of their respective periods.

Charles C. Hill examines how the 1927 *Exhibition of Canadian West Coast Art* catalyzed Carr’s career and facilitated her emergence as an artist worthy of national attention. He analyzes the problematic agenda that informed the exhibition itself, as he contextualizes it (and Carr’s paintings) by examining what other artists of the period such as Langdon Kihn were doing in relation to interpreting Canadian Indigenous cultures. While Marius Barbeau, the curator of the exhibit, created “a new chronology of Canadian art” by locating the beginnings of artistic culture in Canada among First Nations, he also did that culture a disservice

by relegating their endeavours to the removed past—and by suggesting that such endeavours were “the inspiration for a new, national art” produced by those of the likes of Kihn and Carr.

Hill’s contribution is perhaps strategically straddled by another two essays that address Carr’s positioning towards Indigenous persons and cultures. In examining the authority with which Carr entered First Nations territory and appropriated Indigenous iconography for her own aesthetic purposes, Bear and Crean shift from her paintings towards her writing—and to a relationship infrequently examined: Carr’s thirty-year friendship with Salish artist, Sophie Frank. They argue that, even as Carr “rejected some of the ingrained attitudes of the White missionaries toward Indigenous peoples, she shared the prejudices of her time,” a bias which shows not only in her self-representation but also that of Frank. In “A Chronology of Love’s Contingencies,” Crosby elegantly pursues the complexities of some of Carr’s relationships with her First Nations literary and artistic subjects—and the manner in which her cultural, linguistic, and political distance from them rendered them impossible for her to understand.

Andrew Hunter’s essay, “Clear Cut,” is a finely written and illuminating exploration of such canvases as *Scorned as Timber*, *Beloved of the Sky*, and *Above the Gravel Pit* and the contradictions that informed her work: the logging industry utterly transformed the landscape by virtue of its invasive industrial processes, but the transformed landscapes were the very ones that provided “the open vistas of her deeply spiritual projections.” Although her later work is “free of the iconography of Native totem poles” which she controversially included in her earlier work, Carr’s landscapes are not “a virgin wilderness but a space transformed and scarred by human presence and industry.”

These pithy essays are accompanied by over three hundred evocative reproductions, many of which have rarely been seen. The new catalogue thus offers a visually attractive and scintillating exploration of Emily Carr and her work by revisiting the social and political contexts from which she worked, the settings and cultures she explored, and the manner in which she has been interpreted since the development of her artistic career.

Egoyan as Auteur

Monique Tschofen and Jennifer Burwell, eds.

Image and Territory: Essays on Atom Egoyan.
Wilfrid Laurier UP \$29.95

Reviewed by Mark Harris

There's something a little absurd about publishing a collection of essays about an *auteur*, as well as something heroic, since the very concept of *auteurship* has been under attack for more than thirty years—how could it not be in a critical universe where even novels are said to have composed themselves?

Nevertheless, if *auteurs* really do exist, there can be no doubt that Atom Egoyan belongs to this rarefied order of beings. Not only does he write and direct all of his own films, he consistently works with the same creative team, while his troupe of actors (headed by his real-life wife, Arsinée Khanjian) virtually never “plays against type.” In similar fashion, the Egyptian-born, BC-raised, Ontario-based *cinéaste's* concerns visibly recur in feature after feature. The malaise of the contemporary family; the role of video technology in the deconstruction of sexual identity; established authority's compulsion to observe and control; the anguish of the half-assimilated immigrant; the many facets of incest; what it really means to be an Armenian: these elements can be found, to varying degrees, in virtually all of Egoyan's feature films,

although not necessarily in his plays, installations, operas, short films, and other flights of the post-exilic imagination.

Editors Tschofen and Burwell have divided their book into four sections—“Media Technologies, Aura and Redemption”; “Diasporic Histories and the Exile of Meaning”; “Pathologies/Ontologies of the Visual”; and “Conversations”—each preceded by a thoughtful introduction by the co-editors, and concluding with the most complete Egoyan filmography yet published in a non-bibliographical study. This is an impressively thoughtful assemblage of texts and this concise review will only be able to outline the most prominent features of the complex subject it addresses.

Tschofen and Burwell also deserve credit for relying almost exclusively on Canadian critics for input, as certain earlier studies of Egoyan (Jonathan Romney's otherwise excellent overview being a case in point) have tended to blur the distinctions between our side of the forty-ninth parallel and the American one. Atom Egoyan is no more generically North American than Ingmar Bergman is generically European.

In addition to the outstanding filmography put together by Monique Tschofen and Angela Joose, for me, the most useful essays were probably the ones written by Kay Armatage and Caryl Clark (on Egoyan and opera), Lisa Siraganian (on Egoyan and the Armenian genocide, even if she does forget about the Belgian horrors in the Congo that long preceded the dying convulsions of the Ottoman Empire), and William F. Van Wert (on some of Egoyan's critically under-reported installation work). These might not be the best chapters in the book, but they were the ones that shed the most light on the subjects about which I knew the least.

Most of the other essays focus on features and groups of features, with varying degrees of success (Patricia Gruben's is probably the most comprehensive, not least because she

uses Laura Mulvey's ideas more subtly than Mulvey used them herself). And, as always, William Beard's contributions are elegantly composed.

Ironically, what might be the best-written paper of the bunch—it's certainly the most intense—is also the most unintentionally misleading. Melanie Boyd's "To Blame Her Sadness: Representing Incest in Atom Egoyan's *The Sweet Hereafter*" is part of this scholar's ongoing research into the narrative representation of father/daughter incest. While she does briefly acknowledge in a footnote that the director has dealt with this most taboo of subjects before and since, that doesn't really take the sting out of a sentence such as "[Source novelist Russell] Banks' Nichole is angry and sad because her father had sex with her, while Egoyan's is angry and sad because he stopped."

Now, as all Egoyan fans know full well, incest has always figured in Egoyan's oeuvre, but this most notorious form has not. In particular, the filmmaker is seemingly fascinated by sex between non-blood relatives (stepmothers and stepsons; stepbrothers and stepsisters, etc.), as well as domestic sexual abuse that lacks a penetrative component (Hilditch's humiliations at the hands of his TV show host mother Gala in *Felicia's Journey*, for instance). What's more, this perversion is one hundred per cent inseparable from Egoyan's critique of the perversion of contemporary society as a whole, the "connected" culture that seems unable to connect with anything human at all.

The collection, however, does seem to ignore certain key elements in Egoyan's work, of which his perverse use of montage is by far and away the most important. If Lev Kuleshov and his students figured out, shortly after the Russian revolution, how splicing together strips of film in the correct order would invariably result in audiences jumping to the right conclusions in regard to the emotional relationships between characters, Egoyan has become

world cinema's anti-Kuleshov, the man who sets up scenes so we'll jump to the wrong conclusions about who is who and why they do what they do (this tendency is probably most noticeable in *The Adjuster*, but it's almost as palpable in *Exotica* and *Where the Truth Lies*).

Finally, it would have been nice if someone had seen fit to write a piece on the similarities between the works of Atom Egoyan and Robert Guediguian. These are the most important cinéastes still working in the Armenian diaspora, and the similarities inherent in their working methods, especially in casting, might well be evidence of a more general transcultural/ethnic trait.

Even so, these last paragraphs should not be read as an excuse to ignore this work. *Image and Territory* is both useful and impressive, and belongs on the shelf of any cinephile interested in the work of the king of Armenian Canadian directors. What it does not do, however, is capture his "auteur-hood" to the fullest extent possible, but then such a result may be impossible.

Quête spirituelle ou guide touristique?

Yolande Villemaire

India, India. XYZ 25,00 \$

Compte rendu par Lucie Lequin

À plus d'un titre, *India, India*, le dernier roman de Yolande Villemaire, s'inscrit en chassé-croisé avec ses œuvres précédentes. *Le Dieu dansant*, notamment, faisait appel à ses souvenirs de l'Inde où elle a séjourné dans un ashram entre 1989 et 1991. Par ailleurs, Miliana, la protagoniste de *India, India*, a pris forme dans *La Déferlante d'Amsterdam* et dans *Poètes et centaures*. Donc rappels de lieux et de personnages, mais ce qui est plus important, évocation de préoccupations éthiques et esthétiques : mise en cause des apparences, évanescence des émotions, quête d'un savoir-vivre,

apprentissage de la sérénité, spiritualité, mise à distance du soi et exotisme.

L'action se résume en quelques mots. Miliana, artiste peintre, dans la jeune trentaine, a une petite fille que ses parents adoptifs gardent durant son voyage en Inde où elle est invitée à exposer ses oeuvres. Chacune des quatre parties du roman correspond à un moment de son séjour. La première partie relate sa présence au Kalachakra célébré par le dalai-lama. La deuxième partie porte surtout sur l'exposition des oeuvres, la troisième se passe à New Delhi et la quatrième présente le retour. Le récit par touches, par esquisses, dit l'expérience d'attraction—répulsion face à l'Inde maintes fois représentée, entre autres par l'agent de voyage Khayaal Khan, aussi charismatique et envoûtant que redoutable.

Tout au long du roman, des passages en italiques interrompent le récit. Miliana ne veut pas raconter sa vie, mais plutôt la transposer pour mieux la saisir. Cette mise à distance est soulignée par le recours à la troisième personne où *je* devient *elle*. C'est l'histoire de ce *elle* qui est donnée à lire, même si c'est un *je* qui parle. Ces jeux narratifs sont le miroir des esquisses de Miliana qui diffèrent toujours de la réalité, rapidement et inconsciemment dépassée. Ainsi, lorsque Miliana peint le portrait d'une poète, en surimpression s'impose une image de la déesse Tara: « Elle s'empare bientôt de tout le corps d'Eden, tandis que j'essaie de peindre ce que je vois. »

Malgré de beaux passages, ce roman laisse l'impression d'un carnet de voyage, comme si la narratrice n'était qu'observatrice. Le récit de son quotidien est farci de descriptions touristiques, de détails pragmatiques—coûts, problèmes de transport, de confort—et d'autres irritants. Cette disjonction entre l'intention du personnage principal qui participe de la quête intérieure et le récit qui, lui, est anecdotique, maintient la narratrice dans sa bulle qui, plutôt que refuge, devient une entrave au

mouvement intérieur. La quête ne se fait pas. Les ficelles derrière le récit sont aussi trop visibles et mal contrôlées. Puisque Miliana, elle-même métisse, se veut ouverte sur le monde, pourquoi alors identifier ethniquement chaque personne rencontrée comme si l'ethnie s'avérait le seul trait pour apprécier quelqu'un?

Villemaire a misé sur le pragmatique pour protéger son personnage du pouvoir de séduction si puissant de l'Inde, coincée entre la tradition et la modernité. C'est peut-être là un passage nécessaire mais il dilue trop le point de vue de Miliana qui, pourtant précédemment, montrait une belle et forte présence.

Of Note

David Biespiel, ed.

Long Journey: Contemporary Northwest Poets.
Oregon State UP \$29.95

“There is no such thing as regional poetry” editor Biespiel proclaims in the first sentence of his foreword—and spends the ensuing four pages questioning “Poetry of Place” and insisting that no such thing as Northwest poetry exists. All of which leaves aside the question of why have an anthology of poets with addresses in Alaska, British Columbia, Idaho, Oregon, Washington, and Western Montana. If their association by virtue of some connections to where they were born or choose to live is irrelevant, then, why not have an anthology of contemporary poets from Florida, North Dakota, and New Brunswick. Leaving aside so much anxiety over regional inference, I will most certainly use this excellent anthology the next time I teach Northwest writing.

David Biespiel has chosen well. Whether

I was reading it sequentially from Jan Lee Ande to Patricia Young, or sampling randomly, I almost never felt let down. The poems, however various, always show careful attention to nuance and echo, and alertness to surprised listening. I enjoyed the playfully extended intricacies of Miranda Pearson's "The Empress" in which a woman considers what it is to be alone, and at home and away in Victoria's landmark hotel. Richard Kenney disturbs physics, geography, literary criticism, the Icarus myth, and flight attendants' announcements in a joyful inquiry into the meaning of "Turbulence." (About one-quarter of the poems are by Canadians, and border-crossing Sharon Thesen shows how the national boundary inflects our shared language.) Patrick Lane's "The War," a long accumulating unevenly recalled unfolding of two intersecting stories of childhood and the wars, must be one of his finest. Robert Wrigley's "Letter to a Young Poet" is a shrewd parody just catching the uncatchable achievement of Rilke. Other poetic ideas to indulge in: Madeline DeFrees imagining nest-building: "ornament with lichen"; Sam Hamilton on New York in September 2001, "a mute sadness settles in, / like dust"; or Marvin Bell on the aesthetics of fog: "they adore it / who wish to be wrapped in beauty so delicate / one must step outside it to be able to see it." I would rather have it both ways: find the regional poetry in poetry with some otherworld origin in and out of region. — LAURIE RICOU

Adam Dickinson

Kingdom, Phylum. Brick \$18.00

Somewhere in most of these poems the strange processes of the mind become explicit subject matter: "cumulus brain" drifts toward "clouded thought"; a poem titled "Carboniferous" pivots on the declaration that "Belief is the imagination as coal"; another such temptingly strange aphorism announces "Downhill is memory." Such

observations—at once briskly definitive yet happily bizarre—tease us in every poem.

"This is where thinking leaves us," Dickinson proposes, and for all that the observation provides two lines of explanation, a reader ultimately has to be content to realize that "This" has no locatable antecedent, and that he has just read the method of Dickinson's poetry. His poems are composed seemingly by tracking where thinking leads us. Having written in the prose poem "Kingdom, Phylum, Class" that gives the collection its title about a white ash tree with golden leaves, purple bush, blue bower bird, and nesting behaviours, the poet pauses, then begins a new paragraph: "It's raining here today and the yellow ash leaves lie in the street waiting for the someone to put a peach or a pineapple together. This is, I guess, the job of the peach bird." Or, we might say, thinking leads us to where it leaves us. And such wit, such inventive honouring and then crossing over and confusing the precise ordering of taxonomy and species category gives this book its intelligent good humour. — LAURIE RICOU

Derek Hayes

Historical Atlas of Vancouver and the Lower Fraser Valley. Douglas & McIntyre \$34.95

Sheila Harrington and Judi Stevenson, eds.

Islands in the Salish Sea: A Community Atlas. Touchwood \$44.95

Haye's generous selection of almost four hundred maps in colourful reproduction is complemented by detailed interpretive notes and compact historical essays. Hayes' understanding of the genre extends from souvenir guides to billboards, from Geological Survey to braille and tactile graphics maps from the CNIB. Frequent reproduction of real estate advertisements and historical photographs reinforces a sense of how thoroughly fictional the art of mapping often is. The increasing number of literature students examining the imagining and transforming of urban species will

find such a rich and compact assembling of maps a valuable companion.

Of considerably more immediate literary interest is *Islands in the Salish Sea*—the term designates the cross-border bio-region encompassing the inland Puget Sound and Strait of Georgia (although only “Canadian” islands are mapped in detail). The maps differ according to artist and community interest, but each is less concerned with grids, scales, and coordinates than with flora, fauna, culture, and history that define local concerns and matters of import. So, on Lasqueti, the “Biggest Juniper” is located; the productive sites around Quadra are shown with recycled materials glued onto a conventional marine chart. A map of Saltspring Island shows no roads or hotels but scores of apples, carrots, grapes, and sheep. A Wsanec (Saanich) map of the “Island Relatives” shows the Creator transforming persons into things that were needed. “The animals, the trees, the fish and even the four winds were once human beings,” explains an accompanying note by John Elliot. Hence, our responsibility to take care of all our relatives. This is a whimsical, accessible, and still challenging book that I have used with good effect in regional literature classes to illustrate the possibilities for projects in deep mapping of singular locations. — LAURIE RICOU

Barry Lopez, ed.

Home Ground: Language for an American Landscape. Trinity UP us \$29.95

Robert Hass defines “cranny” in an eight-word sentence; he lists eight synonyms, wonders about a disputed etymology, and then quotes the term’s complicated usage in Ovid, Byron, Tennyson, Edna St. Vincent Millay, and as place name in Idaho and West Virginia. I am not sure you can call Hass’ entry in this impressive dictionary of landscape terms typical, but it shows something of editor Lopez’ ambition: to have imaginative, well-read writers writing their

way—briefly, creatively—in and around landscape words. So, often, a cranny opens up in any given entry from which we can pluck a flowering metaphor that inspires and attaches: Kim Stafford on *old growth*: “what old age gives the individual person, old growth conditions give a forest: a life-library of survival wisdom.” Numerous literary allusions often are left as untested oblique re-readings of mostly technically inclined definitions. Admired lyrical stylists often write less speculatively and playfully than we might have hoped. Despite Lopez’ role as Arctic dreamer, no Canadian writers have entries here. But, at least, Michael Ondaatje, Malcolm Lowry, Anne Carson do walk-ons. Head Smashed-in-Buffalo Jump, the Tidal Bore, and the Sudbury Crater appear. *Nunatak* has an entry, but no “abraded” formation, no fishtrap, no correction line. The entry for “pothole” makes no reference to urban streets during the late March thaw. Toni Onley appears oddly as an “Alaskan Painter.” But books with such encyclopedic aspirations invite criticism of omitted favourites. Minor reservations aside (we would welcome someone’s editing a Canadian companion) *Home Ground* is an essential book for anyone interested in ecotourism, literary regionalism, and studies of place. It is no less than a life-library. — LAURIE RICOU



Theorizing the Disparities of Diaspora

Terri Tomsky

In her recent novel, *Can You Hear the Nightbird Call?* (2006), Anita Rau Badami describes the relationship of the diasporic Sikh community in the Lower Mainland region of British Columbia to their ancestral “home” in the affective register of loss and longing:

A taut rope tied them all to “home,” whether India or Pakistan. They saw their distant home as if through a telescope, every small wound or scar or flare back there exaggerated, exciting their imaginations and their emotions, bringing tears to their eyes. They were like obsessed stargazers, whose distance from the thing they observed made it all the brighter, all the more important. (65)

Such a fetishistic invocation of a remote, distant home is a strategy common to people who for whatever reason find themselves fully or partially alien in their current land. Indeed, it is perhaps the defining characteristic of diasporic consciousness, revealing as it does the incommensurability between home and lived reality—the modifiers “exaggerated,” “brighter,” “more important” remind readers that home, for the diasporic subject, is nearly always spelled with a capital *H*. But this diasporic attitude is more than a coping strategy, something Badami’s novel traces in the consequences of the Sikh community’s

infatuation with Home as the lost or imaginary object. As she represents the violent potential of their long-distance nationalism, which culminates in her fictional reworking of the plot to bomb Air India Flight 182 in 1985, Badami reminds us in many ways that a term like “diaspora” is not simply a synonym for passive nostalgia. A novel like Badami’s thus disaggregates the positive connotations that the term diaspora acquires in some of its postcolonial articulations (Appadurai; Bhabha 1994; Rushdie). What is more, in the case of Sikh separatists and their mission to create a homeland, Khalistan, on the Indian subcontinent, Badami helpfully questions the idea that diasporic identity is constituted in relation to an actual place, an originary home; instead, we could consider it as part of what Brian Keith Axel calls the “diasporic imaginary,” where diaspora is created “through formations of temporality, affect, and corporeality” and identity, like the homeland, is “generative of diasporic subjects” (412).

So if diasporic identity is, like other ways of being in the world, an intersubjective production, then we require new interpretive practices to theorize overlapping and multiple affective, political, and nationalist allegiances as well as varying degrees of economic power—including especially the capital at the disposal of some transnational, diasporic communities. For example, we might think of the oblivious display of the wealth of non-resident Indian (NRI) tourists visiting “home,” an asymmetry vividly presented in a work like Jhumpa Lahiri’s

Interpreter of Maladies (1999). Similarly, to return to Badami's text, we must consider the comparative immunity of diasporic communities, as it is the Sikhs living in India who are left to suffer the consequences of diaspora-funded separatist activity. If we want to account for these disparities, we would do well both to heed Brent Hayes Edwards' warning that "a discourse of diaspora functions simultaneously as abstraction and anti-abstraction" and to follow his advice that we must continually "attend to the ways the term can be re-articulated and abstracted into evocations of untroubled essentialism or inviolate roots" (12).

In this issue of *Canadian Literature*, Shani Mootoo suggests a way to deal with diasporic disparities in her plea for "longer notions of all that we are, rather than the short hand ones, such as South Asian" (18). For her, this becomes particularly important in today's "sound bite era," where the "old, complicated and on-going" histories of transnationalism are all too often elided (18). Mootoo's own genealogy, offered in her essay, traces her family's migration from India to the Caribbean and then her own move to Canada, and evokes what Carmen Voigt-Graf, building on the work of Parminder Bhachu, has called "twice migrants" (82). Such a term helps extend the meaning of diaspora by gesturing towards the complex affiliations to Home(s)—the parenthetical *s* could here supplement the fetishized *H*—created by multiple displacements and migrations, rather than describing the singular act of direct migration at one point in time to a particular place. "Twice migrant" or even "thrice migrant" collectivities may have a symbolic attachment to their ancestral homeland (for example, Mootoo, at one point, describes India as "foreign, mysterious, inexplicable," a "mythical" rather than a real place), but, all too frequently, they identify more with the nation that they have left as part of a second diaspora. But even so, Voigt-Graf's

phrase cannot adequately capture the fluctuations in the cultural frames of reference that are expressed so poignantly in Mootoo's "queer Indo-Trin-Can stories" (18). In charting a history of diasporic positionings beginning with the "rupture" of migration from India to the Caribbean, the foray into indentured labour, the performance of religious services, elopement, and ending with Trinidadian Independence, the loss of national citizenship, and the acquisition of a new one (Canadian), Mootoo demonstrates how her family casts off old cultural ties and engenders new social relations, leading to a "uniquely Trinidadian hybridization" (6).

Such hybridization is the product of experience as well as a lengthy family history that has become connected to a physical and cultural location allowing for both the establishment and transformation of "originary" affiliations. If our current theories of diaspora are still written in shorthand, Mootoo's article indicates some of the fuller ways in which diaspora can be theorized, ways that express it as a complex of power relations. Her key point is worth summarizing here: her injunction to take "more time to express" longer definitions of diaspora depends on a process of historicization, which not only breaks down any holistic interpretation, but also tracks the specific differentials of diasporic communities adjusting to changing conditions (18). Building on Mootoo's call, we might for example think of the way Sikh cultural identities in North America were reconstructed after the World Trade Centre attacks in 2001. In a historical overview, it becomes clear that diasporas are not new phenomena. Indeed, as scholars have noted, the term diaspora conventionally refers to the exilic displacement of the Jewish peoples after the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 BC. Today, the concept extends far beyond the traumatic connotations of forced mass dispersals to cover more heterogeneous groups of people: such movements are embedded in asymmetrical economic

relations and can be prompted by economic necessity as much as economic agency.

How can the word diaspora be reconfigured in order to distinguish and reflect the range of different movements and experiences that it currently encompasses? One way of acknowledging the existing diversities within diasporic formations is to examine the conceptualization of other equally broad theoretical terms. A model for diaspora studies, for example, might be found in the methodological response to cosmopolitanism. Cosmopolitanism concedes its plurality through its many critical incarnations like “modest,” “rooted” (Appiah), “vernacular” (Bhabha 1996), “discrepant” (Clifford), “critical,” (Delanty; Mignolo), “embedded” (Erskine), “from above,” “from below” (Cheng; Gilroy), “visceral,” “domestic” (Nava), and “subaltern” (Gunew). These modifiers corroborate the extensive understandings of cosmopolitanism variously as a political consciousness, a subjectivity, a historical experience, an ideological project, a structure of feeling, and so on. Clearly, of course, questions must be asked about what is gained and what is lost in adding these amendments; is a modifier, in some sense, a byword for compromise? In adjusting the original term, do we lose its efficacy? Certainly, on the one hand, scholars risk creating categories that might be considered prescriptive and may inadvertently taxonomize an experience that often is uniquely registered by its subjects. But, on the other hand, modifiers augment and transform the term by their descriptive capacity, opening up possibilities for new and more substantial theoretical and critical investigations.

For now it seems that most critics assert a set of theoretical qualifiers when speaking about diaspora. For instance, Edwards uses Stuart Hall’s notion of *articulation* and Léopold Senghor’s concept of *décalage* to highlight the internal as well as external differences of diaspora: “the ways transnational

black groupings are fractured by nation, class, gender, sexuality, and language,” thinking additionally “in terms of a complex of forced migrations and racializations” (12-13). Yet Edwards’ theorization here is subtended by Earl Lewis’ idea of “overlapping diasporas,” which places emphasis on “zones of interaction” and plots out the relations between diverse groups (Lewis 772). In these zones of interaction, Lewis traces the formation of historically specific African American diasporic identities, revealing “a people who molded themselves into being through their relationships with whites, reds, and one another,” who were “[r]egulated by time, spatial, and relational variables crosscut by power” (773-74). Lewis’ “overlapping diasporas” recognizes the uneven processes of interaction and allows for a sophisticated appreciation of identities forged through “the permeability of boundaries and the multipositional nature of most human actors” (787).

While many scholars call attention to the power dynamics of diasporas, what Avtar Brah in *Cartographies of Diaspora* identifies as a “multiaxial” understanding that takes into account the “multiple modalities” of population movements, I wonder about the reluctance of critics to use modifiers to direct particular lines of inquiry (189; 184). If we look outside of literary studies, we see phrases such as “provisional diasporas” and “regional diasporas” being used by social anthropologists and political theorists to help rearticulate the theorization and the forms of diaspora (Gardiner Barber); whereas the former suggests the constraints of agency and cultural contingencies inherent in economic migration, the latter has been used in a narrower sense to describe international diasporas within national regions or with particular regional affiliations (Siu; Werbner). By imbuing “regional diaspora” with a new meaning that focuses on intra-national migration, we can complicate the privileged position

nation currently holds in diaspora studies. “Regional diaspora,” for instance, not only applies to the Newfoundland expatriate culture considered in Jennifer Bowering Delisle’s essay in this collection, but it can also refer to groups of culturally distinct, internally displaced peoples within massive, complex, and polyglot landscapes, such as India, China, and Indonesia. Terms such as “regional diasporas” are especially significant when we consider the disproportionate emphasis on diaspora *vis-à-vis* the nation, as expressed by Shalini Puri in *The Caribbean Postcolonial*: “Notwithstanding the hyper-visibility of migration and diaspora as analytics and poetics at the moment, only 2.5 per cent of the world’s population crosses *national borders*” (7-8, emphasis added). We might do well to remember, turning once more back to Badami’s novel, that the Sikh diaspora finds its revolutionary energy not because they are a thinly spread transnational body, but rather because there is a concentrated group of individuals living in a single part of a nation, i.e. the Lower Mainland region of British Columbia. Nor should we think of this as a new phenomenon; the Boston Irish could also be thus categorized.

Another modifier, “virtual,” potentially opens up a rich seam for comparative diasporic and globalization studies. The term “virtual diaspora” could be applied to Raka Shome’s work on the emerging phenomenon of outsourcing, where transnational corporations shuttle aspects of their business practices to exploit or, to use the more sanitary term, “leverage” international differences in labour costs. Shome is most interested in the rise of the Indian call centre, whose employees live and work in India but participate in a “virtual migration” in their “performance of American-ness through virtual technology” (116). The employees’ “splintered identity” denotes a new form of diasporic consciousness, constituting an experience of cultural and

national dislocation, and border crossing without actually leaving the nation-state (117).

In an intersecting world, it is crucial to remain vigilant to diasporic pluralities. The use of modifiers and prefixes, however problematic, can be considered a practice that complicates the inequalities and differences inherent in different forms of diasporas. Though such modifiers also threaten to showcase such complications, we must take them not as “sound bites,” to echo Mootoo’s words, but as the means to frame new investigations and invite reflections on the breadth of diasporic experiences.

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Gendered Multiplicities: Women Write Diaspora

Kim Snowden

In the introduction to *Writing Across Worlds: Contemporary Writers Talk*, Susheila Nasta discusses the ways in which "writing has always been a form of cultural travelling, a means of transporting words into other worlds, of making crossings, and forging connections between apparently conflicting worlds" (6). In this issue of *Canadian Literature*, Shani Mootoo suggests that writing is about her own personal geographies and her diasporic map. Writing, for her, is not simply about forging connections and border crossings but about how this cultural travelling is in her blood and bones as much as writing, and that the two are inseparable. As she eloquently puts it: "transnationalism seems to have been bred in the marrow." How her identities are formed, how she self-identifies, and how she locates herself within her personal histories and origin stories, are inseparable from her art: "It is the how and the why of the stories that are written (84)."

I first heard a version of Mootoo's paper at a symposium entitled: "Serial Diasporas: Diasporic Asian Women's Writing" held at UBC in March 2007. Mootoo's paper asks some of the larger questions that arose during this symposium about diasporic narratives and that are posed here in this issue. How do authors write diaspora? What constitutes diasporic literature and how do authors

locate themselves not just as writers but as women writers? Is diaspora gendered?

Many of the symposium participants and presenters seemed to focus on the idea of “home” in terms of constructing and understanding gendered diasporic identities: how to define home, the idea of returning home, and the impossibility of both. Mootoo talks about this from her position of hybridity—being Trinidadian, born in Ireland, and moving to Canada. And it is this move to Canada that renders her Trinidadian identity invisible, something that becomes, as she says, about her sensibilities rather than an official identity. In this official act of homelessness, does she become any less Trinidadian?

Home and homelessness, belonging and non-belonging, visible and invisible, recognition and misrecognition, leaving and returning—these are the narrative themes that seem to define diaspora in the texts explored in this issue. But, these categories are not so simply dichotomized and exist in relation to multiple axes of identity. And at the centre of it all is the body—the racialized body, the body in terms of sexuality, ethnicity, class. But what of the gendered body? Can we talk about diasporic women’s writing without talking about the gendered body? It seems to me that the gendered diasporic body is both individual and collective. In Maria Ng’s paper on writing the diasporic self, she says that she feels a conflict between the act of remembering and the act of writing or representing her memories. She makes reference to the literary act of writing and her place as both a subject and author in relation to women’s literary history—how to map the autobiographical self outside of male language and culture. In this way, her writing, her diasporic subject, becomes about her own multiplicity and relies on the gendered body as much as it does the racialized body. It also draws attention to the complexities of writing diaspora and of being a woman writing diaspora.

Ella Shohat says that “Any dialogue about

such fictive unities called Middle Eastern women,” or “Latin American gays/lesbians,” for example—especially dialogues taking place within transnational frameworks—has to begin from the premise that genders, sexualities, races, classes, nations, and even continents exist not as hermetically sealed entities but, rather, as part of a permeable interwoven relationality” (2). How diasporic writing functions in the canon of Canadian literature should be a question that also addresses this relationality. For example, in exploring the construction of Martha Ostenso as a Canadian writer and her place in Canadian literary traditions, Hammill rightly observes that the constructions of nation in literary histories are complicated and challenged by diasporic writers. How are literary histories further challenged by the relationship between gender and nation and the construction of gendered literary histories? Are writers diasporic because of their biography or because of their subject matter? Can the two be separated?

Shani Mootoo and Maria Ng both address these issues through their own approaches to diaspora and transnationalism in writing and by locating themselves as both the subjects and authors of their work. They both perform gender in a way that reveals the “interwoven relationality” of multiple axes of identities when it comes to diaspora, and their construction of diaspora cannot be read without the gendered body at its centre. And their writing is not only gendered but also feminist. Shohat reflects on a “relational understanding of feminism that assumes a provisional and conjunctural definition of feminism as a polysemic site of contradictory possibilities” (1-2). This is evoked in Mootoo’s description of the starboy and her own embodiment of a female masculinity that is constantly transitioning. Here, she complicates the construction of gender in literary traditions, especially the representation of women’s relationship to nation. Lo touches upon this issue

in her piece on Asian Canadian writing and her discussion of the ways in which immigrant women become acceptable and “proper” national subjects through their relationship to domesticity and family. The same can be said for the ways in which women are expected to perform femininity and embody gender. The hybridity and multiplicity of diasporic identities already challenge these norms and Mootoo’s starboy further occupies Shohat’s feminist “site of contradictory possibilities” by challenging the construction of the gendered body in literature but also in the ways in which she locates this identity in relation to seeing and being seen in various contexts and spaces.

Space and place and the geographies of diaspora are also important in terms of gender and the construction of “home.” Mootoo talks of her origin stories and her attempt to locate herself in them now, as a diasporic subject that is connected to, and separate from, her childhood memories. Maria Ng talks of beginnings and place of birth and raises the question of what constitutes home. Throughout these diasporic narratives is the theme of loss, the leaving and loss of home, the inability to return and the feelings of guilt and displacement that accompany this leaving. Johansen discusses this guilt in relation to second-generation immigrants in Dionne Brand’s *What We All Long For*—the burden of bearing their parents’ guilt and their inability to understand their shame or sense of non-belonging. Jennifer Delisle’s paper refers to a diasporic homelessness—one that, for Delisle, is connected to the racialized body but is also linked to the gendered body. Brand’s novel speaks to many of these ideas.

Johansen’s discussion of Brand’s novel suggests that all of these feelings of loss and displacement are related to the specificity of location and the spaces of the city of Toronto. The city is a place where alternate and multiple diasporic identities can be created but is also a place where

diasporic bodies are subject to the city’s gaze. Johansen describes a scene where one of the characters, Carla, a bike courier, rides through the city at breakneck speed resisting the gaze of the city as she traverses it, creating her own map, marking the recognizable city streets and areas in her own terms. While Johansen does talk about the gendered spaces of the city, for her this scene is about how the diasporic body is unreadable due to Carla’s speed. Johansen suggests that the gendered spaces of the novel are most evident in the description of Carla’s mother’s apartment and gendered expectations of domesticity, which she both perpetuates and challenges. In contrast to this, Carla’s journey through the city allows for a reading in terms of Shohat’s feminist “site of contradictory possibilities” in much the same way that Mootoo’s starboy image does. Carla, in this moment, is unreadable as a gendered body, partly due to her speed but also because of other forms of mobility, her freedom to move across the city on a bicycle, performing work that is most often considered the work of men. Sarah Ahmed says that women are taught to feel fear and vulnerability in public spaces and that women’s bodies and mobility are inevitably shaped by this fear: “Vulnerability is not an inherent characteristic of women’s bodies, rather, it is an effect that works to secure femininity as a delimitation of movement in the public, and over-inhabitation of the private” (Ahmed 70). In the same way, Ahmed discusses the racialized body and how “fear works to contain some bodies such that they take up less space” (69). In Brand’s work, and others, this is fear of being the “other” and also a fear of the “other.” As Carla speeds through the city, she is freed from these delimitations and gendered constructions. The gendered body cannot be separated from the racialized body in this moment and it is precisely because she is a woman that this scene is subversive. That she is unreadable and moving is important

because she embodies many of the themes that these diasporic narratives and papers discuss—the hybridity, the multiplicity, the complexities of space and place, and belonging and non-belonging.

Tuyen, Carla's friend, lives in a space that, for me, represents many of the complexities of writing diaspora that these authors and the texts they discuss are getting at. Tuyen has broken down the walls of her apartment, creating one open space that does not allow for traditional domestic separation of spaces such as kitchen and bedroom that are also gendered. She is an artist and creates large installation pieces in her apartment thereby basically living inside her art. The art itself is about "every longing in the city" (Brand 156). Tuyen describes it as a relic, a connection to her Vietnamese heritage and a connection to the diasporic bodies that make up the city in which she lives, but does not call home. Her home is this place, this apartment filled with the multiplicities of the city and the history of her family—a family who won't enter her apartment, can't understand why she won't return to the "home" they have created in the suburbs, full of guilt and loss. In her art, she can give shape to the experiences of her refugee parents and the other inhabitants of the diasporic city and place herself in and around them with the freedom to move, to leave, to dismantle it, to make it grow. Much like Mootoo's feelings about writing, Tuyen suggests that her identity in this diaspora is constantly changing and the only way to give shape to it is through art: "She wasn't quite certain what she was making; she knew that she would find out only once the installation was done" (Brand 308). But it is never done, and as Mootoo says, this story, this conversation about diaspora "is an old, complicated and on-going one."

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Articles

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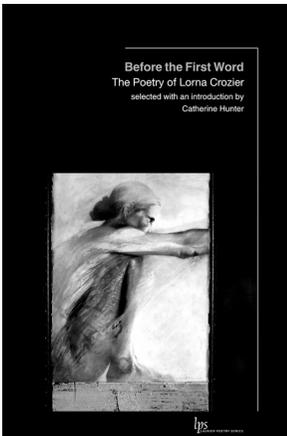
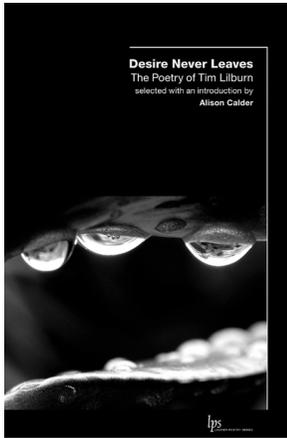
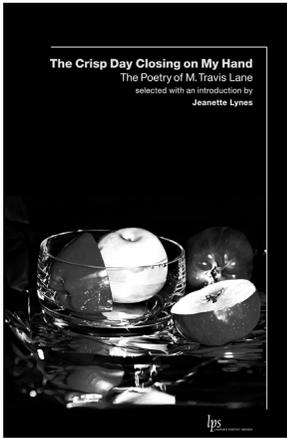
Terri **Tomsky** is a PhD candidate in the Department of English at the University of British Columbia. Her thesis focuses on literary representations of the 1947 Indian partition and the 1991 break-up of Yugoslavia. Her research interests include trauma theory, affect theory, and postcolonial theory.

Poems

Adebe **D.A.** lives in Toronto, ON. Hiromi **Goto** lives in Burnaby, BC. Sonnet **L'Abbé** lives in Vancouver, BC. Yasmin **Ladha** teaches in Muscat, Oman. Prama **Tagore** teaches at the University of Victoria. Rita **Wong** teaches at the Emily Carr Institute of Art and Design.

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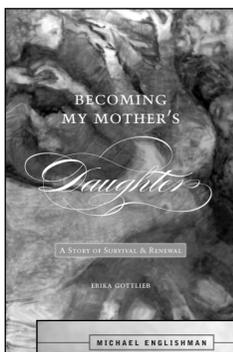
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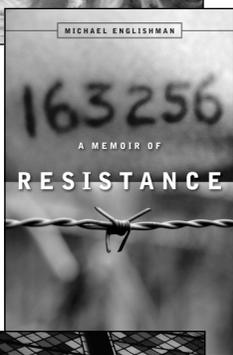
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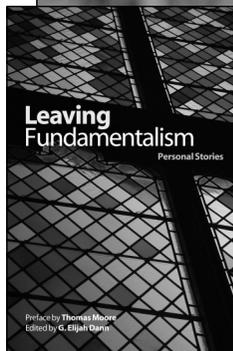
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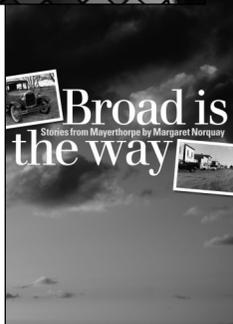
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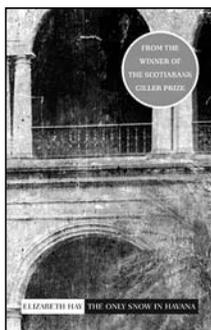
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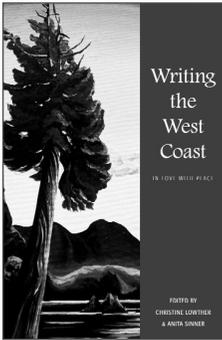
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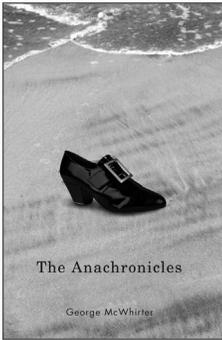


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