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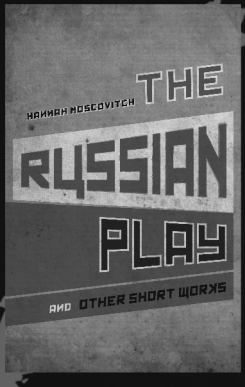

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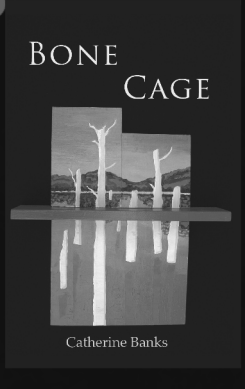

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Production Staff: Matthew Gruman
Stephen Ullstrom
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Editorial

Canada and Its Discontents

Glenn Deer

Make every lyric a work of treason,
A criminal's code, an arsonist's song.
Genius is hideous, degenerate:
Let your poems, this culture, incriminate.
—George Elliott Clarke, "To X.X," from *Blue* (40)

I keep George Elliott Clarke's declamatory *Blue* at my elbow on my desk as a defense against the complacencies of the news of the day, that lulling sound sung in our ears by the editorialists and financial pundits, who tell us to deal with the withering of the markets by smiling and putting on a happy face: "*Let your poems, this culture, incriminate*," proclaims Clarke.

While the globe swirls in economic turmoil, Canadians cannot afford to be smug about our financial future, nor our publicly subsidized culture, nor believe that our inflated international reputation as a space of utopian social contentment can be sustained by mere hopeful thinking. Here in Vancouver, the discontented gap between the affluent and the impoverished homeless grows, even while the city prepares to put on its finest face for the international exposure of the 2010 Winter Olympics, an event that most Vancouverites will only be able to afford to watch from their televisions or computer screens.

According to Adrian White, a British social psychologist at the University of Leicester, Canada is ranked amongst the most contented nations in the world. The colour coded *World Map of Happiness* (2007) devised by White graphically shows that Denmark, Switzerland, Austria, Iceland, the Bahamas, Finland, Sweden, Bhutan, Brunei, and Canada are the ten happiest nations in the world, and these nations are significantly more content even than the global economic superpowers of the United States (ranked 23rd), Germany (35th), France (62nd), and China (82nd). The three most discontented countries according to White's survey are the Democratic Republic of Congo, Zimbabwe, and Burundi. Such measurements of "subjective well-being,"

based on questionnaires answered by 80,000 people around the globe, reflect the respondents' satisfaction with health care, housing, and education, and such indicators favour relatively affluent countries like Canada. But despite these strong indicators of current "happiness"—a slippery concept at best—Canadian literature displays a remarkable propensity for healthy discontent, grumbling about our relative weaknesses, lampooning our belated cosmopolitan development, and *kvetching* about either our lack of worldly competitiveness or the absorption of our once distinctive ethos by the machinery of global modernity.

The recurring sources of human discontent are legion, as the content of this late autumnal issue of *Canadian Literature* will attest, but there is readerly satisfaction, even happiness, in providing an ear for the articulate venting of our discontent. Literary misery finds appreciative company in the arms of many readers, if not for the sympathetic commiseration of others who also feel the pain of the writer's human position, then for the less noble itch for *schadenfreude*, that sinewy and delicious German loanword for the unforeseen pleasure we take in the misery of others. Happiness is such a complex, delicate, and ultimately mysterious affect, and bears a tangled relationship to its shadow sides: discontent, melancholy, and depression.

According to Jacques Poulin's brilliantly comic allegory of social life, *Les Grandes Mareés* (1978), the focus in this issue of Sophie Bastien's article, the contrived pursuit of happiness can paradoxically undermine its attainment. Such is the case in Poulin's novel where a translator of comic strips—Teddy—finds himself transported by helicopter to an Edenic island in the St. Lawrence River by his employer who ostensibly tries to enhance the translator's "happiness." Teddy is happy in his solitary literary work, and he appreciates at first the arrival of an agreeable and pretty female companion, dark-eyed Marie. However, he soon finds his island getaway invaded by a stream of annoying personae, including the lascivious Featherhead, a sullen Author, a Professor of Comic Strip History, an Ordinary Man, a social Organizer, and a supernatural therapist named Gélisol. As Sophie Bastien's article emphasizes, the archetypal oppositions between the individual and the collective, nature and culture, complicate our search for happiness, and our lives are caught in an ebb and flow beyond our control, as Poulin's novel suggests, "le titre en connote la puissance et le mystere *Les Grandes Mareés*."

Can we achieve happiness if we make the effort? (Or can we at least discover the winning formula in one of the hundreds of self-help books that offer us the keys to felicity?) Darrin McMahon's intellectual history

of *Happiness* (2006) reminds us that the contemporary belief that we are entitled to happiness—or that unhappiness is a malady to be remedied by an array of counsellors or self-help books—would be regarded as naïve and bound for disappointment by earlier civilizations. The classical Greek understanding of happiness, *eudaimonia* (good + spirit), "has deep roots in the soil of chance" (11), and respects the powers of fate, the whims of the gods, or the *happenstance* that makes or mars our fortunes. Early Western culture accepted that happiness was determined by good luck, that human beings are quite helpless in controlling felicitous outcomes, and the Middle English term "hap" (luck) is etymologically embedded in our own understanding of happiness. In McMahon's fascinating history of continuously evolving Western thought on the nature of happiness, a radical break occurs with this fatalistic view during the Enlightenment, a break that is famously reflected in the new individual liberties that are regarded as self-evident truths and "unalienable" rights in the 1776 American Declaration of Independence: that citizens have the right to "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." The rapture of this pursuit has recently been echoed again across the US border where many Canadians gaze with envy at a renewed American presidency, whose passionate oratory evokes the possibility of recovering happiness, however it might be defined, in troubled economic times: "Yes, we can," asserts Barack Obama. Meanwhile, in the chillier northern half of the continent, with a minority government, and a discontented and divided electorate, Canadians contemplate more uncertain coalitional prospects for the future. Many are thinking less of the grander possibilities of happiness, and are humbly willing to settle for what appeared in our 1867 Constitution Act as the subsistence contentment of "Peace, Order, and Good Government."

Our lot today seems rather hapless, but there is nothing like a zesty banquet of studied vituperation to spur the mind out of the mire of passive melancholy. If we cannot abide the state of the house, then kick against the pricks. Certainly the essays in this issue show that Canadian literary discontent has been simmering quite nicely in the shadow of (post)modernity. Mark Johnson's article on Richler's *Cocksure* challenges previous assessments of a book that both scandalized and delighted many with its satiric obscenities. Reinhold Kramer, in his recent scholarly biography of Richler, *Mordecai Richler: Leaving St. Urbain,* precisely pinpoints the skill of Richler's critical "counterblast" (203), yet in novels like *Cocksure*, the author is "divided" between an avant-garde "metafictionally playful, boundary-testing, hip" form and a "moralizing" stance that shows the "pitfalls of the

1960's freedoms" (192). Mark Johnson astutely confronts the contradictory logic of Richler's discontent, arguing that *Cocksure* is a melancholy allegory of "the political subject in postmodernism," and that Richler anticipates the critique of the postmodern "depthlessness" and the "subject's immersion in mediascapes and artificial environments," a critique that is later echoed in the cultural interventions of Fredric Jameson and Jean Baudrillard. Richler's discontent with the empty, simulated artifice of postmodern environments does not place the author, however, above the target of his discontent: While Richler is the critic of the contemporary image-making machineries, he is also subjected to his own critique. Discontent thus turns its venom against itself. Such narrative self-denigration is also evident in the Kierkegaardian ironist, the character of Ed, who is the focus of Stephen Dunning's discussion of Guy Vanderhaeghe's "Man Descending," and *My Present Age*. As Dunning demonstrates, Ed denounces the contemporary world, and "the culture's unconscious spiritual bankruptcy and despair have come to brief consciousness," yet Ed has not yet moved beyond the despair of his discontent, nor realized a possible remedy in the example of "the elusive person of Bill Sadler, the placard-wielding, religious ethicist who alone escapes narrative censure."

Jenny Kerber's article on monocultures and militarism in Stead's classic prairie novel *Grain* shows how an ecocritical discontent with the appropriation of agricultural land and labour is usually overlooked. Stead's novel, in Kerber's view, continues to be relevant to current concerns over the pressures of centralizing and "intensive monocultures and ever-larger economies of scale" that threaten ecological diversity, a diversity that is essential for the continuing health of the planet.

The monocultural pressures on labour and landscapes are also reflected in the pressures on individuals to conform to normative body images. Amelia Defalco's article on Margaret Laurence's *The Stone Angel* explores the individual's discontent with the aging self. Hagar Shipley's discontent with her aging body arises from her own unhelpful life narrative, a framework that divides her identity into negative oppositions such as "young or old, true or false, original or deformed, insightful or blind." Certainly, the culture of simulated experiences, and the worship of youthful appearances that are ceaselessly reinforced by popular culture, television, and advertising contribute to such constrictive and damaging norms. The contemporary discontent with the aging self, and the denial of temporal processes, is reflected in Hagar's "denial of change," and her "inability to tolerate a shifting narrative identity."

Her discontent results from a distorted investment in a static self based on her memories of her youthful self, and the result is a painful and frustrating experience of her current body as a "deformation" rather than a part of a naturally human process of transformation.

Finally, discontent with the facile harmonies of Canadian multiculturalism is expressed in the contemporary Canadian texts for adolescents examined by Benjamin Lefebvre. Exploring novels by Beatrice Culleton, Marlene Nourbese Philip, Deborah Ellis, Glen Huser, and Martine Leavitt, Lefebvre demonstrates how these authors resist the simplistic resolutions of the young adult problem novel. These authors explore the profound complications and discontent that arise from poverty and family breakdown, and the oppressive effects of "racism, sexism, patriarchy, and homophobia." But these books remain open forms that "avoid singular ideological stances and clear narrative closure." Such texts for the next generation of Canadian leaders, thinkers, and activists will hopefully allow the young reader to think through the problems of the world while resisting monocultural impositions. If the next generation can move beyond the empty simulations, cults of status, and misguided expectations that have plagued our social life, perhaps their chance for securing some measure of Canadian happiness will be more realistic than ours.

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Alan Hill

In Condominium We Trust

It is a siege fort of swan bone steel
and six pack muscle glass that is
throwing a wasps nest of skin tone
shadow across a line of pasty Cedars,
hardening itself behind the barbeque
cladding of its buttressed battlements
that are sterile and glinting with the
disinterested sincerity of well scrubbed
bedpans or the sharpened instruments
of an over confident surgeon.

A hijacked jet of living space that has
crashed itself into the brain stem of
a million private places, a hermaphrodite
of high rise reproducing itself through
a telegraphic frottage of wire and
chrome, throwing out the shapes of
newborn speech, the words of new
community, of sentences and slogans
yet compiled that have shot themselves
alive out of the mouths of the battlefield
artillery of molded and unstable reasonings,
out in to the feeble wooden colonies
of the mind, out in to the new frontiers
of internal space, to pour their molten
polymers of neighborhood, guide their
freshly pressed utopians, their plastic
peace core devotees, into a blindfold
spacewalk, in to the napalm spitting
eye of an irritated nothingness.

Brian Johnson

Simulacra and Stimulations
Cocksure, Postmodernism, and Richler's Phallic Hero

Whether or not Mordecai Richler's *Cocksure* (1968) can still be regarded as "one of the most embarrassing books in Canadian literature" (Warkentin 81), it has certainly been treated as one of Richler's least successful and least significant satires. Despite winning the Governor General's award for fiction in 1968 (an award it shared with Richler's essay collection *Hunting Tigers Under Glass*), and despite Richler's own judgment that it is one of his best novels, many early reviewers agreed that *Cocksure*'s ribald mockery of everything from sexual liberation and bourgeois bohemia to mass media and identity politics "lashes out without having a definite place to lash out *from*" (Wain 34). Subsequent scholarship on the novel echoes this criticism and is similarly hesitant to endorse Richler's enthusiastic self-evaluation (Woodcock 53; McSweeny 27; Ramraj 78). Yet, the "flaws" that unite the novel's detractors—its enthusiasm for "pornographic" vignettes, its seemingly incoherent superabundance of satiric targets, and its apparent lack of a stable moral center—may be accounted for in terms other than an authorial imagination that is "arrested at the level of the high-school lavatory wall" (McSweeny 27).

Margaret Gail Osachoff comes closest to identifying an alternative approach to understanding the novel's complexity when she notes that *Cocksure* satirizes "the cult of youth, organ transplants, and, especially, the film industry," drawing particular attention to the way that "movies can usurp life . . . to the extent that those lives are lived (if that is the right word) in a moral vacuum" (37). Although it does not name it as such, Osachoff's brief but suggestive analysis points to what theorists at the time increasingly

described as the socio-economic "condition" of postmodernity. When approached from this angle, *Cocksure* emerges as a significant but neglected (and typically Richlerian) engagement with postmodernity's many discontents—an engagement, moreover, that strikingly anticipates the subsequent theorizations of two of postmodernity's most celebrated diagnosticians, Fredric Jameson and Jean Baudrillard.

By staging a confrontation between conventional morality and the weightless logic of postmodern simulation in which Richler's liberal humanist belief in "the possibilities within each of us for goodness" (Richler, *Cocksure* 190) comes out the loser, *Cocksure* allegorizes a melancholy and nostalgic version of the much-publicized "death" of the political subject in postmodernism. As I will argue, Richler's depiction of the liberal humanist subject's fatal immersion in a postmodern world of empty, endlessly circulating signs is ultimately self-implicating, for the novel draws Richler's own role as a writer and critic of the postmodern scene into the orbit of its satire. In this context, the novel's so-called ethical ambivalence, the difficulty it has locating the basis of its own critique, reflects a more complex set of dilemmas than critics have acknowledged. Moreover, far from representing a series of "gross adhesions to the text" (McSweeny 27), the novel's "adolescent" phallic economy can be seen to play a strategic role in organizing Richler's blistering response to emergent postmodernity, nostalgically monumentalizing, and perhaps minimally reviving, modernity's flagging phallic hero.

Richler's Postmodernism

The main plot of *Cocksure* allegorizes the triumph of postmodernity in terms of the absorption of a traditional London publishing house, Oriole Press, into the "international business empire" of the grotesque and mysterious Star Maker, a film and publishing "Goliath" who oversees his global interests from a Las Vegas mansion staffed with a private army of killers clad in black motorcycle gear. Reputedly "ageless and undying," the Star Maker is more Frankenstein's monster than man (29). Originally Greek, he is now "[p]ieces and patches," "a little bit of everything" (137), prolonging his life through visits to his "mobile operating theatre," where he undergoes skin grafts, organ replacements, and blood transfusions provided by a reluctant stable of "spare-parts men" (1-2). After first rising to prominence as a Hollywood studio head during the 1930s, one of "a handful of kikes, dagos, and greaseballs, controlling the images that Protestant America worshipped" (138), he eventually dispensed with the "messy" human imperfections of his film actors

altogether. Assuming the Godlike role of a Victor Frankenstein, he hired a team of scientists to design artificial "Goy-Boy" film stars who can be stored in deep freezes or deflated and hung in closets between films. As the novel opens, the blurted obscenity of a disgruntled minion—"Go fuck yourself!" (3)—inspires the Star Maker to pursue a monstrous new project. Already obsessed with the fluid gender possibilities suggested by prominent historical transvestites and transsexuals like the Chevalier d'Éon, Tiresias, and Christine Jorgensen, Richler's villain surgically transforms himself into "the first self-contained creator"(202), able to both sire and carry his own heir in an obscene parody of immaculate conception.

Such details leave little doubt that Richler intends the "ageless and undying" Star Maker as a symbol for the monstrous appetites, expansive energy, transcendent appearance, and self-replicating power of capitalism. As the Star Maker tells Mortimer, "The revolution eats its own. Capitalism recreates itself" (135)—a reference to the Star Maker's dismemberment of his henchman for spare parts, a reference which pointedly cannibalizes Marx and Engels's famous definition of capitalism as a system wherein "[t]he bourgeoisie cannot exist without constantly revolutionizing the instruments of production" (224). More particularly, Richler's Star Maker closely resembles what Jameson calls "late capitalism," a post-World War II, multinational and consumer-oriented phase of capitalist development marked by "a prodigious expansion of capital into hitherto uncommodified areas" and a concomitant "rise of the media and advertising industry" (Jameson 36):

> The Star Maker, his interests global, swooped out of the sky one day to settle a strike on a Malayan opium farm and the next day flew on to Rome, perhaps to fire the director on one of his multimillion-dollar film productions. His interests were . . . vast and all-embracing, taking in film and TV production companies, airlines, newspapers, diamond mines, oil refineries and gambling casinos . . . (29)

The interpenetration of capital and media that the Star Maker's "all-embracing" interests represent, as well as the disturbing mobility and invisibility they make possible, register precisely the "prodigious expansion" that Jameson identifies as the economic basis for his now classic account of postmodernism as "the cultural logic of late capitalism" (1)—a logic in which "aesthetic production . . . has become integrated into commodity production generally" (4), yielding, among other things, "a new depthlessness" and a "weakening of historicity" that inhere in "a whole new culture of the image or the simulacrum" (6). The eventual dispersal of the Star Maker's scientific team of "Goy-Boy" android-builders that occurs when "[s]ome of [its] best geniuses

go commercial," getting involved in "germ warfare and H-Bomb production" (142), is similarly prescient, anticipating Jameson's sobering observation that "this whole global, yet American, postmodern culture is the internal and superstructural expression of a whole new wave of American military and economic domination throughout the world" (5). The ascendancy of such a new "global, yet American" postmodern depthlessness in which image-flows replace narrative and history is precisely what the novel allegorizes in the monstrous American movie mogul's takeover of a traditional British press, the symbolic last bastion of "humane literary values" (McSweeny 26).

Given Richler's longstanding interest in film—and his satirist's distrust of system builders—it is not surprising that his delineation of late capitalism's cultural logic ultimately focuses more on the effects that its image-making has on individuals than on broader matters of political economy. Thus, despite its nods to the Star Maker's global commercial network, Richler's satire of postmodernism tends to anticipate Baudrillard's more abstract and media-focused account of simulation—an account upon which Jameson nonetheless draws heavily in his theorization of postmodern depthlessness. Postmodernity, in Baudrillard's formulation, is marked above all by the subject's immersion in mediascapes and artificial environments: the subsequent generation of reality out of "memory banks and command models" (*Simulacra* 2) causes the traditional "metaphysical" relation between image and referent to "implode" (81-82). For the old dichotomy of reality and representation, postmodernism substitutes hyperreality and simulation (2). The Star Maker's collection of prefab WASP actors are, in this sense, hyperreal. Modeled on, but radically surpassing, modernist Edward Gordon Craig's director-centered disregard for stage actors as "übermarionette[s]," the Star Maker's rubber and wax puppets generate a cinematic vision of "the ideal American male" (Richler 139) that is "more real than real" (Baudrillard, "Evil" 195). As the Star Maker reveals to Mortimer about the origins of "Operation Goy-Boy,"

> The Motivational Research boys, the pollsters, covered America for us, and came back with twenty thousand completed forms. We fed these forms into the most advanced computers and finally settled on body and face possibilities. (139)

The result of this process of computerized "combinatory algebra" (Baudrillard, *Simulacra* 2) is not merely the dissemination of perfected images of American masculinity, but a hyperreal collapse of the conventional distinction between image and reality which, in Baudrillard's thought, marks "an ultimate stage of disenchantment with the concepts and categories of enlightenment thought"

(Norris 172). This conceptual implosion of image and "reality" is made apparent in the narrator's mockery of the protagonist, Mortimer, whose adolescent worship of the Star Maker's synthetic matinee idol (69) implicitly accounts for his bland, "[c]onventionally handsome" resemblance to, variously, "old-style movie stars" (25), "the smiling sincere husband in the unit trust advertisements" (25), and "one of those male models . . . getting out of a sports car in the *Esquire* ads" (26). A parallel, but more literal, dramatization of "the murderous capacity of images" that illustrates how they are "murderers of the real, murderers of their own model" (Baudrillard, "Evil" 196) is the new "Our Living History" biography series at the Star Maker's recently-acquired Oriole Press. Overseen by the Star Maker's henchman, Dino Tomasso, the series focuses on obscure contemporary figures whose dull biographies are suddenly transformed into hot properties when Dino murders them shortly before publication. The title of the deadly series aptly suggests a muddling of temporal categories and the loss of historical depth that both Baudrillard and Jameson attribute to the culture of simulation.

In all of these ways, the Star Maker thus emerges as the Satanic deity of this increasingly simulated universe, assuming the role of creator that "[p]reviously only God" had played (139). This role culminates in his bizarre pregnancy, wherein the production of his heir through a hermaphroditic closed-circuit symbolizes the "implosive" generation of hyperreality from command models and the murder of the real this entails. By removing any relationship to an outside, the Star Maker's self-impregnation literally embodies the "fatal strategy" of Baudrillard's simulacrum, which "reproduces" itself without reference to the real, according to an immanent logic that "leaves images no other destiny than images" and leads, like the Star Maker's body, to "an exponential folding of the medium around itself" ("Evil" 195). Moreover, the autoerotic narcissism made possible by the Star Maker's new form suggests that Richler, like Baudrillard, locates the central affect of contemporary media saturation in "a kind of primal pleasure…an anthropological joy in images" ("Evil" 194). As the Star Maker says to Mortimer:

> Fifty years ago would you have believed in men flying into outer space?... There is inner space as well as outer, you see. And it's fun, oh it's such fun. In all my years, I have enjoyed nothing more than making love to me. (202)

Like the Star Maker's extrapolation of modernist theatrical "marionettes" into actual robot actors, his evocation of movements into both outer and inner space posits a historic break with the modernity of "fifty years ago" that is recognizably postmodern. Here, the Star Maker's embodiment of an

obscene, self-gratifying "inner space" constitutes a striking symbolization of an "imploded" media funhouse. In this space, a labyrinthine hall of mirrors produces a seemingly infinite play of recursive images in a pornographic "ecstasy of communication."

If the self-love through which the godlike Star Maker conceives his heir is a parody of the "immaculate conception," it is significant that a simulated version of his nascent "son" (202) is already present when the novel begins in a scene between Mortimer and his visiting fourth-grade teacher:

> Mortimer took Miss Ryerson firmly by the arm, leading her across Oxford Street and to the Corner House, stopping to collect the *Sunday Times* for them to study at tea. Unfortunately Miss Ryerson picked up the magazine section first, opening it at the glistening all-but-nude photograph of a sensual pop singer, a young man caressing a cat. The singer wished to star in a film about the life of Christ. Jesus, he was quoted as saying, was no square. But a real groovy cat. (7-8)

Here, Richler cynically suggests, is the "saviour" of the postmodern age. The fact that this parodic postmodern Christ appears long before any "immaculate" conception by the Star Maker also makes possible an ingenious substitution. By placing the newborn-seeming "all-but-nude" pop star, who still only dreams of playing Christ, at the beginning of the narrative, Richler aligns the young man's future film role with the birth of the Star Maker's son. The sequencing suggests, in other words, that the Star Maker's postmodern Christ will be "incarnated" not as the flesh-and-blood child he is carrying, but as a total simulation on the big screen, an "incarnation" that perversely rejects the body to affirm the murder of the real by its images.

Whereas Baudrillard's writing often seems perversely fixated on the apocalyptic postmodern sublime, Richler's judgement on this "age of simulation" that "begins with a liquidation of all referentials" (*Simulacra* 2) is unambiguous. The work of a moralist who "writes out of a sense of disgust with things as they are" (Gibson 271), *Cocksure* repeatedly dramatizes the ethical and epistemological consequences of simulation's unmooring of the traditional relationship between signs and meaning that Baudrillard describes as "the dialectical capacity of representations as a visible and intelligible mediation of the Real" ("Evil Demon" 196). In the absence of such a mediatory function, signs become merely objects of "brute fascination unencumbered by aesthetic, moral, social or political judgements" and embrace a fundamental "immorality" (194). *Insult*, a BBC-2 talk show hosted by "inquisitor" Digby Jones, whose interviews involve a kind of sophistry that superficially "exposes" the depravity of even the most morally upstanding guests for the

gratification of mob-like audiences, exemplifies Richler's outrage at mass media's production of semantic depthlessness and moral vacuity.

Although Richler's comic *aperçus* concerning the pretensions and follies of sexually "radicalized" 1960s liberals do not obviously pertain to his depiction of an amoral postmodern world dominated by simulation, these two narrative strands are, in fact, profoundly intertwined—and with good reason. As Jameson argues, "the economic preparation of postmodernism or late capitalism began in the 1950s" when "new products and new technologies (not least of those the media) could be pioneered," but the cultural preconditions for postmodernism's emergence as a hegemonic "structure of feeling" are to be found in "the enormous social and psychological transformations of the 1960s, which swept so much of tradition away on the level of *mentalités*" (xx). Such a co-implication of counterculture and high-tech in precipitating the emergence of a postmodern era is precisely what *Cocksure* depicts, for Richler's mockery of a hip 1960s liberalism that has adopted the mantras of countercultural revolt as a style is always aligned with his satire of a Debordian society of spectacle.

For instance, Richler's wicked portrait of the ultra-progressive Beatrice Webb school, where male students receive blow jobs as rewards for academic excellence (169) and "uncompromisingly radical parents" entreat the "Expressive Movement" coach to allow their children five minutes to masturbate after class (112), obviously skewers the pretensions of educational experiments of the 1960s. But the school's performance of the Marquis de Sade's *Philosophy of the Bedroom* as a Christmas pageant starring ten-year-old *ingénues* also critiques the "radicalized" discourse of sexual liberation and exposes the culture of simulation as a form of pornographic spectacle. The exchangeability of these positions is cleverly suggested prior to the play's production by a classroom lesson in which a student confuses "marquis" with "marquee" (19-20), a mistake that implicitly connects the school's attack on repression to simulation's attack on the real. The Star Maker's "progressive" identification of his own polymorphous sexuality with the "many gradients on the Kinsey scale" (202), as well as the obscene performance he stages for Mortimer (while holding forth on his own "philosophy of the bedroom"), similarly attest to the convergence of simulation and stimulation in Richler's novel.

What these episodes reveal, when filtered through Richler's unforgiving moral lens, is that the liberal attack on repression in the name of a Sadean "life force" (23) is not substantially different from simulation's attack on the real, even if these attacks privilege "depth" and "surface," respectively.

Ultimately, a philosophy of the bedroom produces an amoral state of polymorphous perversity where, literally, anything goes, precisely because a worldview that demonizes every limit as a repression to be overcome implies a movement beyond good and evil. As Mortimer's treacherous and nihilistic friend Ziggy maintains, "Life is meaningless. Totally absurd" (150). For Richler, this is the ethical corollary of the process of simulation, a process that cancels the relationship between image and referent, rendering all signs equivalent and infinitely exchangeable. Richler's double-edged critique of postmodernity can thus be summarized by Baudrillard's dictum about postmodernism: "in the absence of rules of the game, things become caught up in their own game" ("Evil" 195).

Richler's Phallic Hero

Throughout *Cocksure*, Richler indicates the omnipresence of postmodernity by casting the Star Maker in the mould of grotesque James Bond supervillains, like scar-faced Ernst Stavro Blofeld and one-eyed Emilio Largo—aspiring world-dominators who command the international crime organization, SPECTRE. As Victor Ramraj notices, the opening scene of Richler's novel, which depicts Dino's arrival at the mogul's lavish but sinister mansion, "recalls and probably parodies the pre-credit opening of the Bond movies" which "were at their peak of popularity when *Cocksure* was published" (77). This scene is, in fact, the first of many Bond parodies in *Cocksure*, and its referencing of Bond is apt, for as Jameson argues in his analysis of postmodernism, spy stories were among the first examples of a popular literature of "high-tech paranoia" whose narrativization of global conspiracy constitutes a "privileged representational shorthand for grasping a network of power and control even more difficult for our minds and imaginations to grasp: the whole new decentered global network of third stage capital itself" (37-38). Whereas Jameson's neo-Marxist project reads spy-thriller tropes as incipient "cognitive map[s]" (51) that might allow politically disoriented postmodern subjects to grasp their relationship to a decentered network of global oppression, in Richler's hands, such tropes are fodder for a Baudrillardian satire of postmodernism in which the Bond-villain wins.

The counterpart to Richler's triumphant supervillain is *Cocksure*'s virtuous but impotent phallic hero, Mortimer Griffin, a "satiric *ingénue*" (Ramraj 77) who occupies the structural position of James Bond to the Star Maker's Blofeld, but who is utterly incapable of outflanking and destroying his antagonist. Richler aligns Mortimer's humanistic belief in our innate potential for virtue

with the pop heroics of Bond most visibly by making Mortimer a national hero: his bravery is recognized by the Victoria Cross he receives for rescuing his superior officer in World War II. Like Bond's heroism, Mortimer's morality is also accorded a phallic dimension in the subplot involving Mortimer's persecution by Jacob Shalinsky, the wizened editor of *Jewish Thought*. Shalinsky hounds Mortimer throughout the novel, trying to get him to admit that beneath the Gentile façade he is actually a Jew. Shalinsky suggests that Mortimer's "Jewishness" is metaphorical, and his goodness makes him a moral "Jew" in an immoral world (211). Mortimer's marginalized "ethnic" morality is thereby implicitly identified with the larger-than-life phallic heroism of Bond through Mortimer's suspicion that "minority-group pricks (Jewish, Negro) were aggressively thicker and longer than WASP ones" (87). It is no coincidence, then, that Mortimer's "Jewish" moral heroism is literally marked on his body by a circumcision ("done for hygienic reasons" when he was two weeks old) that makes his wife wonder if his WASPy Ontario family is not concealing at least a little "Jewish blood" (83).

However, Mortimer never truly occupies the position of phallic hero that Shalinsky marks out for him. The schoolyard legends about minority anatomy only give him an inferiority complex, and, more generally, he misunderstands Shalinsky's attribution of Jewishness, wasting a great deal of time defensively (and guiltily) worrying over whether or not he has "a Jewish face" (83). This misunderstanding is one of the many ways that, despite its heroic promise, Mortimer's moral potency is deflated by the plot of *Cocksure* in the service of Richler's thesis that upstanding morality seems unable to stand up to the Star Maker's world of appearances.

Cocksure typically dramatizes postmodernism's dismemberment of the phallic hero in scenes that present Mortimer as a symbolically castrated "*Agent 007*." For instance, when Mortimer is summoned to the Star Maker's film studio to deliver mysterious medical files on Oriole employee, Polly Morgan, he witnesses a sinister episode involving the inflatable "Star" that echoes the Bond parody of the opening chapter. As the Star Maker's black-suited henchmen close in on the synthetic Star, brandishing "an incredible-looking machine with a menacing pump-like device attached" (131), Mortimer finds himself in a spy-thriller scenario where a genuine hero might flex his moral muscles. As the shrieking Star is deflated, however, Mortimer's heroic stature experiences a metaphorical version of the same fate; the passive protagonist is simply "hustled off" to deliver his files to the Star Maker (133). Mortimer's other opportunities to play Bond are similarly

abortive or farcical. Although he uncovers the murderous secret of the "Our Living History" biography series by snooping through Dino's files, his sleuthing turns out to have been stage-managed by Dino himself (123-24). When he confronts the Star Maker in his lair over the scandal of the deadly biographies, he ends up half-seduced by the Star Maker's offer to make him head of Oriole Press and promises to keep the villain's secrets (144). When he attempts to flee the Star Maker after learning that the next biography will be *Mortimer Griffin's Story* (213), he finds himself cornered, and the novel ends with his implied murder by the black-uniformed motorcycle riders. So much for the phallic heroism of the "Jewish" James Bond.

Rounding out this parodic depiction of Bond's international escapades are Mortimer's sexual follies, which take Bond's legendary priapism and replace it with introspection, neurosis, and impotence. Anything but "cocksure," Mortimer is cuckolded by his "friend" Ziggy, develops an "increasingly obsessive fear that he didn't have a big one" (86), and finds himself caught in a hollow performance of virility for his literary cronies—an act which involves flaunting prophylactics and aphrodisiacs that are never used, but that accumulate and silently reproach him from the locked cupboard where Mortimer hides them from his wife (94-95, 85). Similarly, Mortimer's "affairs" with beautiful women in the Star Maker's employ are largely illusory or sexless, deliberately evoking a contrast to Bond's bedroom prowess. For example, Mortimer's introduction to Rachel Coleman, the black Oriole librarian hired by the Star Maker, features language that directly parodies Bond's suave pickup lines and signature name inversion (63). Moreover, Rachel is a stereotypical Bond-girl: young, attractive, standoffish but come-hither, employed by the villain, and "a curiosity" (63). Whereas Bond would no doubt find her exoticism alluring, for Mortimer she precipitates a neurotic liberal crisis, as he is wracked with anxiety over how to behave: "Her perfume was bewitching, but he dared not sniff emphatically lest she think he believed colored people had a peculiar smell" (63). Later, when she consents to sleep with Mortimer, but only if he pays her—ostensibly to relieve his white liberal guilt—she confirms her role as a Richlerian version of the castrating femme fatale who threatens the phallic hero in Bond's misogynous adventures. Mortimer, whose "two-pronged" purpose (153) in following her to bed is be "grade[d]…for size" and cured of his impotence, ends up satisfied on neither account and tellingly flees her apartment when she reveals that she has been talking to Shalinsky: "in the buff, there's no mistaking a Jew man, is there, honey?" (155). Still failing to understand the import of the old

man's crusade to expose him as a Jew, Mortimer experiences Rachel's taunt as further persecution, rather than recognizing in her reference to his circumcision an ironic reminder of his untapped moral vigor.

The parodic framework of such episodes, which play Mortimer as a Bond *manqué*, already hints at Mortimer's absorption within the simulacrum, for his reenactment of Bond's film adventures mirrors his uncanny resemblance to "conventionally handsome" models from *Esquire* ads (25-26). In both cases, resemblance points to the generation of the real from preexisting models that are themselves utterly artificial, and to the resulting implosion of reality and fantasy. Significantly, the origin of Mortimer's impotence is precisely such an implosion. In a set piece that allows Richler to travesty avant-garde cinema, Mortimer attends the premier of Ziggy's formally pretentious and politically correct experimental film, *Different*. The movie's disjointed, new wave narrative represents "square" society's persecution of a repressed homosexual businessman and a closeted transsexual hockey player, culminating in an emblematic shot of WASP villainy: a "well-adjusted man peeling a banana" who turns out to be Mortimer himself, unwittingly captured by Ziggy's intrusive camera (55). The novel's subsequent chronicling of Mortimer's torment by "homosexual doubts" that leave him impotent (65) directly attributes the withering of the phallic hero to the breakdown of the conventional relation between screen image and real life in Ziggy's movie. This breakdown perfectly illustrates simulation's "artificial resurrection" of referents "in systems of signs, which are more ductile material than meaning" (Baudrillard, *Simulacra* 2). Ultimately, then, Mortimer's crisis dramatizes more than simply the semiotic postmodern "weightlessness" produced by the loss of "God" as a "guarantor" of the sign's relation to a recoverable "depth of meaning" that Baudrillard describes ("Precession" 196); it also dramatizes, with uncanny accuracy, the parallel collapse of the phallus as master signifier and guarantor of semiotic stability that Baudrillard-inspired cultural theorists Arthur and Marilouise Kroker allude to when they suggest that, in postmodernism, "the penis, both as protuberance and ideology, is already a spent force, a residual afterimage surplus to the requirements of telematic society" (95).

Fittingly, this trope of the obsolescent phallus emerges in Mortimer's encounters with the Star Maker, whose symbolic role as generator of this weightless universe of simulation makes him the ultimate source of Mortimer's real and metaphorical impotence. In fact, the Star Maker's bioengineered form and auto-reproductive capacity exemplify the "designer

bodies" and "technologies of sex which make possible a sex without secretions" to which the Krokers attribute the "burnout" of "the *postmodern penis*" (95). If Mortimer's own limp appendage attests to the symbolic obsolescence of his creed, then the scene in which the Star Maker lectures him on advanced Russian techniques of penile enhancement (200-201) emblematically anticipates the simulacrum's fatal absorption of the phallic hero: here, the phallus becomes another example of a dead God whose resurrection becomes undecidable and irrelevant because, in a simulated universe, "everything is," so to speak, "already dead and risen in advance" (Baudrillard, "Precession" 197).

The implied murder of Mortimer at the hands of the Star Maker's black-suited motorcycle men literalizes this process of the phallic hero's liquidation by forces of the simulacrum. It does so, moreover, in a final parody of the Bond films that cleverly merges the two lines of mock-Bond adventure pursued in the novel so far: Mortimer's passive non-conflict with the Bond-villain on the one hand, and his humiliating love affair with an exotic Bond-girl on the other. In the final chapters of the novel, Mortimer conducts an affair with Polly Morgan, the "bewitchingly gorgeous," but "puzzling, somewhat abstracted" editor whom the Star Maker's henchman Dino has placed in charge of the "Cinemagician" series at Oriole (36). This affair is somewhat illusory, however, since Polly is a "creature of a generation"—the postmodern generation—whose sense of lived experience has been utterly absorbed into the simulacrum of cinema images she worships. She even lives her life in crosscuts, jump-cuts, close-ups, pullbacks, and montages. Mortimer's vision, too, is affected by her bizarre perspective, and he remains sexually unfulfilled because "their affair, such as it was, had only been consummated on the wide screen of her imagination" (197). In the end, his fate is sealed by Polly's inability to heed her lover's desperate plea for help: "This is no movie. This is real. Understand?" (215). Treating the encroaching threat of the motorcycle riders as a thrilling big screen climax to be milked for suspense, she fails to summon the police and remains blissfully unaware that she has doomed the hero. The novel ends with a vision focalized through Polly, on "the wide screen that was her mind's eye" (215). This hallucinatory reverie pointedly replaces any dramatization of the murder that is about to occur with a simulated fantasy that its dreamer no longer recognizes as such, precisely because her perspective epitomizes the implosion of reality and illusion that has now usurped the narrator's voice and completely taken over both text and world:

> [S]irens sounded, police cars heaving into Beaufort Street in the nick of time. Crowds formed. They embraced. Somewhere in the night a bird was singing. Tomorrow the sun would come up. Tomorrow and tomorrow. Old Sol, she thought. (216)

Her unwitting allusion to the nihilistic soliloquy from *Macbeth* while rhapsodically contemplating "Old Sol"—yet another nostalgic image of a dead master-signifier—is Richler's final comment on the absurdity of the postmodern world that is "full of sound and fury, / Signifying nothing" (V.5.27-28). Mortimer's disappearance from the narrative at the very moment that his story reaches its culmination is, furthermore, a telling anticlimax. Denied even a death scene, Richler's phallic hero simply withers away.

Richler's Obscenities

In her "Abandoned Introduction" to the novel, Germaine Warkentin answers Philip Toynbee's charge that "[i]t is quite impossible to detect the moral platform on which Mr. Richler is standing [in *Cocksure*], and from which his darts are launched" (qtd. in Warkentin 83), arguing that, on the contrary, *Cocksure* is an "unremittingly moral" (Warkentin 83) satire whose hero "poses a real threat to the Star Maker's power" simply by virtue of the fact that "he tells the truth" (84-85). Richler's frank disclosure of his views on the serious writer's moral vocation in interviews tends to support Warkentin's reading (Gibson 271). Considered on its own terms, however, the slippery humour of *Cocksure* makes Toynbee's complaint worth revisiting. This is not primarily because, as Toynbee contends, in order to write "a really good satire [Richler] will have to learn not only what he hates, but where he hates it from" (qtd. in Warketin 83). If the novel proposes no clear, practical alternative to the morally bankrupt world it projects, that is not because Richler needs to "learn" anything *per se*; it is, rather, the result of an internal contradiction that arises from the novel's own fatal implication in the serious reckoning with the free-floating codes of postmodernism it performs. *Cocksure*'s satire, in this sense, is a victim of its own success, for the novel's evocation of a postmodern precession of simulacra feels, by the end, so totalizing that it seems completely to demolish any ground on which its doomed hero—or even its author—might stand. As Jameson argues in his famous account of the postmodern eclipse of parody by pastiche, one of the casualties of a "postlitera[te]" late capitalist world dominated by "a field of stylistic and discursive heterogeneity without a norm" is any stable notion of satire (17). Pastiche follows parody's method of imitation, but "it is a neutral practice of such mimicry, without any of parody's ulterior motives, amputated of

the satiric impulse, devoid of laughter and of any conviction that alongside the abnormal tongue you have momentarily borrowed, some healthy linguistic normality still exists" (17). Richler's novel is neither "amputated of the satiric impulse" nor "devoid of laughter," so it is obviously not a pastiche in the Jamesonian sense. Nonetheless, and despite Richler's "ulterior motives," the contradiction between the satiric aims of the novel's parody and the corrosive implications of its critique of postmodernism produces an impasse not unrelated to the "blank parody" (17) produced by pastiche. In presenting a chimerical world of images where the real has become hyperreal, and where normative moral statements and their satiric counterparts find it impossible to gain traction, Richler has, as it were, pulled the rug out from under himself. He leaves us with a satire that crackles with rage and a yearning for "vengeance" (Gibson 269), yet, at the same time, seems curiously hopeless, a resigned expression of "disgust" for a postmodern scene from which there appears to be no exit.

Richler appears to be aware of this dilemma. Despite his desire to be "an honest witness to what I do know" (Gibson 269), the apparent impossibility of creating meaningful political art by any traditional means in the postmodern context profoundly complicates such aspirations. Richler dramatizes this problem in the novel through the metafictional trope of Mortimer's "indictment" of the Star Maker—a written brief detailing all the secrets of the Star Maker's fearsome simulations that Mortimer entrusts, rather ambiguously, to Shalinsky, from whom he extorts a promise not to publish the document unless he or Polly come to harm. Shalinsky's decision to ignore his promise and publish the document anyway, changing the names so that he cannot be sued for libel, is equally ambiguous. His unwitting sabotage of Mortimer's only potential power over the Star Maker suggests, perhaps, Richler's own uncertainty about the power and, indeed, the possibility, of truth-telling in a postmodern world. On the one hand, Shalinsky styles himself as a political artist who turns the paper he steals from businesses into a utopian medium for social transformation: "What do they need paper for?" he asks Mortimer, answering, "Bookkeeping. But for a poet with a pencil and a paper…*magic*" (209). In other words, Shalinsky articulates a liberal vision of the artist who can still imagine an efficacious cultural politics. On the other hand, his inability to recognize Mortimer's referential indictment of the Star Maker as anything but "a fantasy" couched in dull language that was "too dry, and even legalistic" (212), recalls the callow studio audience of *Insult*, who are so dazzled by Digby Jones's media circus that they cannot register Mortimer's

VC as the meaningful signifier of a moral act (186-91). In this way, Richler aligns Shalinsky with the semiotic implosion of sign and referent that characterizes the simulacrum, and makes the old man's boasts about the social relevance of his art appear self-deluding. If this is the fate of representation in postmodernity, Richler seems to ask, what practical value can his own political art possess? On what basis, if any, might the postmodern satirist retain his historic power to disturb, to defamilizarize, to incite?

Unlike Baudrillard, whose work throughout the late 1970s and 80s increasingly emphasized simulation's triumph as a *fait accompli* and thus moved "into a more nihilistic, cynical, and apolitical theoretical field" (Best and Kellner 122), there are ways in which *Cocksure* stops just short of such an apocalyptic pronouncement, even if it frequently adopts a fatalistic and cynical pose to drive home its satirical barbs. For instance, despite the novel's pessimistic allegory about postmodernity's liquidation of traditional moral values, one may at least register the moral obscenity of Mortimer's murder *as obscene*—a judgement that is only possible because, as the novel represents it, the triumph of simulation remains (however minimally) incomplete. The Star Maker, for all the power that his nebulous global empire commands, requires an heir precisely because he is more vulnerable than he seems (72). Ziggy's outrage about censorship in the Western media is another case in point: his "artistic dream" that it will one day "be possible to show fucking on the screen" (197) has not yet come to pass in the manner he would like, a holdup which confirms his belief that "so long as you couldn't pull your cock on TV his artistic freedom was impaired" (56). *Cocksure*'s strategy for retaining its power as satire hinges on just such an impairment of the pornographer's artistic license—an impairment that Richler dramatizes at the level of content through a minor character like Ziggy. Through the gap in the simulacrum produced by, for instance, Ziggy's concern about "censorship," *Cocksure*'s obscenities are not simply trivial examples of how "Richler succeeds more in entertaining than vexing the world" (Ramraj 79). The obscenities are not merely symptoms of the same "ecstasy of communication" the novel diagnoses. These are, rather, brash attempts to beat simulation at its own game, and thus to shore up a semiotic system whose distinctions have not yet completely collapsed into a "a field of stylistic and discursive heterogeneity without norm" (Jameson 17). If Richler can stay one step ahead of the simulation models that render social relations increasingly "absurd," his novel might yet salvage the power to shock through the sheer brutality of its excesses. In so doing, *Cocksure* would not only galvanize a

sagging system of signs whose total collapse could yield only flaccid satire, it might also recuperate some vestige of the moral ground that seems, by the novel's end, to have disappeared.

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Tammy Armstrong

Flight Stop—After Michael Snow's Eaton Centre Installation

From their vantage point they navigated poorly:
this black cherubim in the glass house,
in the majestic fray of neo-market stalls and food courts—
fibreglass geese far from land of a thousand lakes
into the rib-work of the shopping district.

Overnight they claimed the fall,
the white-out fields
rounded as a boiled egg—
so simple to follow a given horizon, a driving light.

But this peregrination . . .
management wanted red ribbons lacing their necks,
wanted the geese, caught above the silk hydrangeas
festive for Christmas,
saw nothing odd with installation as decoration.

A flight stop in debate
above escalators and a PA system
with its scroll of lost children.
It was unappreciated velocity.
It was a gaggle through the glass house—
so many over-head to remind the shoppers below:
look beyond,
at least look
to see you are missing the point.

Stephen Dunning

What Would Sam Waters Do?
Guy Vanderhaeghe and Søren Kierkegaard

> He takes a step towards me [Ed]. I find myself thinking very hard. The inevitable question arises. What would Sam Waters do in such a situation? I have a good idea what Sam would do, but I know equally well that I am incapable of imitation.
> —Guy Vanderhaeghe, "Sam, Soren, and Ed"

> Reflection is not the evil; but a reflective condition and the deadlock which it involves, by transforming the capacity for action into a means of escape from action, is both corrupt and dangerous, and leads in the end to a retrograde movement.
> —Søren Kierkegaard, *The Present Age*

Guy Vanderhaeghe is probably best known today as a regional, western Canadian writer with a strong bent towards historical fiction who, like his co-regionalists Robert Kroetsch and Rudy Wiebe, offers meticulously researched and darkly disturbing tales that challenge what were once comforting metanarratives of national expansion and consolidation. Witness *The Englishman's Boy* in which Shorty McAdoo finally recounts his story of the infamous Cypress Hill Massacre (1873), thereby discrediting a Hollywood producer's attempt to appropriate the event as nationalist propaganda. This authorial agenda, which here and elsewhere deconstructs European cultural pretensions, has led many to read Vanderhaeghe as a thoroughly secular, postmodern author in Jean-Francios Lyotard's sense of the word, namely one deeply suspicious of all metanarrative—including, of course, religious metanarrative (xxiv).[1] Sue Sorensen, however, proves an exception, showing in her recent essay that his fiction is deeply engaged with religious matters, which should not surprise given that Vanderhaeghe in an early interview not only identifies the Bible as his foremost influence, but also confesses to being a Christian, though he adds he may be "an eccentric and anarchic one" (28). Morris Wolfe, the interviewer (like many readers), simply assumes he is at most "agnostic" (Wolfe 28).

While Sorensen's article does a thorough job of pointing to the religious elements in much of his authorship, focusing particularly on *The Trouble with Heroes* (1983), *The Englishman's Boy* (1996) and *The Last Crossing* (2002), it effectively ignores what are arguably the most significant early works for such a study: "Man Descending" and "Sam, Soren and Ed" from *Man Descending* (1982) and *My Present Age* (1984).[2] This lacuna in both Sorensen's otherwise admirable article and in general readings of Vanderhaeghe's authorship probably results from most critics' relative unfamiliarity with Søren Kierkegaard, the nineteenth-century Danish existentialist and theologian who significantly informs these crucial early works.[3]

Vanderhaeghe provides numerous hermeneutical clues that Kierkegaard holds the philosophical key to the Ed stories. During an interview with Don Swaim, for example, he reveals that he based the character of Ed on Kierkegaard himself, given that both deliberately "set their face" against their cultures. Then there is the clear testimony of the texts themselves: titles, epigraphs, quotations, and allusions—all referencing Kierkegaard. These early stories also employ a rhetorical strategy in keeping with Kierkegaard who spoke through many alter egos and personae, a vital component of his trademark "indirect communication."[4] Moreover, Vanderhaeghe's ingenious incorporation of Kierkegaard's existential stages (or spheres) within *My Present Age*,[5] along with allusions to Kierkegaard's *The Present Age,* which accounts for the novel's title and one of its two epigraphs, provides a compelling interpretive framework within which to read Ed and his world.[6]

Indeed, the three Ed pieces self-consciously invite collective treatment, and witness to Vanderhaeghe's progressive exploration of a fascinating Kierkegaardian problematic. In the first story, for example, Ed twice describes himself as "a man descending" ("Man Descending" 192, 200). He uses a similar metaphor to convey his plight near the conclusion of *My Present Age* (232), thus bringing him full circle, and presumably, to the "bottom of [his] own graph" ("Man Descending" 193). The second piece, "Sam, Soren, and Ed," explores the source of Ed's "inertia," the achievements, the heights from which Ed slides, but it does more, making explicit what the first only hints at through the generic "Man" in its title. Then, the novel picks up and develops thoroughly the Kierkegaardian analysis of Ed's plight that remains merely nascent in the second story, while also tracing the origins of the dialectic between Ed and Sam Waters, his fictional alter ego and ethical yardstick.

In the end, Ed emerges as a Kierkegaardian ironist, a man suspended between the aesthetic and ethical spheres, incapacitated by both physical

and moral cowardice. And despite his vigorous ethical denunciation of his age, he also represents his culture, for at root all such denunciation reveals itself as consciously suppressed self-loathing, a deliberate flight from self. In Ed, as it were, the culture's unconscious spiritual bankruptcy and despair have come to brief consciousness. But a Kierkegaardian reading also points toward a remedy in the elusive person of Bill Sadler, the placard-wielding, religious ethicist who alone escapes narrative censure, and with whom Ed longs to talk. Kierkegaard, however, repeatedly warns against the temptation of trying to establish a direct aesthetic relationship to religion, thereby (in his estimation) transforming what must be existentially appropriated into something that can be intellectually contemplated, and in turn, indefinitely deferring decision within reflection's interminable dialectic. By denying Ed the opportunity to interrogate this character, the novel thus opens an apophatic space, therein suggesting the possibility of recovery for both Ed and his present age.[7]

Man Descending

The first Ed story and title piece of Vanderhaeghe's collection, *Man Descending*, is relatively straightforward.[8] It describes a disastrous New Year's Eve party, during which Ed confronts and fights his wife's lover. The story ends with Victoria rescuing him, but also announcing that their marriage is over. In the events leading up to the fight, we discover that while Ed is obnoxiously sociopathic and pathetically infantile, he is also extraordinarily amusing and bright—indeed, bright enough to theorize about his own proclivity for failure, a theorizing that also typifies his subsequent incarnations. As Charles Forceville notes, Ed's linguistic virtuosity, personal ideals, and psychological acumen (at least when attending to others) point to his extraordinary intelligence and partially account for his appeal (54-55). Vanderhaeghe's characters are driven by ideas, and Ed's undoubted intelligence thus allows Vanderhaeghe to overcome some of the limitations of first-person narration. Here Ed provides a general theory within which to understand individual descent:

> [Every life] could be graphed: an ascent that rises to a peak, pauses at a particular node, and then descends. Only the gradient changes in any particular case. . . .
>
> [I sense] my feet are on the down slope. I know now that I have begun the inevitable descent, the leisurely glissade which will finally topple me at the bottom of my own graph. A man descending is propelled by inertia; the only initiative left him is whether or not he decides to enjoy the passing scene. (192-193)

While Ed's penetrating (often outrageous) humour and general linguistic eclat indicate the personal heights from which he descends, his pathological social ineptitude and failing marriage testify to the descent itself.

"Sam, Soren, and Ed" not only elaborates upon Ed's personal decline, but also locates it within a larger cultural descent, most immediately from the elevated idealism of the 1960's, but ultimately from the (romanticized) heights of mediaeval Christendom. Ed has degenerated markedly since the decisive party of the previous story. Having lost Victoria, he spends his unemployed weekdays enjoying the "passing scene," his "fat ass" pinched by the slats of a park bench (201). Without Victoria's maternal intervention, he has become increasingly unkempt, unmotivated, and unhealthy. Yet Vanderhaeghe would not have us write him off as simply an eccentric misfit. Ed implicitly numbers himself amongst the "truly representative figures of Western decadence" in the park, those indicators of "the mass of gluttony, lechery, sloth and violence which lurks below the surface of society" (201). While his lechery seems limited to mild voyeurism, to "eyeing the nymphets" (201), he qualifies immediately as paradigmatic glutton and sloth. His violence also soon manifests itself.[9]

Ed targets Benny, an old friend, for his most vitriolic verbal assaults. Yet no matter how abusive Ed becomes, the victim remains unsympathetic. According to Ed, "[during] the late sixties and early seventies Benny was a priapic, hairy activist," a "great nay-sayer and boycotter" who "walked around with a millennial light in his eyes. He intended to dedicate his life to eternal servitude in a legal-aid clinic. . . . He was a kind of moral standard . . . " (208):

> But that evangelistic Benny is no more. He's dead. Affluence did him in. The hirsute, wild-eyed Benny is transmogrified. He is razor-cut and linen-suited. His ass cupped lovingly in the contoured leather seats of his BMW, he tools around town on the prowl for extra-marital snarf. (208)

That Benny has chosen to represent Victoria in her divorce proceedings does not account adequately for Ed's anger. Benny has betrayed more than personal loyalties: he has abandoned the idealism of a quintessentially idealistic generation, an idealism that Ed salutes and cherishes even though he could never make it his own, as he later admits in *My Present Age* (96).

Yet, if the sixties emerge as the "node," the heights from which Ed personally descends, the story also treats this era as merely the latest attempt to recover something Ed senses we have collectively lost, some elevation of the human spirit once encouraged and supported by traditions we have abandoned. As witnessed above, Ed renders Benny, the representative of this

revolutionary period, in heavily religious language, the same language he uses (again ironically) to portray the struggling YWCA runners whom Ed watches regularly from his bench, as we learn at the beginning of the story. For example, he describes them as the "sheep which comprise [his] fold," and hails them as "Marys full of grace" (203) as they struggle down the "via dolorosa to health and beauty. . ." (202). That they belong to the YWCA, of course, also underscores the secularizing forces now driving the culture.

The story, however, shows no interest whatsoever in all that the term "organized religion" attempts to capture, from ecclesial structures to dogma. Rather, Ed implies that Christianity once encouraged significant action, providing a metanarrative that guaranteed moral guidance and transcendent meaning. Perhaps Ed saluted the medieval mind that embraced the metaphor of world as book. Ed's desperate quest for authority does indicate that he longed for an *auctor* to write (right?) him, an ultimate guarantor of meaning. That he opts for an "ordeal" to win back Victoria, an opportunity to "face the scaly green dragon of Sloth and the basilisk of Irresponsibility," as he puts it, displays in her words, the "positively medieval" bent of his mind (224). Ed thus intimates, albeit through ironic hyperbole, that Christendom once provided what Vanderhaeghe elsewhere refers to as "metaphysical support" for honourable behaviour, for a chivalric courage that we have lost today. And while Vanderhaeghe admits in the same interview that an oppressive chauvinism often attended such chivalry, he implies that it need not (Wyile "Making History" 49). This partially accounts for the pedigree of Sam Waters, the hero of Ed's western, *Cool, Clear Waters.* A secularized knight errant in cowboy spurs, he ultimately derives from the same stock as the Jesuit martyr, Brebeuf, to whom Ed also likens himself (216).[10]

As the title of the story indicates, Sam Waters figures largely in the puzzle that is Ed. He attributes Sam to some "strange vein" (221) in his psyche that he tapped "in that sad time after the failure of the second Big Book" (220), but he confesses that he does not know where Sam originates. Later, in *My Present Age*, Ed discovers that Sam emerged from his mental breakdown, proving to be a character in the "message" Ed delivered in his madness.

Sam emerges into Ed's consciousness several times in the story, near the beginning when Ed is physically threatened by Mr. Kung Fu after Ed grabs Victoria; again when Victoria bites his thumb, neither breaking the skin nor discolouring the nail; and then near the end, when Ed begins his training for his ordeal, the River Run. In the first instance, he notes that Sam would have handled the contretemps in a "more efficient, more *masculine* manner" (207);

in the second, he compares his sufferings to Sam's, letting out an "exquisitely pitiful moan" (216); and in the third, he spins a story in which Sam is fleeing naked from Shoshone braves, and becomes involved in his fantasy to the point that he begins weaving down the road, causing cars to honk at him. But whereas Sam sprints for his life across the desert, oblivious to the cactus thorns embedded in his feet, and then eludes his pursuers by plunging into an icy river, Ed arrives home "coughing and retching" having run a "considerable way. . . . Perhaps as far as a mile" (228). The bathos is unmistakable.

Thus, because Sam provides Ed with a "yardstick against which [to measure his] conduct" (222), his alter ego serves only to underscore the gap between Ed's ethical ideality and his reality, usually comically—as the above examples suggest. Beneath this comedy, however, lies the tragedy. Ed recognizes that this figure of "awesome substantiality" "says something unflattering about his admirer" (222). But he may not realize that his fascination with Sam debilitates rather than inspires him. He knows that Sam is everything he is not, but would like to be (207, 222-23). Paradoxically, by hiding imaginatively within Sam, he confirms himself in his despair, a despair arising from the conviction that what he desires most will be denied him, that he can only *be* Sam in his fantasies. Too perceptive to remain blind to his despair, and too weak and frightened to face it, he instead treats himself as a jest. But the suffering from which he turns cannot be remedied by humour, and when the laughter dissipates, the pain of his imprisonment remains, causing Ed to lash out at the "visible excreta" of his life, punching a bathroom mirror with his fist and shattering plates (226). Indeed, this dynamic finds itself worked out formally in the movement within many chapters of the novel that follows: intense comedy giving way unexpectedly to tragedy, often leaving Ed in tears and the reader strangely moved.

Whereas Sam emphasizes the gap between Ed's ideals and his reality, Soren provides existential courage. Ed, for example, first adverts to Kierkegaard, the "old humpbacked cigar-puffing Dane," immediately after he begins to accept responsibility for his life and to consider the suffering that his condition entails: "[But] those dirty dishes are mine. It is *my* filth in the bathroom. And I am living this crazy goddamn life stuck in neutral. All this is my mess, not Victoria's" (226). Elsewhere, he cites a passage from Kierkegaard's *Journals* that a former philosophy professor would quote whenever his students "malingered or bitched about the work load": "There is nothing everyone is so afraid of as being told how vastly much he is capable of. . . . You would be furious with him who told you so, and only call that person

your friend who bolsters you in saying: 'No, this I cannot bear, this is beyond my strength, etc.'" (226). This entry complements another passage from the *Journals* that Ed tells us he will use as an epigraph for *Cool, Clear Waters*, his Western about Sam (and with which Vanderhaeghe ends the story):

> What ability there is in an individual may be measured by the yardstick of how far there is between his *understanding* and his *will*. What a person can *understand* he must also be able to force himself to *will*. Between understanding and willing is where excuses and evasions have their being. (230)

The ending of the story, however, may leave readers deeply puzzled. On the one hand, Ed shows signs of existential maturity. He has secured a job selling china at Eatons, and has trained diligently for the River Run. On the other, he hyperbolizes his suffering at the hands of his customers, these "blue-haired hags" who drive him to think of Kierkegaard, amazed at his "capacity to absorb abuse" (229). And he offers unconvincing excuses for not participating in the Run, his medieval ordeal and chance to recover Victoria. Is this conscious or unconscious duplicity?

Ed confesses to being "overcome with stark anxiety" (219) when confronted by his failures, and this anxiety suggests that he intentionally blinds himself. According to Kierkegaard, anxiety increases as we become aware of our freedom, of the terrifying possibilities open to the self and the responsibility this entails. We became dizzy with freedom, and often paralyzed with sympathetic-antipathetic dread.[11] Thus anxiety reveals its paradoxical dialectic: Ed can only blind himself to something he sees, only flee from freedom through freedom.

This helps to explain the irony of his identification with Kierkegaard. True, Kierkegaard had "much the same effect on people" as Ed (214), but with one important difference: while the Dane offended others in his struggle to *become* himself, Ed offends in his struggle to *avoid* becoming himself. Moreover, Ed's allusion to Kierkegaard's relationship with Regina (214) is ludicrous. Kierkegaard broke with Regina to save her from himself; Ed pursues Victoria to burden her with himself. Thus, as the title suggests, Ed ultimately uses Kierkegaard like he uses Sam, as more material for his personal fantasies, as one more way to avoid his own reality. He begins the story watching others training for the River Run, and he ends the story watching others participate in the Run. Kierkegaard may be "slowly supplanting Sam Waters as [his] guide through life's pitfalls" (229), but Ed's self-deception has merely deepened. He has not simply come full circle at the end of the story: rather he has slid further down the spiralling loops of his personal graph.

My Present Age

At one point in "Sam, Soren, and Ed," Ed confesses, "Sometimes I feel entirely disassociated from what I do. It's a malady of the modern age" (211). *My Present Age* provides not only a much more detailed study of Ed's pathology, but also a framework within which to understand both his malady and the malady of the age. The novel's two epigraphs[12] from the 1984 edition help to establish this framework:

> But the present generation, wearied by its chimerical efforts, relapses into complete indolence. Its condition is that of a man who has only fallen asleep towards morning: first of all come great dreams, then a feeling of laziness, and finally a witty or clever excuse for remaining in bed.
> —Soren Kierkegaard, *The Present Age* (1846)

> No mistaking them for people of these parts, even if I hadn't remembered their faces. Both of them are obvious dwellers in the valley of the shadow of books.
> —George Gissing, *New Grub Street* (1891)

As in the previous story, Vanderhaeghe immediately establishes Ed as representative of his age, for the opening of the novel finds him in bed, spending yet another "luxurious" morning, "rereading *The Last of the Mohicans, Shane, Kidnapped* or *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*" (*My Present Age* 1). We learn that he quit his job at Eatons (rather than wait to be fired because of his rudeness to customers) when his father cashed in an insurance policy and gave Ed the money, encouraged by his signs of growing maturity. Here Vanderhaeghe resolves the ambiguity surrounding the authenticity of Ed's reformation in the previous story, for he has visibly declined, beginning the novel in worse shape than ever.

Yet Ed provides more than a parable on modern life: he also analyzes the forces at work in his culture. Using a distinctly Kierkegaardian paradigm, Ed divides his contemporaries into complicators and simplifiers. Complicators, of whom Benny provides the best example, find "safety in numbers, people, things. It doesn't matter. [They take] pleasure in possessions" (33). Ed expands: "The thing is, Benny believes in data and sensation. He believes that his perplexity is a result of not having enough information, and his lust the result of too few women. Hence his belief in one more feature-length article in *Time* or one more bimbo" (34).

Ed cites Bill Sadler, one of the key figures in the novel, as the "ultimate" simplifier:

> The very antithesis of your bet-hedging, quibbling complicator, Sadler wants Truth with a capital T. He always did. And when he signed on with the

> Independent Pre-Millennial Church of God's First Chosen, or whatever they call themselves, he didn't go making his membership contingent on a bunch of mental reservations. No sir. He understood that being one of God's First Chosen isn't easy. He swallowed it whole. I kind of admire that. (32)

Ed's categories of complicator and simplifier correspond closely to Kierkegaard's aesthetic and ethico-religious stages or spheres of existence.[13] Those in the aesthetic stage avoid making existentially significant decisions by immersing themselves in sensuality (their categories being pleasure and pain) or by thinking about life (their categories being the interesting and the boring), depending upon their location within the aesthetic stage, whether near the immediate or the reflective pole.[14] That Vanderhaeghe chooses a lawyer to represent the aesthetic over against the ethical is telling, for it suggests that at some point in our history the ethical and the legal parted company, an indictment he drives home by having Benny insist upon the distinction between ethics and law in his dispute with Ed over the Balzac collection, which Victoria had purchased for Ed just before their breakup and with which Ed refuses to part, because he sees it as a symbol of her love for him, an interpretation that she vigorously denies (96).

Ethicists conversely choose decisively, that is, they have decided they will make decisions that count absolutely, decisions between good and evil in which they will define themselves unequivocally. According to Kierkegaard, by deciding to decide, they make the first absolute choice for good. Or, one might say that they have chosen to take responsibility for themselves, not as they might like themselves to be, but as they are, warts, failures and all, which helps to explain why Kierkegaard sometimes refers to choosing oneself as a form of repentance and why this choice necessarily entails suffering. Essentially, then, ethicists have consolidated themselves in time, chosen themselves as definite, concrete ethical beings.

With the exception of Bill Sadler, the fictional Sam Waters, and Ed, all of the major characters in the book fall into the aesthetic sphere: "Hideous" Marsha, Bill's estranged wife, lives for pleasure, and not particularly refined pleasures at that, since Ed identifies her as a fast-food heiress. Victoria is every bit as much an aesthete as her friend, though her tastes are more cultured. Stanley Rubacek is interested only in commercial literary success, turning his mendacious tale of incarceration into a saleable commodity. And none of the minor characters shows any sign of ethical seriousness either. Everyone, aside from Bill and Ed, could be regarded as another version of Benny.

Ed, however, does not achieve the status of simplifier, even though he claims to seek it (34). Rather he remains suspended somewhere between the two spheres, caught, as it were, between Benny and Bill. Kierkegaard identifies this boundary condition as irony, a state resembling the reflective pole of the aesthetic stage, but with some important differences. The movement from the reflective pole to irony requires a shift in emphasis or perspective. Where the reflective aesthete focuses upon his own ideality to the exclusion of historical actuality (or perhaps uses reality merely as material for abstraction and fantasy), the ironist attends to the disparity between the two, to the failure of reality to measure up to his ideality. Kierkegaard describes the effect of this upon the ironist: "[the] whole of existence [becomes] alien to the ironic subject. . . . [He] in turn [becomes] estranged from existence, and . . . because actuality [loses] its validity for him, so he, too, is to a certain extent no longer [historically] actual" (*The Concept of Irony* 276).

So, both reflective aesthetes and ironists escape real self-knowledge, aesthetes by abandoning themselves to speculation and fantasy, ironists by pointing their fingers at others. Ed, of course, does some of both, but his biting wit, keen sense of betrayal at the hands of his friends, and characteristic sociopathy all identify Ed as principally an ironist, as does his acute awareness of the gap between his ideals (embodied in his alter ego Sam) and his reality.

Vanderhaeghe's focus in the novel, however, is not simply on Ed *qua* individual, or even on Ed *as* representative individual. As the title of the novel suggests, he is exploring the dialectic between Ed and his age. And to understand this dialectic, we must consider Kierkegaard's text, *The Present Age*. Granted, one might immediately object that the two cultures—mid-nineteenth century Denmark and late twentieth-century Canada—are too radically different to enable a useful comparison. Above all, the Denmark Kierkegaard addressed was thoroughly Christian (at least in its own estimation), while Ed's culture is decidedly post-Christian, to judge by the prevailing aesthetic consciousness. How then can allusion to Kierkegaard's text critiquing a different culture prove pertinent?

One general response might be that Vanderhaeghe's Canada simply occupies a further place along the historical trajectory that Kierkegaard identifies. And, indeed, Kierkegaard attacks a number of forces within his culture that also characterize Ed's age, most of which can be captured by the process of levelling, driven in large part by an envious, incapacitating reflection.

By levelling, Kierkegaard adverts to a cultural ethos that deeply resents—and therefore refuses to acknowledge—significant aesthetic and moral differences

among people.[15] While, in a previous age, people might openly envy or even banish the great, recognizing the rebuke and call of greatness, Kierkegaard's society simply denies these distinctions (*The Present Age* 50). One strategy is to invoke the category of "The Public" to suppress those who are truly exceptional, thus providing numerical ballast for opinions/positions that have no intrinsic qualitative merit, a tactic of the Press that Kierkegaard particularly loathed and to which he was subjected (58-64). Kierkegaard here identifies one of the prominent features of modernity, namely the displacement of qualitative by quantitative discourse, which Margaret Atwood also deplores in her dystopian novel, *Oryx and Crake*. More significantly, however, the Public is an abstraction in which individuals lose their concrete identity and thus their personal responsibility (*The Present Age* 52-54). As Kierkegaard puts it elsewhere, "The Crowd is untruth" ("On the Dedication to 'That Single Individual'"). Thus both objectivity and subjectivity become compromised.

Kierkegaard identifies reflection as the major levelling force in his age. He claims that it is not evil in itself, but becomes so when it produces a deadlock, thereby "transforming the capacity for action into a means of escape from action" (*The Present Age* 68). As he argues elsewhere in his critique of the Hegelian System, the dialectic of reflection is internally interminable. To move from reflection to action requires passionate choice, but this is particularly difficult in an age governed by "passionless envy," a "ressentiment" that denies "that eminent distinction really is distinction. Neither does it understand itself by recognizing distinction negatively (as in the case of ostracism [of the great]) but wants to drag it down, wants to belittle it so that it really ceases to distinguished" (*The Present Age* 51).

While he identifies levelling forces as demonic (*The Present Age* 54, 82), he notes that they make possible a positive spiritual movement, in which every individual (stripped of mediating persons—the great, the saintly, the exceptional) now stands equally before God, and may leap over "the sharp scythe of the leveler" into the "arms of God"—if he or she can find the courage (*The Present Age* 82; cf. 37, 56, 58). Similarly, he argues that "[man's] only salvation lies in the reality of religion for each individual" (56).

Ed's narrative stance as ironist protects the novel from didacticism, viewing religious life tragically from underneath (as it were), but all other forms of life comically from above. And because aesthetics dominates the novel, so does comedy. But Vanderhaeghe still preserves the heart of Kierkegaard's critique, reifying the levelling process in the character of Tom Rollins, "The Beast," whom Ed vilifies in the opening words of the novel, alluding directly

to the Antichrist of the Apocalypse. As radio talk host of "A Piece of Your Mind," Rollins combines the powers of the Press and public opinion that Kierkegaard despised. Moreover, at the incitement of McMurtry (Ed's downstairs neighbour), he publicly and unjustly persecutes Ed, talking about him on the radio. In one show, he reads a letter entitled "Dear Aggrieved," rebuking Ed for not contributing to society, in which Rollins sees himself as a shining light, one of the tallest trees in the social forest, as he puts it (154). The letter itself is a mish-mash of populist political cliché, which of course, "struck a chord in the greater public" (155). One grade seven teacher, who required her class to listen to the show because it was "contemporary issues oriented," ordered a hundred copies (155-56). Vanderhaeghe simply allows The Beast's vitriolic drivel to testify against him, contrasting it with Ed's linguistic precision and originality. Similarly, Ed mocks the related shift towards quantitative discourse: first, in reference to the "visual chaos" of the city, in which "the golden arches of the House of Mcdonald" with its boast of "4.6 billion burgers sold" figure largely (99-100); and second, in his conversation with the cretinous Rubacek about "intelligent quotient" (133), in which Ed refuses to play the numbers game, defining genius instead as "the infinite capacity for taking pains" (134).

More significantly, the whole novel revolves around an issue at the heart of *The Present Age:* the flight from reality (with its painful self knowledge and demands for decisive action) into fantastic reflection. And here Ed represents rather than rebukes his culture, though undoubtedly from a position of greater consciousness.[16] Ironically, however, Ed's flight from self closely resembles a quest for self, a resemblance that may trick some readers into misconstruing the ending of the work.

Ed's "message" holds the key. We discover that he penned it during a mental breakdown several years before the period of his life covered by the short stories and the novel. While shock treatment may have erased it from his conscious memory, it simply drove it deeper "into hiding," as Ed puts it (*My Present Age* 209). When he finally finds the courage to read the message, to allow it, in his words, to "witness" to him, he discovers the origins of Sam Waters (*My Present Age* 208). This "crazy manuscript" (205) takes as its epigraph the concluding words of *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*:

> If I'd a' knowed what a trouble it was to make a book I wouldn't a' tackled it, and ain't a-going to no more. But I reckon I got to light out for the territory ahead of the rest, because Aunt Sally she's going to adopt me and sivilize me, and I can't stand it. I been there before. (*My Present Age* 206)

The message itself tells a deceptively simple tale. Sam wanders into a saloon in a Kansas railhead town and encounters a drunk "not above thirty-five" (211)—close enough to Ed's age—who burdens Sam with his life's story. The "juicehead" turns out to be Huck Finn, his spirit having been broken in a Yankee jail after being captured at Vicksburg. The friend (clearly Tom Sawyer) who persuaded him to fight for the Southern cause, took "a Yankee minie ball plumb dead center in the head" during this battle, after "a-ridin' back 'n forth in the enemy fire, his hair a-blowin' ever' which way, a-wavin' his sword and a-singin' out 'Give Us Liberty or Give Us Death'" (*My Present Age* 212).

The message is not hard to decipher, particularly within the context of Kierkegaard's analysis. Ed identifies closely with both Sam and Huck. Sam, as we have seen, embodies Ed's ideals, symbolizes everything Ed wishes he were but believes he cannot be. His relationship with Huck, however, is subtler. Huck's *Adventures* figures as one of the escapist books Ed confesses to rereading in the opening paragraphs of the novel, which (given the novel's second epigraph) identifies him as a "[dweller] in the valley of the shadow of books." Since his childhood, Ed has used this book to "light torches against the mind's blackness" (*My Present Age* 51). At night, rather than face what he refers to elsewhere as "the stink of [his] own loneliness" ("Man Descending" 226), he imagines gliding down the Mississippi on a raft with Jim. Such escapist fantasies, of course, ultimately ensure his solipsism, confirm him in a self-reflexive universe, where paradoxically, true escape becomes progressively more difficult, where death masquerades as life.

The message indicates that Ed had long since discovered the danger, for Huck therein testifies to the price of running away, of habitually lighting out for the territory. Moreover, Ed, in the clarity of madness, exposes the existential cowardice motivating such flight. Tom Sawyer's death particularly devastates Huck because he witnesses the price of bringing ideals into connection with reality, of moving from reflection to decisive action. Ed's message renders Huck as a disgusting, pimping drunk whom Sam first pities and finally rejects. Here Ed effectively passes judgement on himself, proving that beneath his ironic disillusionment with society lies a deeper disillusionment with himself for failing to live up to his ideals.

Ed's announcement in the penultimate chapter of the novel that he is "running away" (*My Present Age* 235) signals that he will not heed his own message. Although he claims to have achieved "a new, simpler life" (236), he merely approaches the simplicity of madness. As in the time before his first breakdown, he cannot sleep. And when he closes his eyes, "strange

things begin to happen": "A big man, gentle on bootless feet, [moves] slowly through the room soft, soft. . . . The kitchen light strikes his naked black feet" (238-39). Thus, in some sense consciously, he repeats his solipsistic tragedy, flies from himself further into himself.[17]

According to Kierkegaard, an individual can only escape the self-reflexive madness of the present age by attaining "the inwardness of religion," "the religious courage which springs from his individual religious isolation" (*The Present Age* 48, 54). Only one character in the novel actualizes this possibility: Bill Sadler. As Kierkegaard might have predicted, almost everyone writes him off as a placard-wielding religious lunatic—everyone except Ed, who consistently defends him. And although this defence may be motivated somewhat by perversity, Ed unquestionably admires him and recognizes that Bill has found something crucial that he himself lacks. While Ed's one attempt to speak to Bill comes to nothing, the attempt itself is significant (206-08). That Vanderhaeghe preserves the veil of mystery surrounding Bill indicates he understands well Kierkegaard's notion of indirect communication. Were he to allow Ed, and hence the reader, access to his consciousness, this would merely help establish an aesthetic relationship to something that transcends the aesthetic, and hence muddle the existential distinctions that the novel establishes. To remain a viable existential alternative, he must remain apart.

Thus, Kierkegaard proves invaluable in reading Vanderhaeghe's early Ed stories, which is not to say that the Kierkegaardian agenda of these works establishes their literary merit. Indeed, that they remain in print and perennially popular with students and others unfamiliar with this agenda suggests they work very well simply as engaging narratives.[18] Recognition of the works' existential depth, however, should increase awareness of the seriousness and complexity of Vanderhaeghe's enterprise, for it was not Ed's comic potential alone that repeatedly drew Vanderhaeghe back to this outrageous misfit. Rather, he recognized that Ed's pathological eccentricity could provide crucial insight into contemporary culture, and perhaps even point negatively—through his own failure—towards viable forms of personal and cultural recovery. In light of these early works, much of the puzzlement over Vanderhaeghe's subsequent preoccupation with ethics, with doing the honourable thing in the face of social opprobrium and even physical threat, vanishes. It was there from the beginning.

NOTES

1 Such readings are perhaps understandable given Vanderhaeghe's occasionally grim parody of religion, for example in Hardwick's comment, "Happy is the man doing the Lord's work," as he contemplates the slaughtering of Indians (*The Englishman's Boy* 46). For highly nuanced treatments of Vanderhaeghe's historical fiction that avoid placing it baldly on one side or the other of the ideological postmodern (postcolonial) divide, see Herb Wyile's recent articles.

2 I will refer to these three works collectively as the Ed stories.

3 The only exception to this is Nicholas von Maltzahn, who notes that Kierkegaardian concerns become "the major theme" in *My Present Age*, but his analysis is limited to noting that Ed emerges as "a character engaged in a typically existential struggle to move from the aesthetic to the ethical realm . . . " (142).

4 One of best summaries of Kierkegaard's indirect approach to his own authorship is Louis Mackay's classic, *Kierkegaard: A Kind of Poet.*

5 Readers unfamiliar with Kierkegaard's stages may consult my brief discussion on 12ff.

6 Vanderhaeghe reveals that he had read a great deal of Kierkegaard (both the pseudonymous and edifying works) before writing the Ed stories: *The Journals* (several abridged versions), *The Diary of a Seducer*, *Either/Or* (both volumes), *The Present Age, Works of Love, Fear and Trembling* and *The Sickness Unto Death.* He adds that "there may have been others . . ."("Re-An Inquiry").

7 Although *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* provides Kierkegaard's most thorough argument against confusing the existential spheres, *The Present Age*, by critiquing a culture that confuses reflection with action, addresses precisely the same concern.

8 Vanderhaeghe did publish an Ed story before this, "He Scores! He Shoots!," but he considered it "too slight" to bother including in *Man Descending* ("Re-An Inquiry").

9 See Tom Gerry's article, which is especially interesting in its exploration of violence in these stories.

10 Near the end of the novel, Ed likens himself to a crusading knight (231).

11 See Kierkegaard's *The Concept of Anxiety* 41-46.

12 I note that the most recent editions of the novel omit the epigraphs.

13 *See* Reidar Thomte's *Kierkegaard's Philosophy of Religion*, and Mark Taylor's *Kierkegaard's Pseudonymous Authorship: A Study of Time and the Self,* for accessible treatments of Kierkegaard's stages. Kierkegaard's *Either/Or* provides the most useful single analysis of the forces at work in Vanderhaeghe's novel, for it confines itself to an exploration of the aesthetic and ethico-religious stages, and insists that everyone must choose absolutely between them. Interestingly, when Ed explains his theory of complicators and simplifiers to Victoria, he refers to "Big-decision time" (30).

14 See Mark Taylor 128-130.

15 See Charles Taylor's, *A Secular Age,* "Part I: The Work of Reform," for an extensive treatment of the forces that destabilized and eventually levelled the hierarchical medieval worldview. Ironically, some of these arose not just from Protestantism, but also from Counter Reformation attempts to *raise* the general level of sanctity within the general population to that previously demanded only of the ecclesial elite (85).

16 In *Sickness Unto Death*, Kierkegaard identifies all positions other than faith as forms of despair, the "higher" ones paradoxically being demonic. An increase in consciousness without faith thus represents a greater perdition, but conversely the opportunity for

remedy, for (according to Kierkegaard) despair cannot be rooted out until it becomes fully conscious.

17 That Ed remains trapped by his own reflection is suggested metaphorically by the fact that in both stories and in the novel, he locks himself in bathrooms and stares at himself in the mirror.

18 Students in my Canadian literature classes frequently cite these works as their course favorites.

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John Barton

The Haircut

Egg tempera on gesso panel, 1986

His hands with clipped nails trim your hair
    Shining and dense
        As massed fibres of ice, snow blown and drifted

Down either side of your eyes, his
    Fingers arching, an aureole
        Above your head, scissors and red comb

Poised, the first severed filaments of hair about to
    Drop, catch in the stiff
        Chrysalis of white about your shoulders

Your exposed forearms relaxed and crossed at the wrists
    Against your chest, a gargoyle
        Cut from stone and not ready to be

Mortared into the wall of a medieval churchyard
    But sitting upon a stool to face
        Down death, you watch its approach

In the mirror, noting how your knuckles
    Gnarl, the sheet pulled close about prosaic loose
        Fleshed bones while he remains

Naked and younger, your sculpted
    Neoclassic lover unselfconscious in his skin
        Body for now not holding any

Pose, marbled and warm as he hones with exact
    Scissor-strokes the down-turning
        White bowl

Of your hair, his light-footed shift
In stance to being stationed behind you
Rather than lying before not only mastery

But a sign of how he observes, what he makes
His own after being watched through
The millennia you have drawn him—and draw

Him still—his longing so quiet and workman-like
You are humble but never
Overcome, the respect each snip invokes

Real and expressed in skill, a persistent
Modernity you share, held
Gaze for gaze, his eyes intent

On scissors and hair not abstracted and unempty
Of agapé while you notice everything
Private within you

Sharpen, ageless with his shaping.

Sophie Bastien

Les grandes marées, dans le roman de Jacques Poulin
phénomène naturel ou courant culturel ?

Généralement laconique, le titre d'une œuvre littéraire se veut évocateur pour celui qui en prend connaissance, et acquiert une épaisseur sémantique, voire un niveau métaphorique pour celui qui a terminé la lecture de l'œuvre. Le titre *Les grandes marées* ne fait pas exception. Mais il a ceci de particulier qu'une fois le livre lu, il revêt une signification qui se situe aux antipodes de son sens littéral et de tout ce que ce dernier pouvait au préalable éveiller dans l'imaginaire du lecteur. Bien entendu, il désignera toujours le mouvement maritime que l'on sait, d'autant plus que la couverture du livre ajoute un support pictural à ce signifié, avec la représentation de goélands sur une pointe de littoral entourée d'une eau bleu foncé aux ondulations agitées. De surcroît, il n'y a aucune trace humaine sur l'image, ce qui contribue à créer l'impression de la nature à l'état sauvage. Cependant, chaque fois que surviennent de grandes marées durant les quelques mois que traverse la diégèse du roman, arrive sur le lieu insulaire de l'action un nouveau personnage qui manifeste à sa manière la mentalité de consommation, sinon un courant social contemporain : pour le lecteur, le phénomène maritime devient indissociable de cet événement humain dont il est l'indicateur temporel. Les deux catégories d'événement se doublent par leurs cycles simultanés. L'expression titrale « les grandes marées » s'enrichit ainsi d'un sens figuré et contraire à son niveau littéral qui désigne un fait naturel : elle renferme une allusion à ce qui est artificiel, contraire à la nature. Elle peut même se lire telle une allégorie de ce qu'introduit la société consommatiste, de tout le superflu qu'elle impose, puisque les « grandes marées » apportent avec leurs flots l'artifice moderne.

Dans le présent article, nous tâcherons d'analyser ces deux strates herméneutiques en examinant précisément comment la première en vient à sous-entendre la deuxième, son antithèse. Comme les deux univers de référence entrent en conflit, nous verrons également quelle position idéologique se trouve subtilement privilégiée à leur endroit. C'est ainsi que nous nous proposons de revisiter ce classique de la littérature québécoise qu'est le roman *Les grandes marées* de l'écrivain majeur Jacques Poulin[1]. Paru en 1978, il est le cinquième des dix romans que l'auteur a publiés en une trentaine d'années. Dans une forme très originale, il réactive l'ancienne dialectique nature/culture, ainsi que l'antinomie connexe solitude/collectivité, pour critiquer certains phénomènes sociaux contemporains et, plus profondément, pour susciter une réflexion philosophique sur les concepts de bonheur et de paradis perdu. Ce sont, du moins, des aspects caractéristiques de l'œuvre, que nous nous appliquerons ici à faire ressortir.

Un résumé succinct du roman et un aperçu de ses grands traits formels seraient d'abord de mise. Le personnage principal, âgé de trent-huit ans, est connu sous le sobriquet de Teddy Bear, formé à partir des initiales de « **t**raducteur **d**e **b**andes dessinées »—le métier qu'il exerce (Poulin 34). Il a obtenu de son employeur d'être déporté sur une île déserte, appelée l'Île Madame, où il est arrivé un mois d'avril, avec son chat. Il y accomplit son travail de traduction, protège la faune ailée du braconnage, pratique son sport favori (le tennis), vit à son propre rythme—comme l'exposent les premiers chapitres. Son patron lui rend visite régulièrement et lui apporte des vivres. En mai, il lui amène une jeune femme, Marie, qui est accompagnée d'une chatte. Les rapports entre elle et Teddy Bear évoluent sous le signe de la douceur et du respect. L'anthroponymie évoque cette innocence : le prénom marial porte l'archétype de la pureté féminine; et le seul nom donné au héros, Teddy Bear, emprunté à l'enfance, révèle une personnalité candide. La paix qui règne sur l'Île Madame, à ce stade, en fait un avatar du paradis terrestre. Elle est toutefois éphémère. Car chaque mois, quand surviennent les grandes marées, de nouveaux habitants s'installent sur l'île. Ils perturbent cette harmonie, au point qu'à l'automne, Marie repartira. Le héros lui-même se verra finalement chassé de l'île.

Le roman se divise en quarante-trois chapitres très courts. Le genre de la bande dessinée, dont il est question par l'occupation du personnage principal et dont sont reproduits à l'occasion des illustrations et des phylactères (Poulin 83, 107-08, 149-50), en inspire l'esthétique, qu'on peut qualifier d'économe. Les personnages ne montrent que l'essentiel et, comme l'observe François

Ricard, la narration serrée a « ce côté concret, un peu stéréotypé et rapide qui fait le charme du récit dessiné » (88). La tonalité aussi dérive de la bédé, avec son humour et sa légèreté—bien qu'elle intègre également une gravité, mais intimiste, qui préserve la sobriété stylistique de Poulin. Le contenu suscite des analogies avec d'importants référents culturels; c'est néanmoins avec une écriture fantaisiste et débridée que ceux-ci sont convoqués.

L'un de ces référents se rattache à la prise de contact qu'effectue le héros avec le lieu de l'action. Le début du récit se présente en cela comme une robinsonnade : le nouvel insulaire explore son milieu, tel Robinson[2]. Il fait le tour de l'île, découvre ses deux maisons abandonnées, son vieux terrain de tennis. Il est attentif aux secrets de l'environnement, aux courants et aux marées, profite de la grève et de la grande nature. « Le livre est une histoire de cœur entre un traducteur et un fleuve, une histoire d'oiseaux, de battures et de vent, de rochers et de vagues », perçoit Lise Gauvin (33). Il puise en outre dans la mythologie et les symboles. L'élément de l'eau indique la première piste, à cet égard. D'entrée de jeu, le titre en connote la puissance et le mystère : *Les grandes marées*. Ensuite, la nature insulaire du lieu implique sa présence encerclante. Celle-ci est accentuée par deux attributs physiques de l'Île Madame : sa petite dimension[3]; et son intérieur densément boisé et quasi impénétrable. Les habitants ne s'éloignant guère des berges, l'eau fait constamment partie du paysage. Elle détermine aussi des activités—comme la nage, l'observation de bateaux…—et par conséquent, tout un champ lexical qui lui est associé. D'après Paul Socken, elle suggère une réalité primitive, non encore corrompue par l'homme civilisé. (58)

Un autre élément de la nature remplit une fonction poétique dans le roman : la lune, qui y est orthographiée avec une majuscule. Plus d'une fois, la pleine Lune constitue un repère chronologique (Poulin 26, 130) et semble dicter des comportements (16, 17); et le clair de Lune magnifie le décor (123). L'eau et la lune : deux emblèmes de féminité. Aussi est-il mentionné que la belle Marie arrive dès après une pleine Lune—qui annonçait sa venue, dirait-on. Cette nageuse se démarque par son aisance dans l'eau, notamment quand elle se baigne au clair de Lune avec Teddy. Elle s'avérera d'ailleurs une femme idéale pour lui. Elle nourrit l'image du paradis perdu, selon Socken (56), qui la relie du coup au rôle quelque peu ésotérique des chats, puisqu'un couple félin se forme en même temps que le couple humain.

En fait, comme le postule Socken (49-60), l'œuvre entière est traversée par le motif transhistorique et universel du paradis perdu. Son canevas apparaît comme une métaphore moderne et séculière du récit biblique de

la Genèse : Un supérieur, sorte de patron-providence, qui possède *Le Soleil* (c'est le titre d'un journal), dépose son employé par hélicoptère sur une île qu'il détient, et l'y laisse seul, en espérant qu'il sera heureux; peu après, il lui fournit une femme, qui descend des nuées du ciel, par une échelle suspendue à l'hélicoptère; puis il peuple le territoire, qu'il faut dorénavent partager; le bannissement et l'exil qui s'ensuivront rappellent le sort que subit Adam. Mais les allusions bibliques se multiplient aussi de façon plus littérale. L'incipit du roman suggère la naissance du monde : « Au commencement il était seul dans l'île. » (Poulin 9) Le patron prononce plus loin cette contre-vérité : « Je ne me prends pas pour Dieu le Père et je ne me suis pas dit : Il n'est pas bon que l'homme soit seul » (57). Des emprunts onomastiques servent à désigner des lieux : « paradis terrestre » (14, 37, 121), « Éden » (155), « Terre promise » (178). D'autres, des personnages : Marie, Hagar (83) et, avec une légère modification morphologique, Matousalem (le chat) et Atan (le cerveau électronique qui supplantera le travail humain—180). Enfin, le genre allégorique de la parabole, qu'adoptent des récits internes (chap. 26, 39), et le fait que les courts chapitres qui composent le livre soient numérotés, font penser à la construction de la Bible.

Nous venons de montrer que les référents d'ordre intemporel—mythique ou biblique, tout en installant « un espace d'harmonie en marge du cours du temps » (Morency 37), mettent de l'avant l'idée de nature, tant au sens cosmique (avec les topoï insulaire, aquatique, lunaire) qu'au sens anthropologique (en remontant à l'état originel de l'homme). À l'opposé, nous allons maintenant adopter une approche situationnelle qui ancre l'œuvre dans un espace-temps bien défini et qui fait surgir l'idée de culture.

Quoiqu'il reconduise la charge mythique de l'espace insulaire, le roman ne présente pas un lieu géographiquement inconnu. L'Île Madame existe bel et bien, et est appelée telle quelle non seulement dans l'œuvre fictive, mais aussi dans la toponymie québécoise, depuis sa découverte au XVII^e^ siècle. Réputée pour sa richesse écologique, notamment à cause des oiseaux aquatiques qu'elle abrite, elle recèle également un autre intérêt. Si la voie maritime du Saint-Laurent, où elle se situe, contient d'innombrables petites îles sauvages, celle-ci se trouve à un point charnière de l'hydrographie : c'est là que l'eau douce rencontre l'eau salée et que le *fleuve* Saint-Laurent s'élargit pour devenir le *golfe* du Saint-Laurent, avant de se jeter dans l'océan Atlantique. C'est donc à partir de là que se produit le cycle des marées. Ces transformations provoquent une activité mouvementée, qui se manifeste plus spécialement une fois par mois, par le phénomène dénommé « les grandes marées ».

Poulin exploite ces facteurs géographiques réels et fait toujours coïncider les grandes marées mensuelles avec l'arrivée d'un personnage, par le biais duquel il transpose des réalités contemporaines de sa composition romanesque. Par exemple, le personnage du patron, surnommé ironiquement « le poète de la Finance » (57), renvoie à quelqu'un de bien connu au Québec, Paul Desmarais, qui possédait des journaux dont *Le Soleil*, ainsi que l'Île Madame et un hélicoptère. Dans un Québec qui sort d'une pauvreté multiséculaire, cet homme d'affaires est célèbre par son ascension économique, comme le prototype de celui qui *réussit*, c'est-à-dire qui *s'enrichit*. D'autre part, dans une optique sociale, la figure patronale a pour homologue celle de l'employé. Or, la décennie 1970 voit monter le syndicalisme au Québec et changer les mentalités en milieu de travail : on porte désormais attention à la personne de l'employé, on se préoccupe moins de ses besoins matériels que de son bien-être et de sa santé. Dans le roman, le patron suit ce courant jusqu'à l'exagération. Avec des airs de bonté philanthropique, il croit prodiguer à ses subordonnés les conditions de leur bonheur. Trouvant son traducteur taciturne, il se penche sur son profil « socio-affectif » (13) et voit avec une insistance indiscrète à ce qu'il soit « heureux ».

Autre exemple de réalité que transpose la fiction de Poulin : Autour de 1975, l'année internationale de la femme, l'émancipation féminine marque la société québécoise. Marie en est peut-être le fruit : elle ne compte pas sur l'apparence corporelle pour fonder son identité sexuelle, comme le montre son allure garçonne; elle est physiquement forte, comme le prouvent les sports qu'elle pratique; psychologiquement autonome, comme le révèle sa relation assez singulière avec Teddy; et elle sait se défendre, quand les autres se font envahissants. Le seul autre personnage féminin du roman représente une facette différente du féminisme. Affublée du surnom de Tête Heureuse, l'épouse du patron—plutôt : « la femme du *boss* » (73)—s'adonne au nudisme, recherche les contacts physiques avec les hommes, leur rend des visites nocturnes quand le désir lui prend. En somme, elle est la caricature de la libération du corps et des mœurs sexuelles.

La perspective contemporaine ne se restreint toutefois pas au contexte québécois : elle peut s'élargir à l'Occident. C'est alors que l'idée de civilisation s'oppose le plus à celle de nature. À cet effet, certains travers du patron, selon le portrait que dresse le roman (9, 131), sont assez éloquents. Excité par les millions—de lecteurs (15) comme de dollars (56), affairé, visant l'efficacité, héliporté, toujours pressé, sinon absent parce qu'en voyage, il est une parodie de la personne en position de pouvoir, dans les démocraties capitalistes.

Présumant de surcroît que la solitude insulaire est intolérable, il impose à Teddy sa propre conception de la qualité psychologique et sociale. Cette conception se moule sur un courant en vogue, un idéal de vie communautaire—alors que « le bonheur collectif est irréalisable » chez Poulin, comme le constate Jean-Pierre Lapointe (17). Après Marie, le patron-démiurge envoie donc d'autres visiteurs, dont le principal concerné n'a nul besoin et qui ont pourtant pour mission de favoriser son bonheur. Grotesques et inopportuns, ces intervenants bouleversent la sérénité initiale; ainsi, « l'œuvre recrée une société qui, dans son élaboration progressive, s'oppose à un monde d'harmonie » (Hébert 115).

Tête Heureuse, la première à s'y ingérer, offre affection et massages; mais elle déconcentre Teddy et retarde son travail. Deux « intellectuels » (87) sont censés tenir des conversations sérieuses avec lui, dialoguer sur sa profession : le professeur Mocassin, qui enseigne la bande dessinée à la prestigieuse université de la Sorbonne; et l'Auteur, qui vient de Montréal, la grande ville. Celui-ci se comporte avec une suffisance acariâtre; celui-là se lance dans des discours aussi enflés qu'ennuyeux, en plus d'être sourd, de s'évanouir à l'occasion et de se réveiller alors en employant un langage régressif de primate qui passe pour un babillage puéril. L'intrus suivant, l'Homme Ordinaire, dont la spécialité cocasse réside dans le sens pratique et l'organisation, fait penser au fonctionnaire bureaucratique. Il est chargé de mettre de l'ordre sur l'île; bruyant et dérangeant, il sème plutôt le désordre. Trois thérapeutes se succèdent : le médecin vient investiguer les maux dont souffre Teddy—mais il ne se soucie guère de son patient, dont il ne se fait même pas comprendre; l'Animateur Social s'occupe de thérapies de groupe—et ses séances tournent au ridicule, entre autres par les paronomases involontaires d'un personnage qui parle de la « dynamite de groupe » (174) alimentée par les moyens « idiots-visuels » (196, 198); le père Gélisol, enfin, a des dons en guérison individuelle—mais échoue. Ricard décèle chez ces derniers la satire des « techniciens de la vie privée » que la société moderne « a inventés pour libérer l'individu » (86-87). Contrairement à ce que craignait Teddy, ce ne sont pas des braconniers, de rudes gens de plein air, qui violent l'univers insulaire, mais des citadins à la pointe de leur champ d'expertise et à la dernière mode des courants sociaux. Et comme le fait remarquer Hébert (110), ils perturbent tant l'environnement physique que l'écologie humaine, puisque l'un et l'autre sont indissociables.

Aucun de ces envoyés n'a de nom véritable : on les désigne par leur fonction ou par un sobriquet. *A contrario*, les animaux et les objets manufacturés

portent un nom propre, parfois même un nom humain, comme s'il y avait déplacement de l'essence ontologique[4]. Certains visiteurs sont annoncés par des « fiches signalétiques » (Poulin 128, 168) qu'émet un téléscripteur et qui donnent des renseignements laconiques et factuels dans le style des données statistiques. Les personnes s'en trouvent encore plus déshumanisées.

L'effet de déshumanisation découle également du rôle, propre à la civilisation moderne, des machines et de la technologie. En plus de l'appareil télégraphique mentionné plus haut et qui se trouve dans la « chambre des machines » (91), il y a le fameux hélicoptère avec lequel arrive et repart le patron. La présence de l'engin—un moyen de transport exubérant, tonitruant—est plus manifeste que celle de la personne—un patron furtif et aucunement attentif aux autres, malgré son inquiétude apparente. Il y a aussi Prince, le lance-balles qui sert d'adversaire au tennis; difficile à vaincre et stimulant, il est fort apprécié de Teddy. Remarquons encore l'onomastique : « Prince » est le nom réel d'un célèbre manufacturier d'articles de tennis, et bien des objets dans le roman sont ainsi désignés par leur marque de commerce. Mais de plus, son sens premier a pour effet de personnifier le signifié, ce qui colle à la simulation humaine de ce dernier (lancer des balles tel un adversaire intelligent), et il le valorise par sa référence princière, ce qui souligne son excellence.

En remplaçant l'humain, ce robot est le précurseur d'un autre qui, celui-là, sera cause de contrariété pour Teddy, car il le dominera, non en finesse mais en vitesse, et l'éconduira. En effet, vers la fin du roman, le travailleur compétent et méticuleux apprend que ses traductions ne sont pas publiées, parce que le patron recourt à un ordinateur—Atan—qui effectue rapidement le travail. Ce nom d'allure anodine, « Atan », cumule avec humour deux figures de rhétorique qui lui confèrent paradoxalement une densité, voire une portée fataliste. D'une part, une paronomase réfère à Adam—mot hébreu signifiant « homme » et désignant le premier homme de la Genèse—et annonce, à cette étape précise de la diégèse, l'effacement de l'espèce humaine, dépassée par la machine. La déviation phonique sous-entend une déviation de l'humanité, par la dissolution de l'un de ses fondements, le travail. D'autre part, l'homophonie que crée « Atan » avec l'expression « à temps », renvoie à l'obsession du temps et au culte de la vitesse engendrés par (ou engendrant) le monde moderne. Bref, la productivité prévaut, et avec le concours des moyens scientifiques, le digne et patient labeur se voit évacué.

Teddy n'est pas le seul à incarner celui-ci, ou son expérience de l'écriture n'en est pas l'unique aspect. Tandis que se répandent les cours de lecture

rapide, dans la décennie 1970 où parut le roman, Marie pratique au contraire la « lecture ralentie » (Poulin 51), grâce à laquelle elle savoure et assimile les textes littéraires[5]. Du scripteur Teddy et de la lectrice Marie se dégage l' « éloge de la lenteur », dirait Jean-François Chassay[6]. Se dégage aussi, en filigrane, l'éloge de la littérature au sens large, ajouterions-nous. Leur amour des mots procure à Teddy et à Marie un plaisir de l'esprit dont la qualité est à mettre en opposition avec les plaisirs superficiels et vains que recherche une Tête Heureuse, par exemple. Surgit discrètement une échelle hiérarchique du bonheur, dans laquelle le sobriquet de « Tête Heureuse » prend tout son sens ironique. Teddy ne peut être heureux sans son travail. Son patron qui prétend vouloir son bonheur et qui croit tout mettre en œuvre pour le réaliser, le rend définitivement malheureux en le remplaçant par un ordinateur : il supprime la raison d'être de ce travail et surtout, ce faisant, il tue le plaisir de l'esprit.

Une autre valeur fondamentale se trouve thématisée dans le roman et traitée avec une certaine nostalgie. Il est pour le moins significatif que Teddy ne communique pas vraiment avec les « intellectuels » (l'Auteur et le professeur). Sa relation avec Marie est la seule substantielle et la plus authentique, comme le souligne Anne Marie Miraglia (91). Tous deux ne sont guère loquaces, pourtant; l'une de leurs rencontres consiste même en une conversation silencieuse—que transcrit la narration extradiégétique (Poulin 77-78). Ce mode étonnant d'échange n'est-il pas une hyperbole de la simplicité que défend Poulin à tous égards?

NOTES

1 Silence ou parole économe, lenteur, sont des conditions dans lesquelles Teddy et Marie se plaisent et accomplissent leur activité langagière. Il en est une autre : l'intimité de la solitude, sur laquelle insiste Giacomo Bonsignore (19-20, 25) en se référant à « l'être poulinien » en général (26), mais que l'insularité des *Grandes marées* spatialise en en offrant un analogon géographique. Que la littérature se trouve vécue « hors de tout cadre institutionnel, de toute assise collective », selon le constat d'André Belleau (68), n'en devient que plus évident, dans ce roman.

Celui-ci oppose une existence frugale et minimaliste dans un cadre dépouillé à une culture matérialiste, ostentatoire dans ses moyens d'expression, et voués à la consummation. Avec Teddy Bear et son chat, puis avec Marie et sa chatte, le microcosme insulaire fonctionne en toute quiétude. Mais les visiteurs, concomitants aux grandes marées, portent les tendances du monde extérieur et ses miasmes agressants. On assiste à la prolifération des faux besoins et des stimuli—ce que Ricard appelle « l'inflation de l'être » (87). Le couple se trouve dépossédé, gommé par ce maëlstrom; et le bonheur tranquille, enfoui dans les vagues submergeantes. Le paradis se change en enfer; l'eutopie, en cacotopie, selon

la terminologie spatiale qu'adopte Hébert (122-26). Comme le note Socken (51), l'histoire raconte une destruction plutôt qu'une création. Le parallèle biblique et les racines mythiques ne sont convoqués que pour exacerber avec dérision l'écart entre ces deux pôles. L'ironie sociologique de Poulin atteint là une dimension métaphysique et toujours actuelle : elle fait vivement sentir la menace que constitue la civilisation de masse, impersonnelle et parée d'artifices, sur le cœur de l'intériorité humaine.

La notoriété de Poulin est corroborée par le Prix du Gouverneur général (le plus prestigieux au Canada, dans ce domaine) qu'il reçut en 1978 pour *Les grandes marées*, et par le Prix Athanase-David (le plus prestigieux au Québec) qui lui fut décerné en 1995 pour l'ensemble de son œuvre.

2 Cette piste de lecture est surtout suggérée par la critique anglo-saxonne. Par exemple : Douglas O. Spettigue (374).

3 Sa longueur mesure deux kilomètres et sa largeur, un demi-kilomètre (Poulin, 16).

4 Yves Thomas étudie la réonymie dans son article « La part des labels et des marchandises dans *Les grandes marées* ». *Voix et images* 15.1 (1989) : 43-50.

5 Voir Michaud, Ginette. « Récits postmodernes? ». *Études françaises* 21.3 (1985-86) : 75.

6 Chassay intitule « Éloge de la lenteur » son article sur *Le vieux chagrin*, un roman de Poulin postérieur aux *Grandes marées*, pour faire référence au titre que porte un chapitre de ce roman : « L'écrivain le plus lent du Québec ». *Spirale* 93 (1990) : 3.

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Vincent Charles Lambert

Exode

Les statues partirent les premières.
Mais leurs ombres restèrent comme des aveugles
attendent une main pour traverser la rue (c'est elles alors qui vous emportaient)
ou glissaient de feuillage en vitrine, ou reniflaient près des vidanges.

Des âmes à la recherche de nos corps. Après quoi
fut, inaudible, la grande procession des instruments
à vent, ce fut le tour des notes
mais les partitions restèrent et se confondirent aux feuilles blanches.

Il arriva qu'un navire entra si loin au port
que sa déchirure atteignit le seuil de ma porte—tout au fond du paysage.
Mais je ne suis pas là. Je suis
sorti très tôt, et j'ai ramassé les vers qui baignaient dans l'eau de pluie.

Peinture écaillée de la barque de personne.
Le lac est resté sans nom—des orgies de truites et de poissons-lunes ont nettoyé
les os du dernier cartographe.
Un silence frais, préservé, montait des fosses.
Se répandait sur nos terres en réveillant les chouettes au plus noir des troncs.

En drapant tout—montrait l'intérieur.
L'intérieur : un enfant s'est penché pour boire et son visage est toujours là. Cieux
et forêts. Crapauds retournés pierres parmi les pierres.
Jusqu'à la prochaine fois.

Jenny Kerber

Monocultures, Monopolies, and Militarism

The Environmental Legacy of "Greater Production" in Robert Stead's *Grain*

Midway through *Grain*, his 1926 novel depicting prairie agricultural life in the early twentieth century, Robert Stead presents a conversation between two farmers that still rings true across many rural landscapes in Canada today: leaning in the shade of a horse stable in the summer of 1914, Jackson Stake jokes with a neighbour that his wife's desire for household improvements has been encouraged by the mistaken belief that "'farmin' was an industry, instead of a pursoot'" (86). While Stake's characterization of farming as a mere hobby is an attempt to justify the postponement of domestic expenditures, the humour of the scene suggests that even this notoriously tight-fisted character knows his bluff is being called by the economic momentum of the times. The declaration of war in 1914 confirmed that agriculture in Canada was indeed an industry, and an increasingly profitable one at that. The wheat boom of the First World War would in turn pay for a new house for the Stake family, but more importantly it also helped shape an ideology that would come to define the development of industrial agriculture in the decades that followed, one underwritten by the imperative to steadily increase production to feed the appetite of a growing world.

Today, Canadian grain farmers again find themselves on the threshold of a boom: after years of low grain prices and drought, a combination of factors, including low world grain stocks and the search for alternatives to conventional petroleum in the face of climate change has fostered the dramatic rise of grain prices. In conjunction with these developments, prairie summerfallow acreage in 2007 dropped to its lowest level since 1920. According to *The Western Producer*, the largest farm newspaper in Western

Canada, the increase in seeded acreage across the prairies was partly a result of higher grain prices fostered by the growing ethanol trend (Pratt 3). Some critics have pointed out, however, that there are several ironies underlying the recent shift towards greener fuel production. First, in many cases more energy is expended to produce the ethanol than is ultimately gained from the production process (Ross 7); secondly, the seeding of large acreages to produce grain for ethanol threatens to put pressure on ecologically sensitive land that is either prone to erosion or otherwise provides valuable habitat for birds, rodents, and rare plant species (Pratt 3); and finally, recent global food shortages directly challenge the policy of prioritizing fuel needs over basic human nutritional needs. Biofuel may be touted as the new secret weapon in the war against climate change, but mounting environmental critique demands that we more carefully examine the hidden costs of this promised harvest. I propose that examining early prairie literature from a literary-environmental perspective offers one important and largely overlooked means of engaging in these debates by situating contemporary ecological challenges within a wider cultural and historical context.

Although some of the reasons given for expanding seeded acreage have changed since the early twentieth century, in what follows I will demonstrate that there are also good reasons not to forget the historical consequences of coaxing every corner of the prairies into grain production. To do so, this article will consider Stead's novel as a text of continuing relevance for the way we think and write about environmental challenges facing Western Canada today, particularly as those challenges relate to industrial agriculture. Reading the novel against the backdrop of the federal government's Greater Production Campaign, a wartime initiative designed to increase agricultural yields across the country, opens up the space to question the ways in which certain socio-political values are promoted through the application of military discourses to nature. It also allows us to situate current agricultural debates within a broader historical milieu, thereby demonstrating that many of the dilemmas faced by prairie farmers today—including the long-term ecological impacts of intensive monocultures and ever-larger economies of scale—are not so new as we might sometimes presume. Stead's novel thus functions as more than an historical document or piece of prairie "realist" fiction; it also offers an overlooked form of environmental critique that speaks to the literary and popular concerns of our time as well as its own.

In the context of Stead's own career, during which he worked as a newspaperman, a publicity agent for the CPR, and as a director in the federal

Department of Immigration and Colonization (Thompson 2), the publication of *Grain* marks an important transition. While much of his early work, particularly his poetry (*The Empire Builders* [1908], *Prairie Born and Other Poems* [1911], and *Kitchener and Other Poems* [1917]), touted the settlement of the west under the banners of biblical dominion and wheat-growing patriotism (Allison v), the publication of *Grain* in 1926 marks the beginning of a more measured consideration of some of the war's costs on the home front—to the environment, to human relationships, and to the creative self. While *Grain* signals Stead's continuing concern with constructions of prairie life up to and including World War I, the patriotic fervour that had defined much of his earlier work is now tempered and complicated in the figure of its young male protagonist, Gander Stake. The novel shows Gander caught in the struggle between two conflicting ideals, as he tries to decide whether to remain on the family farm or to sign up for military service. The fact that Stead presents this struggle with measured empathy demonstrates just how sharply the characterization of Gander diverges from Stead's earlier portrayals of young men of military age. In a popular wartime verse such as "We Were Men of the Furrow," for example, Stead helped create the myth of a group of Canadian volunteers flooding down from their fields and woods to wage a just war in the name of peace. The closing lines of this poem warn of the consequences of threatening the pastoral life of those located on the imperial periphery: "Loud is the boast of the despot, clanking his nation in arms, / *But beware of a peace-loving people when they sweep from their forests and farms!*" (*Kitchener* 14, emphasis in original). Canada's Expeditionary Force, the myth suggested, was composed primarily of virile "men of the mothering earth" who had willingly beaten their spades into swords (14).[1]

With the publication of *Grain* in the mid-1920s, however, the equation of patriotism with military enlistment suddenly became much less clear in Stead's work. Although the myth of the war that developed in the postwar years perpetuated an idea of the Canadian soldier as a child of nature eager to serve at the front (Vance 140), in *Grain* readers are drawn to empathize with a young man who struggles to make any meaningful connection between his own life on the farm and the war across the ocean:

> Gander was not very sure of his geography, but of this much he was sure, that the Atlantic Ocean lay between, and the British Navy ruled the Atlantic Ocean, so what was there to worry about? With Gander as with most others, it was a matter of perspective. He was not lacking in courage or in a spirit of readiness to defend his home. […] But Belgium? Gander was unable to visualize a danger so remote. (106-107)

While the mythic version of the war might lead readers to assume that Gander Stake's reluctance to enlist marks him as an anomaly in a multitude of willing rural volunteers, it is more likely the case that his response was representative of many young farmers' experiences during the war. Jonathan Vance notes, for example, that "[o]f the soldiers who had enlisted by 1 March 1916, only 6.5 per cent were farmers or ranchers; 18.5 per cent were clerical workers, and nearly 65 per cent were manual workers. Even by the war's end, the reality had not changed to meet the myth" (161). What Stead seems to have recognized, however, is the considerable advantage of myth over government data when it came to the public perception of reality. With the announcement of war in *Grain*, Gander finds himself directly confronted with this myth: even as he clings to hope for a future for himself and his childhood love Josephine Burge, he is forced to acknowledge that the excitement of war has generated "a light in her eyes which he could not fathom or understand" (92). While Gander cannot bring himself to identify with the myth of enlistment, he also lacks a counter-narrative powerful enough to contest it.

As the first year of the war passes by and the pressure to join the services mounts, Stead's protagonist finds that actions that would once have been cast as heroic in peacetime no longer carry much weight. For example, at one point in the novel he saves a young farm laborer from certain death at the hands of a threshing machine, an action that leads one threshing crew member to suggest that Gander is worthy of the Victoria Cross. Instead of applauding Gander, however, Jo Burge responds with the stinging suggestion that "'Maybe he'll wear a *real* VC there some day'" (111, emphasis added). As a result, Gander finds himself in a difficult position: his own reluctance to take orders and surrender his privacy makes the thought of military service repulsive to him, and yet he is haunted by social pressure to conform to the new wartime ideals of heroic masculinity.[2] At the same time, a close reading of the narrative suggests that he is not the only character with misgivings about military service. Even as Josephine's public actions conform to the myth of heroism that dominated the wartime experience, her private sentiments suggest that she does not entirely believe in it. Her doubts about the narrow path to heroism emerge not only in her misgivings about her brother's enlistment (129), but also in her private remark to Gander following the threshing accident that she is in fact "very proud" of his bravery (111). The conflict underlying the narrative thus seems to reside less in Jo's own perceptions of Gander than in her concern about wider public opinion: "Like any

honest girl, she was not satisfied that she alone should be proud of Gander; she wanted other people to be proud of him" (106).

Gander's response to this dilemma is somewhat unconventional, and reveals a significant change in the discursive framing of agricultural practice in the period. Rather than enlisting in the military, he tries to expand the existing definition of heroism to include his own agricultural labour as a form of service that will help determine the outcome of a war played out on the global stage. As Gander delivers a load of wheat to the railway siding in Plainville, for example, the narrator characterizes the procession of farm wagons as "the march of King Wheat into the gates of the world," and insists that the business of war "cannot be carried on for long without the help of that little red kernel, mightier than siege guns and battleships" (120). In recasting the role of the prairie farmer as military hero, the novel echoes the rhetoric of Canadian government officials at the time. For example, in a wartime address to the Royal Canadian Institute in 1917, Dominion chemist Frank Shutt concluded his speech by quoting a directive to farmers given by the British President of the Board of Agriculture and Fisheries: "'You have your duty quite as clear and as definite as the captain of the cruiser or the colonel of a battalion. England has a claim on you farmers, men and women of every class, as clear as she has on our sons and husbands to go and serve in the trenches'" (Shutt 18). Stead certainly seems to have had the parallel between the soldier and the farmer in mind as he wrote *Grain*, for as Eric Thompson notes, one of the titles he first suggested to his publisher was *A Soldier of the Soil* (34).[3]

While the arrival of World War One reinforced the conceptualization of agriculture as a form of warfare, evidence in the novel suggests that the idea of prairie farming as a form of battle precedes 1914. At several points in the text Stead challenges the idea of the prairie as a beneficent Eden by illustrating how the language and logic of battle defined the settlement experience from its very inception. The narrator describes the Willow Green district schoolyard, for example, as a place in which Gander and his schoolmates fought with each other "as their parents had fought with the wilderness—with the single idea of victory, and few compunctions about the method of attaining it" (36). The conquering of a perceived wilderness through tasks such as brush clearance and sod busting would in turn prompt new forms of adversarialism in the agricultural sector during wartime, especially in the face of a perceived onslaught by pests such as weeds, insects, and gophers. In an exchange between Gander and his sister as they ride around a field on

a binder in late summer, one witnesses the deployment of an increasingly lethal series of metaphors to describe the human relationship to nature on the home front. As his sister remarks,

> "I was just thinking as I rode up on the back of the binder that the wheat was Germans and the knives were the Allies. It was great fun watching them topple over, in whole regiments. And where a big green weed would stick up out of the wheat I would say, 'That's a German officer, a captain, maybe, or maybe a colonel, but just you wait. Your time's coming.' And then the knives would snip him off, and he'd fall with a flop on the canvas, and get swept up out of sight." (95-96).

In this passage, we see the transformation of what might have once been understood as a mundane activity into a heroic—and violent—undertaking. By growing acre upon acre of clean wheat, the prairie Canadian farmer fills the stomachs of the Allies abroad while simultaneously holding back the threat of homeland invasion by a series of "unnatural" others. The particular form the enemy now takes—that of a German officer—suggests the way in which the First World War took the latent forms of cultural and linguistic xenophobia that had long underwritten Canadian immigration policy and gave them a specific set of targets: Germans, Austro-Hungarians, and others presumed to be affiliated with these groups.[4] From this perspective, the field that is under threat from weedy irruptions can be read as a metaphor for an Anglo Canadian majority anxious about the possibility that newly-arrived "strangers within our gates" might not only stubbornly resist assimilation, but that in the specific form of the enemy alien, they might also overthrow Canadian society from within.[5]

This fusion of military and agricultural discourses greatly appealed not only to individual farmers and governments of the period, but also to agricultural industries that stood to benefit from the new emphasis on monocropping and increased yields.[6] For example, anxieties about military invasion are exploited to considerable effect in a 1918 advertisement placed in *The Grain Growers' Guide* designed to sell strychnine to farmers for poisoning gophers. The text of the ad warns the farmer of the "HUNgry Gophers" spring attack, a siege that parallels the territorial struggle for the western front in Europe: "They charge by thousands and thousands; hoping to ravage the tender wheat, and satisfy their greed at the expense of the farmer. But, when they meet the Allied defense of grain, poisoned with 'GOPHERCIDE' their drive is checked – their massed attack is shattered – and the wheat fields of the west are dotted with their dead" ("Gophercide" 36) (Fig.1).

The HUNgry Gophers Spring Drive

They charge by thousands and thousands; hoping to ravage the tender wheat, and satisfy their greed at the expense of the farmer.

But, when they meet the Allied defense of grain, poisoned with

"GOPHERCIDE"

their drive is checked—their massed attack is shattered—and the wheat fields of the west are dotted with their dead.

"Gophercide" is a perfect solution of strychnine, which entirely dissolves in warm water without the aid of acids or vinegar; and is so disguised that gophers smack their lips over it, and it curls them up.

Don't take chances this year. Get "Gophercide" right now—soak the wheat in it, and sprinkle the poisoned grain about the holes of the gophers. It will save your wheat crop. Your druggist or general store has it, or will get it for you.

Made by

National Drug and Chemical Co. of Canada Limited, Montreal.

Western Branches:

Winnipeg, Regina, Calgary, Edmonton, Nelson, Vancouver and Victoria.

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Fig.1
Advertisement for "Gophercide" depicting gophers as German soldiers launching an attack (*Grain Growers' Guide* 20 February 1918).

The gopher here is rendered an unnatural, even pathological, prairie species; the best way to encourage its extermination is to dress it in the guise of a well-known human foe. The advertisement also relies upon the use of theriomorphism, a technique sometimes used in contexts of national or racial stereotyping, as for example when the Nazis depicted Jews as rats, or Americans depicted the Japanese as insects during the Second World War.[7] What is interesting about the rhetorical function of this document is the way it transforms the agriculturist into the *natural* resident of the prairie, while the gopher is made to play the role of outsider.[8] As the war continued, the appeal of chemical methods of weed and pest control would only become more attractive, since farm acreages and incomes rose dramatically even as the labour supply shrank.

Instead of advocating a cautious approach to agricultural management, the governmental and commercial press of the period largely encouraged an adversarial orientation to prairie nature in the name of boosting wartime grain production.[9] The slogan "Food will win the war" appeared in farm periodicals such as *The Grain Growers' Guide* and *Nor'west Farmer*, as well as in the *Agriculture War Books* published in 1915 and 1916 by the Dominion Department of Agriculture (Herd Thompson 189, n.45; MacEwan 130). By the second year of the war, Gander Stake also adopts it as his own slogan:

> the world [...] had awakened to the quite obvious fact that the war must be won by wheat. Growing wheat became a patriotic duty into which Gander fitted like a cylinder nut into a socket wrench. [. . .] True, there were still some who refused to see in the growing of wheat the highest expression of service, some even who were frank enough to suggest that the prospect of a high price had more to do with the sudden increase in acreage than had any patriotic motive. But Gander avoided argument and kept on with his ploughing, his seeding, his harvesting and threshing. (127)

Gander's retreat from society, however, suggests that he might not be entirely convinced by his own rhetoric. As the war wears on, the narrator describes Gander becoming "more than ever a creature of his father's farm. He ploughed and harrowed early and late, and found his companionship with his horses and machinery. From even his father and mother he withdrew as into a shell" (134). Here, cultivation of the self through agriculture is stunted by the endless round of seasonal labour. Further, while food may win the war, it does not win the girl, as Stead leaves the main romantic subplot of the novel involving Gander and Josephine Burge unresolved. At the end of the novel, Gander leaves the farm and moves to the city with the goal of becoming a mechanic. While critics have had mixed reactions to the plausibility of this conclusion, the fact that a character once described as a natural child of the prairie grows

up to run away from it seems to suggest Stead's growing discomfort with the triumphal rural settlement narrative of his previous work.[10] The post-war myth may have promoted the image of thousands of farmers returning from the front to their fields, but the increasing mechanization of prairie agriculture actually meant there was less and less room for men of Gander Stake's age on the farm. The narrator recognizes the impacts of this industrial shift well before the war begins, as demonstrated in the description of the Stake farm's adoption of steam and gasoline power in the early 1900s:

> Jackson Stake was but one unit in a hundred thousand who were making possible the great trek from the country to the city, a trek which never could have taken place but for the application of machinery to land, so that now one farmer may raise enough wheat to feed many hundreds of city dwellers. But if in this he was adding his weight to a gathering social and economic crisis he was quite oblivious to the fact; he saw no further than the need of bringing more land under cultivation, to grow more wheat .... (41)

While the war experience pushes Gander away from the natural environment and profession in which he most thrived, the scale with which improved technology transformed the prairie west meant that rural depopulation was already a familiar trend before the war years. At the end of the novel, the prairie is left to the care of aging farmers such as Gander's father, and war veterans such as Dick Claus who are as wounded as the landscape itself.

Meanwhile, devotion to wheat production would prove to have both short- and long-term costs for prairie farmers. In the short term, the war had two main effects: first, it fostered a dangerously exclusive economic reliance on wheat as the main crop grown across the prairies; and second, it led to decreased farm diversification.[11] Although provincial agricultural authorities such as John Bracken in Manitoba and W.R. Motherwell in Saskatchewan encouraged farmers to diversify their operations into livestock, fodder crops, and even turnips and potatoes, after 1914 the frequency with which farmers tried new crops or types of livestock dropped off dramatically. In fact, most federal authorities in the Department of Agriculture actively encouraged wheat monocropping, and the federal voice tended to override those of provincial or local officials (Herd Thompson 61). When couched in terms of supporting the war effort, it became difficult to argue against increased wheat production without looking unpatriotic.

While the federal government was intensely involved in advising farmers about what and how many acres to sow during the war years, even going so far as to implement policies demanding a militant approach to the

management of weeds and other agricultural pests, government intervention broke down when it came to the handling, transportation, and marketing of prairie agricultural products. Lack of federal regulation of the grain marketing system meant that even with high wheat prices, individual farmers were largely left at the mercy of large corporate monopolies when trying to sell and ship their grain. Although the narrator of *Grain* suggests that wheat is Gander Stake's world (122), Gander's single-minded focus on production is also shown to be a severe limitation, since it constitutes a failure to connect the local, organic world of the farm with transnational economic forces.

Stead seems to have understood the importance of making these kinds of connections: as early as 1899 he was writing newspaper editorials arguing for government ownership and operation of elevators (Mundwiler 186). In *Grain*, he uses Gander's trip to the Plainville railway siding with a wagonload of wheat to illustrate the frustrations of the prairie farmer in the face of corporate concentration and a lack of competition in the days before the establishment of a permanent Canadian Wheat Board.[12] Even though Gander knows that his grain ought to receive the top grade price for "One Northern" wheat, the three grain buyers "who, for competitors, seemed to him to be on much too friendly terms with each other" force him to accept the price for Three Northern wheat (121). Unable to take the risk of trying to get his own railcar to ship his grain to the lakehead by winter freeze-up, and without any means of being able to load his grain into an existing rail car (which in many cases were owned by similar corporate conglomerates), Gander is forced to take the low street price (121). In response to the low grade assigned to his grain, Gander finally responds in frustration: "Oh, take it!" The narrator comments, "This was not his world. He was a producer, not a seller" (122).

While prairie grain producers are now much more likely to be sellers as well as producers, the threat of this kind of exploitation has not been entirely relegated to the past. Indeed, the challenges faced by today's prairie farmers, most of whom are forced to compete in an increasingly deregulated and unevenly subsidized market in which geographical location and scale are crucial factors of profitability, remind us just how *contemporary* many of Stead's concerns are.[13] The loss of the Crow rate rail subsidy in the mid 1990s, the challenges of addressing increasing vertical integration in the agrifood industry, and fierce debates over how to most effectively market Canada's wheat, collectively demand reconsideration of the ways in which external factors help decide who will succeed in the farming game, and who will be cut off at the knees like so many German weeds.

Although economic hardship and dustbowl conditions are usually associated in the popular imagination with the 1930s, not the 1920s, Gander's decision to leave the farm at the end of the novel accurately foreshadows what would happen to the western wheat industry in the immediate postwar years. By 1920-1921 the prairie economy was entering a recession, and the high commodity prices previously enjoyed by prairie farmers during the war were curtailed by the actions of two competing empires: first, in 1920 Britain pressured the Canadian government into eliminating the set price for Canadian grain previously established under the Board of Grain Supervisors, and then in 1921 the United States implemented an emergency tariff to keep lower-priced Canadian grain from flooding its borders (Larsen 48). As a result, Canadian grain and cattle prices went into sharp decline. Although the economy recovered by the mid 1920s, the warning signs were there about relying too heavily on a wheat economy. It is worth remembering that there were more farm foreclosures in Alberta from 1921 to 1929 than there were from 1929 to 1939, the height of the Great Depression (Larsen 48).

Even in the pre-Depression years, then, Stead's work illustrates that some prairie writers were expressing concern about the ecological price paid by the land for short-term profitability. For example, at one point in the novel, the narrator describes how the Willow Green district farmers burn straw piles that lie "on all quarters of the horizon," and in so doing, "lavish their humus and nitrogen into the air" (52). Besides providing an eerie echo of Marx's description of the transmuting effects of bourgeois capitalism ("All that is solid melts into air" [Marx 58]), the technique of straw burning robs the land of moisture and destroys necessary organic matter, thereby leading to soil depletion and drifting.[14] This technique was fostered by wartime conditions, because a shortage of labour and a market for straw often led farmers to choose the most inexpensive, time-saving way of dealing with stubble, especially after the exhausting harvest period (Herd Thompson 67). Rising grain prices during the war years also led farmers to increase field acreage dramatically in hopes of paying off debt and making a profit amidst unpredictable market forces. However, as John Herd Thompson explains, the lure of quick profit also meant that "hundreds of thousands of acres were seeded which should have been left fallow. Equally serious was the fact that because of the shortage of labour and the increased attention paid to grain crops, those acres that were left fallow were not tilled as thoroughly as they should have been" (67). Weeds thus gained a deep foothold on the prairies, draining soil moisture and nutrients and ultimately reducing yields. By the

conclusion of the war, farmer and agricultural writer Seager Wheeler concluded that low yields could no longer be blamed entirely on the weather or on growing heavy crops; instead, they were a logical consequence of "the abuse and illtreatment of the soil by the many slack methods in force to-day" (Wheeler 100). The continuance of monocropping would only be sustained by the application of another product of the military-industrial complex, ammonium nitrate, which in the postwar years eventually made a successful transition from the munitions plant to the farmer's field in the form of chemical fertilizer.[15]

In their assessments of *Grain*, critics have generally agreed on the novel's value as a social document of the changing patterns of prairie life during the first two decades of the twentieth century (Harrison 102; Saunders xi). Stead was acutely aware of how new technologies were changing the prairie agriculturist's relationship to the land, and of how the long reach of war came to affect those people and landscapes that initially seemed most insulated from its effects. For prairie agricultural communities, the costs of the Great War went beyond the loss of young men overseas; the prairie environment itself also bore the costs of a shortsighted emphasis on a single commodity at the expense of farm diversification and the development of the prairie north. The emphasis on King Wheat was encouraged not only by farmers, who stood to benefit from high wartime grain prices, but also by governments and investment in the region by large, powerful companies (Waiser 21). It is the lingering notes of ambivalence about the wheat boom in *Grain* that make it a text of continuing importance for those contemplating the ongoing relationship between prairie literature, landscape, and agriculture.

As in the 1920s, today's prairie agricultural climate is characterized by intense market uncertainty. The fierce debates among farmers about the continued need for a single-desk Wheat Board to market Canadian wheat and barley, and the federal government's continuing push towards "free market choice" highlight the extent to which farmers are divided on the issue of how best to deal with this volatility.[16] Under such circumstances, any new development that might give a boost to yields and prices is usually welcomed, particularly when it enables the pursuit of profit under the banner of a nobler cause. In Stead's time, attempts to justify "greater production" clothed themselves in the patriotic dress of red, white, and blue; today, the riches promised by those pushing Big Ethanol suggests that the official colour of greater production is now green. In its purported eagerness to declare war on climate change, the Canadian federal government has begun to offer large

financial incentives for ethanol research and production, fostering the idea that farmers' exploitation of this "new market opportunity" might also be interpreted as an act of environmental stewardship.[17] Many environmentalists, however, express concern about conceptualizing environmental action in terms that focus on changing the means and materials of fuel production without fundamentally altering habits of consumption. Reading Stead's work in an environmental context thus offers an important reminder of the need to consider some of the long-term implications of our choices when it comes to structuring the prairie economy in light of future economic and environmental challenges. In going round our daily furrows of production and consumption, farmers, governments, and consumers alike must take care not to dig so deeply that we wind up with our heads in the sand.

NOTES

1 For a history of the development of a mythic version of the First World War in Canada during the interwar years, see Vance.

2 Dagmar Novak notes that although Stead received some military training during the summer of 1915, he did not enlist in the Canadian armed services. While I hesitate to let biography overdetermine my reading of the novel, I agree with Novak's assertion that "it is intriguing to speculate how much of Gander Stake's refusal to join the army in *Grain*, the chief conflict in his life, is a reflection of the dilemma that Stead experienced himself" (15). Stead's ambivalence about the relative merits of agricultural versus military service are evident elsewhere in his work; for example, in the poem "In the Wheat", a young prairie farmer leaves his crop in the field for the worthier sacrifices of battle in Europe: "His wheat is red for harvest, but his blade / Is red with richer harvest at his feet" (*Kitchener* 22).

3 The Dominion government also set up a national initiative called "Soldiers of the Soil" during the First World War as a way of recruiting boys between the ages of 15 and 19 to work on labour-strapped Canadian farms during the summer and harvest season. Over 20,000 boys were enrolled in the SOS program across Canada (Champ 7).

4 For a detailed examination of the pressures of Anglo-conformity during World War One, see Palmer 148.

5 The phrase "strangers within our gates" is drawn from Winnipeg Methodist minister and social gospel advocate J.S. Woodsworth's 1909 book of the same name. Woodsworth's primary concern involved the assimilation of vast numbers of European immigrants into the Anglo-Protestant Canadian mainstream, particularly in prairie cities.

6 There were exceptions to this enthusiasm among prairie farmers, most notably in the conscientious objection of groups such as the Mennonites, Doukhobors, and Hutterites.

7 For an explanation of theriomorphism as compared and contrasted with anthropomorphism, see Garrard 141. For some examples of how theriomorphism was applied to Italians, Germans, and the Japanese in American insecticide advertisements during World War Two, see Russell 116, 120, and 121.

8 On the layered ironies of this "de-naturalization" of gophers as prairie residents, see Calder 396.

9 The Greater Production Campaign also led to the federal expropriation of First Nations reserve lands across the prairies for grain production with minimal compensation to reserve residents (Dawson 21).

10 See, for example, McCourt 87; Davey 134; and Thompson 43 for differing assessments of the novel's plot resolution.

11 See Friesen, *Canadian* 328-329.

12 The federal government established the first Canadian Wheat Board (CWB) in 1919, but this initial attempt at regulation lasted only one year. Not until 1935 did R.B. Bennett's government establish a permanent CWB. In 1943, it became a compulsory pool for the export marketing of all Canadian wheat. For a history of the CWB and the development of Canadian grain marketing, see Irwin 85-106. For a discussion of farm protest actions against the CWB in the mid 1990s, see Epp 731-732.

13 The National Farmers' Union points out that many smaller agricultural producers in Canada continue to struggle financially, in part because of a gross imbalance in market power between agri-food industry multinationals and the individual family farms that do business with these firms (2, 15). For useful background information on the current economic challenges in prairie agriculture, see Warnock.

14 See Wheeler 116; Bracken 44.

15 For a recounting of the development of synthetic ammonia by German chemist Franz Huber and its industrial production in Germany during World War One, see Smil.

16 For opposing viewpoints on whether or not prairie wheat and barley producers would benefit from ending the single desk marketing system run by the CWB, see the arguments of former federal Agriculture Minister Chuck Strahl 7; and Schmitz and Furtan 8-10.

17 See Natural Resources Canada's statement on the environmental benefits of ethanol at http://oee.nrcan.gc.ca/transportation/fuels/ethanol/benefits.cfm?attr=16. Accessed 22 Jan. 2008.

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Paul Huebener

Memory II: Clouds

Particle physics explains the little things,
like how two clouds of probability
can never touch; there is no unifying
theory to stop a hand touching
its own skin, trying not to, kept on a leash
to make sure it doesn't get too close, yet
the context of this love makes me
weary, grazes me, puts me
a little on edge.

In a large iron pan one day you made the sun:
a simmering orb bursting thickly its scarlet
tomato lava, indistinct with heat, setting
our eyes aglow. Cover it with a lid
so it doesn't dry out.

Outside in the clinging pall
knuckled and gnarled I'll blow
the damp off my lips, aggressively
pruning lavender in soaking denim
fingernails to the weight of my kisses
on your face.

Amelia DeFalco

"And then—"
Narrative Identity and Uncanny Aging in *The Stone Angel*

The notion that human subjects are constituted by narrative has become something of a theoretical truism. As Kathleen Woodward puts it, "To *have* a life means to possess its narrative" (emphasis hers, *Discontents* 83). The belief in narrative as what Frederic Jameson calls "the central function or *instance* of the human mind" is pervasive and persistent within both popular and academic discourses of identity (emphasis his, 13). Still, there are detractors wary of the all-encompassing claims of the narrative identity thesis. For example, in an editorial for the journal *Narrative*, James Phelan considers the risks of what he calls "narrative imperialism," that is, "the impulse by students of narrative to claim more and more territory" (206). More specifically, Phelan is uneasy with the constriction of identity that is the consequence of relying on a single story of self: "I cannot shake the awareness that whatever narrative I construct is only one of many possible narratives and that the relations among the subsets of these possibilities range from entirely compatible and mutually illuminating to entirely incompatible and mutually contradictory" (209). In this essay I propose that identity need not be mono-narratological; in fact, I argue that aging forces a confrontation with the multiplicity that Phelan posits as undermining narrative identity, a multiplicity I interpret as intrinsic to both temporal identity *and* narrative. This assertion draws on Paul Ricoeur's vision of narrative and time as inextricably connected, the two forming, in his terms, a hermeneutic circle in which "time becomes human time to the extent that it is organized after the manner of narrative; narrative, in turn, is meaningful to the extent that it portrays the features of temporal experience" (*Time* 3: 3). In other

words, human temporality makes self-understanding the result of narrative, a causal relationship that becomes increasingly obvious as subjects age. As a result, in later life, time can weigh more heavily than it did during youth, provoking a confrontation with temporality, with the mutability of identities based on narrative. The proliferation of personal narratives exposes the chimerical nature of identity, rendering the subject a contested uncanny site, at once familiar and strange.[1] According to Freud, the space of the uncanny is marked by the collapse of boundaries, of the strange trespassing into regions of the familiar, and vice versa. Aging involves perpetual transformation that unsettles any claims to secure identity, allowing strange newness to intrude into a subject's vision of a familiar self, and undermining efforts to construct coherent life reviews.

In this essay I explore narrative-based identity theories alongside Margaret Laurence's *The Stone Angel*, a novel structured around late-life review. In *The Stone Angel*, ninety-year-old Hagar Shipley self-consciously narrates the self, confronting what Husserl calls "the paradox of human subjectivity: being a subject for the world and at the same time being an object in the world" (178). Despite her repeated attempts to manage, divide and restrict the temporal self, Hagar is gradually drawn into a space of unsettling uncanniness. She attempts to negotiate her life story by bisecting her identity into a series of polar opposites based on time and authenticity: young or old, true or false, original or deformed, insightful or blind. However, this project of control begins to falter as she becomes increasingly aware of her own mutability, an awakening to the simultaneous self/other status of the subject that moves her to recognize herself as another. Critics have noted the numerous pairings and oppositions in this canonical Canadian novel and the paradoxes they inspire. For example, Michel Fabre attends to the novel's structural and symbolic oppositions, particularly the tension between culture and nature (17), while Donna Pennee examines the paradoxical position of Hagar's incontinent body, at once excessive and restrictive (5). Those critics who discuss the novel's treatment of aging at any length, and there are fewer of such studies than one might expect, are often troubled by the novel's "bleak view of human potential" (Baum 153).[2] In her extended discussion of *The Stone Angel* and discourses of aging, Sally Chivers conveys her frustration at the "vexatious" novel's simultaneous "advocacy for the elderly and denigration of old age" (20). For my purposes, this contradiction and duality makes *The Stone Angel* a particularly instructive text for exploring the perils of "looking back," and the uncanny potential of aging.

The associations between later life and the evaluative backward glance are well established in both popular and academic culture, which often regard life as teleological, moving toward the telos of death, and the subject in old age as a collection of memories, a series of events that constitute the life narrative. Indeed, according to this perspective, human beings inevitably move along a recognizable trajectory: we are born, we grow, we mature, we die. For medical ethicists such as John Hardwig, the biological "facts" are clear: "We are mortal beings, and death is not only the end result of life, but its telos—the aim or purpose for which we are headed biologically" (Hardwig, qtd. in Overall 32). Within this linear program, once one enters the realm of late-life, there is little of the route left to look forward to and as a result the gaze is typically directed backward, initiating a re-examination of the past. This is the vision of old age promoted by developmental psychologist Erik Erikson, whose Life Cycle model sees a person aging through eight stages, each of which involves a central conflict between harmonious and disruptive elements (what he terms the syntonic and dystonic), a conflict that must be resolved in order for one to progress to the next stage of life.[3] The final stage, Old Age, involves a conflict between integrity and despair. Integration, entails, in Erikson's terms, "a sense of *coherence* and *wholeness*" (emphasis his, 65). This sense is associated with interpretive recollection since, Erikson asserts, "[looking] back over a long past . . . helps us understand our lives and the world we live in" (6).

Close proximity to "the end," real or imagined, often intensifies narrative impulses, resulting in a process of "life review" that involves a close examination of life narratives. As psychoanalyst Henry Krystal explains, "In old age, as in treatment, we come to the point where our past lies unfolded before us, the question is, What should be done with it?" (78). He implies that one's past must be manipulated to be worthwhile. As a result, narrative identity, or more precisely, *healthy* narrative identity, involves not just *writing* (living) a life, but also *reading* (remembering and interpreting) that life; though there may indeed be something inherently narrative about human existence, it is only via reflection and expression that such narrativity can be understood. This emphasis on the function of reflecting, of reading, produces the subject as an agent, one actively determining the meaning of his or her life, and implies a two-stage selfhood: simply "being" is not full existence; a complete subject ruminates and interprets. For Porter Abbott, survival depends on our ability "to read as well as to write our lives, perhaps in equal measure" (539). Narrative identity results from *re*-telling by linking events in a causal chain.

The centrality of narrative to selfhood is fundamental to the burgeoning field of narrative therapy, which insists on the psychological benefits of exploring, and often revising, the stories that make up a patient's life. "Restorying" grants the subject a high degree of agency in identity formation involving

> a set of stories we tell ourselves about our past, present and future. However, these stories are far from fixed, direct accounts of what happens in our lives, but products of the inveterate fictionalizing of our memory and imagination. That is, we 'story' our lives. Moreover, we *re*-story them too. In fact, restorying goes on continually within us. (Kenyon and Randall 2)

The practice of "restorying" is essential to what Gary Kenyon and William Randall term their "*therapoetic*" perspective, which regards life narrative analysis and manipulation as the means to personal "*healing*" (emphasis theirs, 1-2). Restorying "is a therapy for the sane. In it, storytelling (and storylistening) is not merely a method for solving particular problems that crop up in our lives, but has an importance and integrity all its own, as a means to personal wholeness. In this sense, it is a spiritual activity. Through it, *we become more of who we are*" (emphasis added, Kenyon and Randall 2). Even in an ostensibly flexible model of identity maintenance like restorying, the fantasy of a solid, unyielding core remains, some self prior to narrative that is able to express itself *through* narrative, unsettling the notion of an entirely narrative-based subject. The rhetoric of "becoming oneself" and the diction of "wholeness" and "healing" stress the corrective power of narrative manipulation; narrative therapy assumes some narratives are better, or at least healthier, than others.[4]

A belief in the therapeutic efficacy of "storying" one's life provides the basis for the practice of life review. Life review has a "multifaceted role: to aid the narrator in achieving new insight and peace of mind; to bring closure to troubling events through viewing them from a different perspective; and to restore as far as possible neglected skills or abilities" (Garland and Garland 4). A seminal article on life review by Robert Butler appearing in the journal *Psychiatry* in 1963 was largely responsible for sparking the continuing interest in the topic. And though the current understanding of the practice may not employ Butler's universalizing rhetoric—he describes life review as a "naturally occurring, universal mental process" (66)—an emphasis on the soothing power of analysis and understanding remains.[5] In their practitioners' guide to life review, Jeff and Christine Garland allege that "[r]eview gives direction to people's lives as they move towards a valued endpoint, along a well-trodden track marked by success stories—and failures" (35). Life review clearly

falls within the category of narrative therapy, allowing subjects to optimize their life story through recognition, revision, and even disposal.[6]

In many ways, *The Stone Angel* appears in line with the models of life review fostered by Butler and Erikson in its narrator's appeal to recollection as a means of self-recognition and the summation of a life. Hagar uses memory to chart a chronological past, alternating between reminiscence and present-day action, a dualist pattern that reveals a split subject struggling to negotiate between competing selves: past and present, young and old, authentic and distorted. Laurence depicts Hagar's attempts to construct a metanarrative of self (albeit a self in conflict) that conjures a distinct subject moving through time in an orderly fashion. In her efforts to arrange and divide her narrative, and therefore her self, Hagar attempts to skirt the uncanny instability produced by mortal life, which consistently replaces the singular with the multiple, the definitive, authentic self with an ever-expanding number of versions. Despite Hagar's desire to discover, even enforce a singular, authentic identity, divergent and even contradictory narratives thwart her efforts, exposing the mutability and multiplicity concomitant with temporal identity.

The Stone Angel depicts a character struggling to reconcile past and present, and offers a binaristic model of selfhood that corresponds to Hagar's persistent frustration and anger at what she perceives as a delinquent old self that distorts her true, young self. Hagar repeatedly endeavours to deny and resist her own temporality, and by implication, her own narrativity, in the very process of narrating her life story. Despite Hagar's explicit rejection of mutability and uncanniness, Laurence encourages readers to recognize Hagar's *ongoing* strangeness within. The novel's persistent irony, which resides in the gap between Hagar's staunch, independent character and the infirm ninety-year-old woman reliant upon the care of others, along with its accumulation of symbols, including the sightless stone angel, and numerous helpless animals, produce a kind of counter narrative, one that seems aware of its own blindness, even when its protagonist is not. The tension between implied author and narrating protagonist generates a doubleness within the text itself, one that, much like the uncanny, at once reveals and conceals internal difference.

As much as Hagar tells her story, her story tells her. In fact, an examination of her narratives reveals that this latter transaction, Hagar's constitution via narrative, is dominant. "We are subject *to* narrative as well as being subjects *of* narrative," writes Richard Kearney (emphasis his, *On Stories* 153); however, in Hagar's case, the emphasis falls more strongly on being subject

"*to*" narrative since her recollections determine her identity. Yet Hagar often refuses to reflect on her own narrative, functioning more as mouthpiece than as determining agent, or interpretive author. To be sure, there are moments in the text when Hagar seems capable of becoming an interpretive agent, but these moments are fleeting and not sustained. Perhaps the most obvious example is her revelation about pride that comes as the clergyman, Mr. Troy, sings to her. In pain and near death, Hagar is moved to epiphany, momentarily recognizing the debilitating impact of pride, shame, and fear upon her life. The revelation appears in terms remarkably reminiscent of Freud's "uncanny": self-knowledge resides in "some far crevice of my heart, some cave too deeply buried, too concealed" (292). But as always, the instant of interpretation and insight is fleeting, and Hagar returns to the rigid confines of an identity formed long ago, one "unchangeable, unregenerate" (293). There are several such moments of insight and reckoning, all of which are brief, painfully achieved, or confined within the haze of semi-consciousness, the insight dissolving as the moment passes.

These transitory interpretive moments are rare and, using the language of Ricoeur, Hagar remains largely in the realm of configuration, unable to consistently and effectively reflect on her own story, that is, to move successfully from configuration to refiguration.[7] In other words, Hagar rarely moves into the realm of interpretation, and as a result of her stubbornness she experiences a self-inflicted paralysis that denies change. The novel's primary symbol, the memorial statue erected in honour of her dead mother, is markedly blind, doubly so since she is "not only stone but unendowed with even a pretense of sight. Whoever carved her had left the eyeballs blank" (3). This central metaphor of sightlessness draws our attention to Hagar's reluctance to see, that is, her inability to be an effective reader. Her limited insight into her own story impedes Hagar's ascent toward redemption. She is a mouthpiece, a teller who often refuses to effectively listen or read, and as a result she is determined *by* narrative in spite of her ironic efforts to be always the determiner. Hagar is an overtly narrative subject, but one unwilling to read her own story.

"Now I am rampant with memory" (Laurence 5). This oft-cited remark occurs early in the novel, initiating Hagar's repeated contact with narratives of the past. The phrase suggests an inversion of the recollecting, storytelling subject. In Hagar's figuration, memory is the active agent that overtakes its subject. The *Oxford English Dictionary* reminds us that "rampant" refers to things "Unchecked, unrestrained, aggressive . . . . Having full sway or

unchecked course in the individual or (more commonly) in general society" (*OED*). The term's etymology is linked to wild animals, and one denotation refers to a beast reared on its hind legs.[8] A rampant memory is an uncontrollable one, a wild and domineering force that demands release in the narrative: "Now I light one of my cigarettes and stump around my room, remembering *furiously*, for no reason except that I am caught up in it" (emphasis added 6). Clearly there is no space here for the calm interaction of reflections. This narrative, this remembered past, determines Hagar, a wildness of recollection that she still prefers to the boredom of the present where she is treated as a thing by "the middling ones" (6), as "a cash crop" (6), and "a calf, to be fattened" (35).

In the voicing of her life narrative, Hagar undermines the multiplicity and flexibility of mediated identity. She maintains a stiff narrative line bisected into before and after, allowing her the illusion of pinpointing the constitution of self and its subsequent perversion. For Hagar Shipley, the unfamiliarity of the self in the present is in direct contrast to the "true" self of her youth, Hagar *Currie*. Yet Hagar's maiden name deconstructs her own nostalgic vision of a youthful, whole self. The obsolete term "currie" refers to "[t]he portions of an animal slain in the chase that were given to the hounds . . . [or] any prey thrown to the hounds to be torn in pieces" (OED). In other words, "Currie" signifies the ruin of a wild creature, suggesting that even in her youth, the patriarchal destruction of the "wild," "wilful" feminine was already underway—"Currie" being the name passed on to Hagar through her father. Her narrative documents the undoing of that supposedly true "Currie" self that has led to the disavowed "figure" of the present, one that appears "arbitrary and impossible" (38), a pattern of dissolution Laurence emphasizes through her use of names. Hagar repeatedly locates herself in a long past moment "when I first began to remember and to notice myself" (38). This period of authentic selfhood occurred when she was Hagar Currie teetering between the domination of two patriarchs: her father and her future husband. In this brief moment of (illusory) freedom, Hagar is on the brink of marriage, giddily defying her father's wishes and not yet burdened by the realities of her ill-conceived union to Bram Shipley. Hagar's father refuses to condone the marriage, but Hagar is determined: "'There's not a decent girl in this town would wed without her family's consent,' he said. 'It's not done.' 'It'll be done by me,' I said, drunk with exhilaration at my daring" (49).[9] Hagar imagines wholeness and freedom in the fleeting liminal space of transition, a space of change that she transforms into a static portrait of authenticity.

So fixed is Hagar on a definitive, youthful version of selfhood that her current status is often a shock: "I glance down at myself . . . and see with surprise and unfamiliarity the great swathed hips. My waist was twenty inches" (56). The selective use of possessive pronouns betrays Hagar's disavowal, articulating her body as other, an unfamiliar and unpleasant object at odds with the body, the self, she lays claim to: only the youthful body of the past is "my" body. Ironically, in her diligent emplotment of her life, Hagar locates herself in *images*, rejecting the temporality, the transition intrinsic to narrative. Hagar's narrative works to deny its own temporality through its efforts to impose constancy—Hagar *is* the young, beautiful unruly girl on the brink of marriage in a first experience of self-awareness—and to deny transience—Hagar *is not* the impoverished aged woman in her husband's overcoat selling eggs at Lottie's backdoor. Nor is she the old woman she sees reflected in a restroom mirror: "My hair was gray and straight . . . . The face—a brown and leathery face that *wasn't mine*. Only the eyes were mine, staring as though to pierce the lying glass and get beneath to some *truer image*, infinitely distant" (emphasis added, 133). Hagar's observation reinforces the opposition between youth and age, truth and falsity, resulting in a denial that attempts to consign the distorted, delinquent, or aged self to the space of otherness.

Hagar consistently perceives old age as other, separate from the immutable self she desires. Her denial of change results in a whole-hearted insistence on her aged self as artificial, even incorrect. Hagar strenuously disavows temporality, unsuccessfully denying her own difference through othering. Her story emphasizes identity dissolution, a movement *away* from her true, imagistic self, a narrative of aberration. From the vital, familiar self of youth—"Hagar with the shining hair, the dark-maned colt off to the training ring" (42)—to the unfamiliar wife and mother with a "face that wasn't mine," to the "arbitrary and impossible" image in the present (38), Hagar's narrative trajectory is one of loss and diminution. Her inability to tolerate a shifting narrative identity, and her insistence on the fixed and absent image of her memory inhibit her awareness of otherness *within*. Unable to fully accept the plasticity of narrative identity, Hagar remains trapped in the mournful dualism of past wholeness and present disintegration.

Hagar is not alone in her insistence on temporal segregation. As Woodward makes clear, age gradations "ultimately and precipitously devolve into a single binary—into youth and age. Age is a subtle continuum, but we organize this continuum into "polar opposites" (Woodward, *Discontents* 6). Woodward identifies such evaluative segmentation as the legacy of a

psychoanalytic conception of a bodily ego formed in childhood: "The ego takes shape in infancy; the surface of the body is imagined as smooth, that is, as unwrinkled – in short, as *young*. Thus in Freudian discourse the aging body would be a sign of *deformation*" (10). Consequently, youth often becomes, as Patricia Mellencamp asserts, "a lost object rather than a process or a passage. . . . An abnormal modeling of ego or self as an object, often of contempt, rather than a subject can be the rageful result" (281). Frustration, contempt, and even rage are obvious in Hagar's narrative; indeed, the novel opens with an epigraph from Dylan Thomas's "Do Not Go Gentle into that Good Night." But while Thomas is urging a dying father to rage against death, to rise up vibrant and vital, Hagar's rage is directed both outward and inward in a flailing hatred of time and aging. Trapped as she is in a past image, her narrative is one of frustration, of "*deformation*," since it inevitably moves her away from her beloved youth.

Unable to confront her own temporality and acknowledge strangeness *within*, she is similarly unable to empathize with the other older women patients in the hospital where she is taken after her "rescue" from Shadow Point. She is unnerved by what she can only regard as decrepitude, demanding a private room to protect her from the threat of association with these aged others. She does get her wish, but her move to a semi-private suite comes just as she is beginning to glimpse the humanity of the other patients, an awareness of their position as subjects. The revelation that Hagar has been talking in her sleep, a disclosure she immediately rejects, suggests the existence of multiple versions, of stories that her conscious mind cannot abide (259). The narrative voiced in sleep precisely embodies Schelling's uncanny as "*everything that ought to have remained . . . secret and hidden but has come to light*" (qtd in Freud 345).[10] Hagar projects otherness onto the other patients, whom she regards as old, infirm nuisances, as abjectly corporeal with their "open-mouthed yawns . . . gaseous belches, volcanic wind" (258). However, this projection is undermined by the shocking discovery that she herself is *one of them* when another patient informs Hagar of her uncanny storytelling:

> "Well, what kind of night did you have?" she asks. "Kinda disturbed eh?"
>
> Her voice has that insufferable brightness that I loathe. I'm not in the mood for her cheerfulness. I wish to heaven she'd go away and leave me alone.
>
> "I scarcely slept a wink," I reply. "Who could, in this place, with all the moaning and groaning that goes on? You might as well try to sleep in a railway station."
>
> "You was the one doing most of the talking," she says. "I heard you. You was up twice, and the nurse had to put you back."

> I looked at her coldly. "You must be mistaken. I never said a word. I was right here in this bed all night. I certainly never moved a muscle."
> "That's what you think," she says. (Laurence 258-9)

Hagar's sleep-talking exposes her own strangeness, the multiplicity and unfamiliarity of self that distressingly associates her with the others in the hospital ward. Hers is one of the night voices that speak unbidden when "darkness swarms" (273). These night voices are like "remembered fragments painted on shadow" (274); they "stir like fretful leaves against a window":

> *Tom, don't you worry none—*
> *Mother of God, pray for us now and at the hour of—*
> *Mein Gott, erlöse mich—*
> *You mind that time, Tom? I mind it so well—*
> *I am sorry for having offended Thee, because I love—*
> *Erlöse mich von meinen Schmerzen—*
> Bram! (275)

It is a shock for Hagar to recognize her own cries among the others; indeed, "Some time elapses" before she recognizes her voice (275). Hagar's outburst appears as one fragment within an unattributed list of speech that makes her voice one of many in a chorus of sleep-talking. Hagar's recognition briefly pierces through the protective blindness that makes us "refuse to acknowledge ourselves-as-others" (Kearney, *Strangers* 5). Hagar momentarily hears herself-as-other in her uncanny utterance: she discovers a voice and a story that is her own, that is *her*, and yet is unfamiliar. Aging and her association with other aging women move Hagar into a space of uncanny recognition where the illusion of the singular, authentic self begins to dissolve into multiple versions. As philosopher Henry Venema explains in his inquiry into Ricoeur's theory of narrative identity, "there is no meta-narrative that can totalize my experience. Narrative identity is an identity of various stories" (97). The unbidden voice, speaking in fragments, speaking from sleep, speaking alongside many others, divulges the cacophonic self: unstable and various, at once other and self.

But Hagar seeks to return to the meta-narrative that puts youth at the apex. Her uncanny recognition is cut short when she is whisked away to the semi-private quarters she had requested. In her new room, which she shares with a young woman hospitalized for an appendectomy, Hagar quickly returns to her exclusive identification with the "lost object" of youth: "I was quite slender at your age," she tells the thin, young nurse who ministers to her, "I had black hair, long, halfway down my back. Some people thought

me quite pretty. You'd never think so to look at me now" (283). Once again Hagar locates herself in a static memory that makes time into a process of dissolution and paradoxical inflation, since it magnifies the body's importance by "deforming" it. She shares her new room with a young woman whose youthfulness quickly inspires Hagar's empathy, unlike the old women of the public ward, who initially prompted irritation and disgust. [11]

Hagar quickly tumbles back into the model of an authentic self formed in youth and victimized by time.[12] This dualistic fantasy of constancy cannot tolerate the instability of temporal existence. In Ricoeur's formation, narrative simultaneously creates and depends upon time in a circular constitutive transaction; but Hagar's narration seeks to deny the impermanence that human narrativity and temporality bring. The novel emphasizes such a static vision of selfhood that equates time and change primarily with debilitation in its framing image of the stone angel; in her full (though blind) glory at the outset, she is altered by time at the novel's end: "she stood askew and tilted. Her mouth was white. We didn't touch her. We only looked. Someday she'll topple entirely, and no one will bother to set her upright again" (305). Original integrity is set against the collapsed future, the metonymic angel neatly bracketing Hagar's narrative of her own fall.

However, though the novel does employ these stone angel images as a frame, the weather-beaten angel does not close the novel. The novel's actual ending, two pages later, gives temporality the final word. The final lines, like the sleep-talking scene, rupture the neatness of the singular self, the simple bisection of Hagar's life into before and after. Hagar's narrative is aborted by mortality and the novel's concluding fragment, "And then—" (308), represents a simultaneous suspension and triumph of time. This artificial maintenance of the present, through which the reader is always here, on the verge, unable to move to the next moment, creates an ending that flaunts closure. As a result, the novel, and by extension, Hagar, can be always *on the verge of* and concluded at once. The uncanniness that Hagar refused to accept subsequently finds her at her death in this fragment, this simultaneous presence and absence, this unfinished completion.

The Stone Angel suggests that "life review" is never comprehensive or fully finished since summation and exhaustive analysis are invariably thwarted by the progress of time. Though narrative can provide the comfort of meaning and identity, its temporal nature (narrative as the human way of understanding and expressing time) means that it is always fluid, open to revision and re-telling. Or, as Ricoeur explains, narrative is "not a stable and

seamless identity," making it "the name of the problem at least as much as it is that of a solution" (*Time* 3: 248, 249); narrative identity is always in flux as it "continues to make and unmake itself" (249). Though mutability is an unavoidable effect of temporality, as Hagar and the various champions of life review demonstrate, we transient mortals continue to long for the "stable and seamless identity" of totalizing stories, for corrective metanarratives able to encapsulate a life. Consequently, as *The Stone Angel* dramatizes, change can easily become a frightful spectre that threatens to upset the illusion of a fixed, authentic self. The prospect of multiple versions of self introduced by aging can provoke a frightening unsteadiness as distinctions and categories begin to blur, as oppositions refuse to hold. Life narratives are multiple and complex, rampant with ambiguities and contradictions, with interpretive blindspots, frustrating ellipses. As the *The Stone Angel* suggests, "looking back" rarely, if ever, yields a cohesive meta-narrative of self in spite of the recollecting subject's desire to do so. Instead, the reading and writing of a life in Laurence's novel exposes the very mutability at the heart of narrative itself, wedded as it is to ever-changing temporality. To look back is to gaze at a chimera, at the uncanniness of self.

NOTES

1 The converse is also true: the increased prevalence of dementia in later life means that aging can result in the gradual disappearance of narratives, and by implication, an erosion of the subject, one that produces a frightening uncanniness as subjects become strangers to themselves and those around them. The uncanniness of later-life dementia is the subject of my current research into relations between caregivers and those they care for.

2 One of the few essays that analyzes the novel's "affirmation" of old age is Constance Rooke's "Old Age in Contemporary Fiction: A New Paradigm of Hope" (250). Rooke also uses Laurence's novel to touch briefly on the "theme" of "life review," which she sees as central to the genre she terms "*Vollendungsroman*," the novel of winding up and completion (244-5).

3 Erikson's eight stages, their central conflicts and ideal resolutions are as follows:
Stage one: Infancy. Basic trust versus mistrust resolving in hope.
Stage two: Early childhood. Autonomy versus shame resolving in will.
Stage three: Play age. Initiative versus guilt resolving in purpose.
Stage four: School age. Industry versus inferiority resolving in competence.
Stage five: Adolescence. Identity versus identity confusion resolving in fidelity.
Stage six: Young adulthood. Intimacy versus isolation resolving in love.
Stage seven: Adulthood. Generativity versus stagnation resolving in care.
Stage eight: Old age. Integrity versus despair, disgust resolving in wisdom.

4 The therapeutic preference for certain narratives as more appropriate for psychological healing is, of course, part of the legacy of the psychoanalytic "talking cure," which "meets

psychological pain with narrative" (Hemmings 109). In psychoanalysis, narrative can become the anodyne as "healthy" stories are made to replace dysfunctional ones. For more on the narrative implications of psychoanalysis, see Steven Marcus and Donald Spence.

5 Kathleen Woodward takes issue with life review theory, which she regards as limiting in its emphasis on the location, or creation, of consistent, coherent life narratives ("Telling Stories" 150). Instead of life review, she prefers the more open-ended process of "reminiscence," which "does not promise the totality of the life review. It is more fragmentary and partial. Reminiscence is concerned with a certain moment, or moments, in the past" ("Telling Stories" 151). She regards reminiscence as "generative and restorative," as less analytical and restrictive than life review (151). In these terms, reminiscence makes room for multiplicity and mutability, the flux of narrative identity. Literary gerontologist Anne Wyatt-Brown disagrees with Woodward's analysis, arguing that "real lives, unlike postmodern novels, have their psychic coherence. They can display all the Aristotelian characteristics of a beginning, middle, and end" (341). I do not dispute that "real" lives have some "Aristotelian" coherence, but I would argue that such neat linear narratives are rarely the whole story. As *The Stone Angel* makes clear, even organized, coherent life narratives are open to revision and reinterpretation.

6 Life review often has "three stages: focusing on what has been learned about self in relation to others; considering whether this learning is still relevant; and recognising what should be retained, revising what is unclear, and discarding what is no longer required" (Garland and Garland 3).

7 These terms stem from Ricoeur's treatment in *Time and Narrative* of the three stages of mimesis that produce the hermeneutic circle between narrative and life (2: 64-71). Ricoeur proposes emplotment, or configuration, as the connective tissue between the preconfigured world and our understanding of it. And it is this understanding, or reconfiguration that, in turn, informs our action and participation in the world. As Ricoeur explains, this third stage of mimesis "marks the intersection of the world of the text and the world of the hearer or reader" (2: 71).

8 Sally Chivers's analysis of *The Stone Angel* emphasizes the preponderance of animal metaphors and similes in the novel, suggesting that such "bestial and derogatory" vehicles are an effect of the collision between memories of youth and the fearful difficulties of old age. She suggests that such figurative language effects a distancing from the present, from old age since Hagar can only reach the present through derogatory and evasive metaphor, producing a "tenor [that] continually shifts and evades readers" (30).

9 Notably, it is during this liminal moment between men that Hagar's father seems to briefly acknowledge her subject status, calling his daughter by her name:

> Then, without warning, he reached out a hand like a lariat, caught my arm, held and bruised it, not even knowing he was doing so.
>
> "Hagar—" he said. "You'll not go, Hagar."
>
> The only time he ever called me by my name. To this day I couldn't say if it was a question or a command. I didn't argue with him. There never was any use in that. But I went, when I was good and ready, all the same. (49)

10 This particular secret, sleep-talking, both unveils and maintains Hagar's incomprehensibility, an element of strangeness that can never be entirely domesticated: the uncanny unearthing of dark secrets is always only a partial exposure. An element of irreducible otherness must always remain. This is part of the very uncanniness of Freud's "The

Uncanny," an essay that demonstrates the necessary limits to explanation since exhaustive explanation would in effect eradicate the very phenomenon it seeks to explore. In other words, the uncanny and Freud's investigation of it, take us to the limits of representation since the term by definition relies upon a degree of semantic and interpretive uncertainty.

11 Despite the fact that her roommate, Sandra Wong, is a young Chinese-Canadian woman, Hagar more easily identifies with her than with her contemporaries in the previous ward. Here we see evidence of Woodward's claim that "in advanced old age, age may assume more importance than any of the other differences which distinguish our bodies from others" (*Discontents* 16). Hagar easily overlooks ethnicity in order to identify with youth.

12 Aging studies includes a number of identity theories that concur with Hagar's vision. Joseph Esposito, for example, "divide[s] the lifespan into just two stages: the emergence of the ultimate self and the maintenance of the ultimate self" (101). However, I maintain that old age frequently strains the illusion of permanence provided by such theories.

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Aaron Giovannone

untitled

I thought hard, put hand to chin
What's the date, and you revealed
your forehead your eyes

This is how sad I am
Your smile pulls the corners of my mouth
and underline this now she's looking
as the day curls away at the edges
and thickens with stars

We slept in my brother's old room
because mom was too sick to climb the stairs

So what's the difference you said
So what's the difference I said
then kissed you so quickly on the porch
even the motion-light missed it

Benjamin Lefebvre

Agency, Belonging, Citizenship

The ABCs of Nation-Building in Contemporary Canadian Texts for Adolescents

A few years ago, on the first day of a 200-level undergraduate course at the University of Winnipeg on "Canadian Children's Literature and Cultures," I introduced the topic with a pedagogical strategy designed to prompt my students to consider some of their assumptions about texts for children, their audience, their cultural production, and the ideological function they serve. First were fill-in-the-blank statements borrowed from Perry Nodelman and Mavis Reimer's book *The Pleasures of Children's Literature* (2003) about the perceived distinctions between children and adults as well as between texts for children and texts for adults: "Children's books are, or should be, _____." "Children are, or should be, _____" (79). To these I added a few follow-up questions: "What is (or should be) a *Canadian* text for children?" "How is Canadian children's literature different from literature set elsewhere?" And finally, "Who is a Canadian?"

Many of my students expressed their inability to confirm whether the authors they remembered from their childhoods were Canadian or not. They had a clear sense that Canadian texts for children should be set in Canada and reflect Canadian values, but they weren't always able to articulate precisely what those values were or how they might differ from those of the United States or elsewhere. To my last question, on the other hand, the responses were overwhelmingly consistent: anyone who lives in Canada and who self-identifies as a Canadian is a Canadian—period. A few of my students acknowledged their awareness of some of the ways in which hierarchies of race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, class, language, nationality,

and location might trouble or at least add to the complexity of the term "Canadian" to encompass all citizens of the nation. Overall, however, the sentiments expressed in my students' responses implied a particular view of Canada as a liberal and diverse nation-state, one that has been encoded into the dominant ideology of multiculturalism, which guarantees equal rights, responsibilities, and privileges to all its citizens. The Canadian Multiculturalism Act outlines some of the measures used to ensure the promotion of multiculturalism within an officially bilingual nation-state: it includes policies that

> (*a*) recognize and promote the understanding that multiculturalism reflects the cultural and racial diversity of Canadian society and acknowledges the freedom of all members of Canadian society to preserve, enhance and share their cultural heritage;
> (*b*) recognize and promote the understanding that multiculturalism is a fundamental characteristic of the Canadian heritage and identity and that it provides an invaluable resource in the shaping of Canada's future;
> (*c*) promote the full and equitable participation of individuals and communities of all origins in the continuing evolution and shaping of all aspects of Canadian society and assist them in the elimination of any barrier to that participation[.]

It may seem unnecessary to quote so extensively from the Multiculturalism Act more than two decades after its initial formulation in 1985, but I do so because of a curious discrepancy between what it states and the vision my students expressed of the country in which they live. While my students, most of whom were born around the time the policy took effect, implied an active support of multiculturalism as an ideal that ensures equal rights and responsibilities for all Canadian citizens, they showed no awareness of possible "barrier[s]" that the Act explicitly acknowledges and seeks to overturn. Such a gap is even more revealing in light of Neil Bissoondath's comments about the Multiculturalism Act's "lack of long-term consideration," which he discusses at length in *Selling Illusions* (2002):

> The act, activist in spirit, magnanimous in accommodation, curiously excludes any ultimate vision of the kind of society it wishes to create. It never addresses the question of the nature of a multicultural society, what such a society is and—beyond a kind of vague notion of respect for human differences—what it means for the nation at large and the individuals who compose it. Definitions and implications are conspicuously absent. . . . Even years later, the act—a cornerstone of bipartisan, federal social policy—shows signs of a certain haste. (39)

While Bissoondath questions the Act's ambiguity about the nature of the ideal multicultural society it envisions for the future, what struck me about

my students' comments was that they recognized this ideal as their present reality. And yet, in the discussions that ensued throughout the term about the links between literary texts and the dominant cultural and social values that they reproduce or challenge, we kept encountering texts that focused on characters experiencing the very kinds of discriminatory practices that violate the legal rights guaranteed by this Act. My decision to include such texts was not motivated by a desire to ruin the sense of equality and justice that they perceived under the banner of multiculturalism, but I did want them to read texts that would put pressure on some of their assumptions about such an ideal. Even in my other courses that year, in which I included Canadian texts for young people whenever I could, were narratives that seemed to challenge this ideal in ways that echo Bissoondath's comments.

My objective in this paper is to explore some of the ways in which discourses of agency, belonging, and citizenship—the ABCs of nation-building alluded to in my title—are staged in a handful of Canadian literary texts for adolescents published in the last twenty-five years. While countless texts published for young people in Canada portray national ideals alongside the story of a central protagonist's growth from relative immaturity to relative maturity, the ones that form this discussion were chosen because they tell a particular story, or counterstory, about the official policies of multiculturalism quoted above: Beatrice Culleton's *April Raintree* (1984), Marlene Nourbese Philip's *Harriet's Daughter* (1988), Deborah Ellis's *Parvana's Journey* (2002), Glen Huser's *Stitches* (2003), and Martine Leavitt's *Heck Superhero* (2004).[1] All of these novels narrate a version of modern adolescence—the "transition stage between childhood and adulthood," to borrow from the Australian critic Robyn McCallum (3)—that depicts young characters striving to negotiate the social and ideological pressures of the cultural spaces they inhabit. They depict young people who struggle with poverty and family dissolution, and who are marginalized by such oppressive discourses such as racism, sexism, patriarchy, homophobia. These narratives draw on the conventions of the young adult problem novel, a subgenre of adolescent realistic fiction that not only advocates a clear solution to a clearly identified social problem (such as peer pressure and divorce) but offers resolutions that according to Kirk Fuoss "usually suggest that the protagonist is only beginning to come to terms with the problem and that a difficult period of adjustment and/or recovery still lies ahead"(161). As it has been theorized by critics in Canada, Australia, and the U.S., the narrative structure of the young adult problem novel, particularly the ending, encodes an attempt to

manipulate an imagined audience of adolescent readers who are targetted as requiring the ideological and moral guidance of the text.[2]

However, the texts that form this discussion do not quite reinforce such guidance. Their plot resolutions refuse to settle the "problem" of these oppressive discourses, and they trouble both the conventions of the young adult problem novel and the vision of an idealized, multicultural Canada. These texts overlap to an extent with the pattern that Roberta Seelinger Trites finds in American texts for adolescents and labels "novels of social hope," which "share a romantic faith in the ability of youth to improve the future" by casting "uncorrupted youth with reform agendas" in starring roles ("Hope, Despair, and Reform" 3-4, 13). The distinctive feature of these Canadian novels, however, is that while their protagonists retain hope at the end of each narrative, this hope does not necessarily lead to concrete social change. Given the importance of the *resolution* in adolescent fiction as the purveyor of the text's final ideological standpoint, such open endings prompt me to consider what version of Canada is encoded in these texts for young people, not only in terms of granting a voice to all citizens of the nation but also in terms of how the future of the nation is imagined. Because they break from resolutionary conventions, texts that avoid singular ideological stances and clear narrative closure necessitate a different kind of reading contract with adolescent readers. Given such deferrals of narrative closure, readers are invited to ponder for themselves the implications of such deferrals.

For example, in both Leavitt's *Heck Superhero* and Ellis's *Parvana's Journey*, a coincidental happy ending implicitly signals a failure in the protagonists' quests to find their missing mothers from whom they were separated by external forces beyond their control, and they are unable to rebuild a fractured family unit. For both Heck and Parvana, the quest to reclaim the mother (and thus the family) is primarily motivated by gendered fantasies. Heck relies on the narrative conventions of comic books to imagine himself as a superhero (in terms of both the visual drawings and the psychological adoption of such a gendered persona) in order to distract himself from the hunger and homelessness caused by the eviction that followed his mother's disappearance. In Ellis's book, the second title in her Breadwinner trilogy set in Afghanistan but aimed at Canadian readers, Parvana is forced to dress as a boy in order to gain some of the liberties that are denied to her under the Taliban, a faceless and incomprehensible system of oppression that prompts her to express her confusion and anxiety in a series of letters that can never

be mailed. As young adolescents negotiating a world that has failed them, both Heck and Parvana discover through hardship that they can be resourceful and self-sufficient without their mothers, even though their quest to restore their natural roles as dependent children would make them renounce that self-sufficiency, and thus become relatively *less* mature. The fact that both Heck and Parvana reach the point of despair shortly before their miraculous reunions with their missing mothers adds to the ambivalence of each resolution, as revealed in Parvana's penultimate letter to Shauzia, written in a camp for internal refugees who are being considered for exile in Canada, figured in the text as a land of refuge: "*Everywhere I go, I look for my mother. . . . I'm not even going to hope that I'll find her. Hope is a waste of time*" (178; italics in original). After spending the bulk of the narrative trying to locate his mother without asking for help, Heck admits defeat to his best friend: "I've tried everything, Spence, but I just can't find her. I've got to tell . . . somebody, I guess" (119; ellipsis in original).

James C. Greenlaw, discussing Ellis's fiction in the context of global education, praises the larger trilogy for "its power not to indoctrinate but to educate Canadian adolescents and adults about the way hope, love, and courage figure in the lives of children who are faced with overwhelming challenges. . . . By sharing vicariously in Parvana's and Shauzia's struggles, Canadian adolescents may also learn about the importance of thinking critically about injustices in their world" (46, 45). And yet, the pleasures evoked by the respective reunions of mother and child require that readers overlook the ambivalence implied by both texts' resolutions, which arguably reward their protagonists by providing them with precisely what they both *gave up* looking for. In the final pages of *Heck Superhero*, Heck's fragile and unstable mother—described earlier in the narrative as "so small, so breakable" (42-43)—vows to become a better parent after a switch in medication, but readers looking for a "satisfying" resolution to the protagonist's quest would need to ignore the fact that the text does not depict the practical ways she will do so. Instead, despite the story's focus on the quest to restore the biological family, the narrative's final moments depict Heck confiding in and physically embracing a male teacher who has befriended him, shortly after bumping into his mother in a hospital. Ultimately, both Heck and Parvana end the story *less* mature than when they began. The immediate "problem" of locating missing mothers has technically been resolved; however, the continuing problem of how the protagonists might gain agency and belonging in an unsafe world remains unresolved.

Given that these quests for agency and home remain unsuccessful or incomplete, I am interested in considering how these open-ended texts construct adolescence for young readers in Canada. Such a concern is especially apt in the case of *Parvana's Journey*, a story that is preceded by two maps of the Middle East: these maps suggest that the text is written for an audience of readers in Canada who do not even know where Afghanistan is located, let alone how to place Parvana's struggle for survival in any context.[3] Reading these two books for the first time, I questioned the respective endings for their apparent failure to resolve adequately the struggles depicted throughout the narratives—survival, homelessness, hunger, war. But as the larger pattern of supposedly faulty endings began to emerge, I began to wonder if perhaps these texts were deploying a different kind of narrative strategy to call into question the very feasibility of neatly "solving" problems of identity and belonging, making me reconsider the purpose of endings in literature for adolescents. In *The Rhetoric of Character in Children's Literature* (2002), Maria Nikolajeva makes the distinction between the structural closure of the plot and the psychological closure of the protagonist's personal conflicts, stressing that the two "may stand in discrepancy to each other": "The superficial plot is concluded; the 'human' plot is left open-ended" (168). This kind of psychological open ending is what Nikolajeva terms *aperture*, which signals "an indeterminacy concerning both what has actually happened and what might still happen to a character," allowing for "an infinite bifurcation of interpretations" that invites readers "to contemplate further" (168-69).

In asking the question of what version of Canadian adolescence is staged in these two texts, the notion of aperture seems especially apt given their apparent inability to bridge the gap between the fantasy of a Canadian nation comprised of equally autonomous citizens and narratives that do not neatly resolve oppression and inequality. The conclusion of Culleton's *April Raintree* likewise appeared incomplete in my first reading for this reason. The bulk of the novel depicts its eponymous protagonist struggling to find a place for herself as a Métis woman in a social world that perceives "white" and "Native" as a binary opposition, a world that excludes her for having mixed ancestry: "It would be better to be full-blooded Indian or full-blooded Caucasian. But being a half-breed, well, there's just nothing there" (125). After years of viewing all forms of Métis and Aboriginal cultures as negative, April finally embraces the notion of "my people" (184) after her sister's suicide and the discovery of an infant nephew. However, because she has never been able to pinpoint in practical terms what it means to be Métis, to

bridge the gap between two apparently homogenous and mutually exclusive cultures, the text is unable to articulate what exactly she ends up embracing. The "superficial plot," to use Nikolajeva's terminology, closes at this point, but the aperture of the ending suggests, in my view, the difficulties inherent in attempting to "solve" or "resolve" the challenges of pinpointing a static and definite Métis identity. Helen Hoy discusses the "provisional" identity (285) that April embraces at the end of *In Search of April Raintree*, this novel's predecessor:

> April ultimately treats identity as verb not noun, as action not condition, as performative not inherent—and as communal not individual. Her final claim to have accepted her identity has less to do with some essence she discovers in herself (or other Métis or Native people) than with her mobilization of the relations, historic and present, in which she finds herself. She begins to deploy positively connections she has hitherto resisted. Her speaking of the words 'MY PEOPLE, OUR PEOPLE' . . . enacts a political affiliation, an involvement with others in the hopeful shaping of the future. (286)[4]

In light of Nikolajeva's suggestion that such aperture invites readers to reflect further on the gaps and silences embedded in the resolution, it would seem to me that the open ending of this text invites readers to ponder the irresolvability of locating a finite Métis identity, rather than a failure to resolve the quest of the protagonist. The text explicitly identifies the ideal Canadian nation that is supposedly guaranteed by the Multiculturalism Act, but ongoing discourses of racism become the barrier that prevents April and Cheryl from obtaining that idealized citizenship. Obtaining that ideal is deferred precisely because the theory and the practice of a harmoniously multicultural nation-state are unbridgeable—not to mention because this apparent "ideal" is imposed by the very norms that continue to oppress Aboriginal and Métis citizens.

The remaining texts that form this discussion likewise centre on the negotiated relationship between individual citizen and imagined community, and they both feature adolescent protagonists who openly challenge the boundaries of race, gender, and sexuality imposed by their families and their communities. Moreover, as in *April Raintree*, both stories are told by first-person narrators who articulate their own feelings of powerlessness (even though these "authentic" teenage voices are created by adult authors writing within the conventions of adolescent fiction). Marlene Nourbese Philip's *Harriet's Daughter* tells the story of Margaret Cruickshank, a Toronto-born fourteen-year-old of West Indian ancestry who uses the language of slavery to persistently question social and familial oppression (105). Resisting the

rigid structures imposed by her father, who sees assertive speech as unladylike, and by her mother, who has internalized her husband's patriarchal thinking, Margaret temporarily finds empowerment in the Underground Railway Game, an elaborate revisionist staging of the journey toward freedom in which white and black children can participate as either slaves or slave-owners. As a consequence of her rebellion, Margaret's father punishes her by making her his slave, claiming that she has "*too much* freedom" (90; emphasis mine). In the absence of a single male role model who does not enforce patriarchal thinking, the text depicts a form of patriarchy that is largely irredeemable. Instead, Margaret invests her energy in her close friendship with Zulma, a bond that is democratic, egalitarian, and emotionally satisfying. The novel culminates in Margaret's success in reuniting Zulma with her grandmother and in her temporary escape from her family when she joins Zulma on her trip to Tobago. When I taught this novel in a first-year introductory course to literary studies, my students and I had some difficulty with the complexity of the ending: Margaret's dream of living harmoniously with Zulma on a self-contained island is juxtaposed with the final line, in which Zulma's grandmother tells them to hurry up because "your uncle Herbert [is] waiting" outside (150). On the one hand, this final moment subtly undercuts the dream of a women's-only utopia with the implicit reminder that such a utopia is ultimately unattainable and must be repressed. On the other hand, by providing this contrast, the text signals the ways that such a utopia is attractive and necessary without presuming to intimate that it can be achieved so easily. The abrupt ending—or non-ending—signals in my view the reminder that ceaseless effort needs to follow the beginnings of feminist consciousness, even if the desired goal is always out of reach.[5]

Finally, in Glen Huser's *Stitches*, the story of Travis's persecution as a gender-atypical adolescent likewise reaches an ambivalent conclusion, given that he chooses to leave the small community that contains fellow citizens who reject him. Travis is compelling because he refuses to be swayed by the opinions of male authority figures around him, men who respond to his interests in sewing and fashion with distaste, homophobic name-calling, and, in the case of three classmates who bully him, a violence combined with the language of sexual assault.[6] And yet Travis's sense of "difference" remains unnamed; his mother responds to his insistence that he is "more different" than most people with the correction that he is "more special" (109). Despite the implied shift from negative to positive connotations in his

mother's corrective, Travis's different identity remains undefined, and this adds to the complexity of the resolution: he relocates to the city after a nearly fatal act of violence and attends an alternative high school where "no one seems to mind how different you are" (196). Because "difference" ultimately remains an abstract concept (as does the norm against which difference is measured), it remains unclear precisely what kind of agency sixteen-year-old Travis gains by leaving: he *does* find a place within the nation where he can be himself (whatever the identity refers to), but the fact that his tiny apartment is located in an impoverished neighbourhood hardly guarantees that acts of violence could never recur. It is likewise debatable what kind of utopian world he has joined if individual differences are glossed over by abstract word-choices. In many ways, the utopian world staged in the city mirrors a version of multicultural citizenship that values "difference" in the abstract but refuses to name or acknowledge concrete differences between actual individuals. As well, the incompleteness of this resolution extends to the supporting characters, given that the abusive relationship between Travis's aunt and uncle is left hanging: not only does Uncle Mike disappear from the text, but Travis does not intervene in the oppression of others, an assurance that such oppression will likely continue after he leaves.

In staging a version of Canada that clearly articulates the ideal world that the protagonists yearn for but defers the possibility of making that ideal world a concrete reality, these recent Canadian texts for adolescents unsettle the fantasy of equality perpetuated by official multiculturalism. By focusing primarily on a protagonist's oppression, and ending at the moment when newfound freedom appears to be achieved, these texts signal that the quest for agency, belonging, and citizenship is always an ongoing project. At the same time, the deferral of resolutions to such problems signals the need for further reflection and action before productive social change can be achieved. As well, the final moments of these five narratives draw attention to the impossibility of closure by shifting the setting to transitional spaces—the airport, the refugee camp, the hospital, a friend's home, a new apartment in the city—which stage a version of Canada that is likewise in transition as a utopian nation that can never be fully realized. By refusing to satisfy completely the protagonists' desires to belong, these texts encode the nation as a temporary space in a state of reconstruction. The fantasy of a harmonious nation embraced by my students is a clear ideal, but these Canadian texts for adolescents demonstrate how difficult it is to achieve this harmony in practice.

NOTES

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1 It is worth noting that four of these texts are recipients of major awards, indicating the cultural capital that they have gained in Canada and elsewhere. *Harriet's Daughter* won the 1988 Casa de las Americas Prize. *Stitches* was the recipient of the Governor General's Award for Children's Literature—Text in 2003, whereas *Parvana's Journey* and *Heck Superhero* were shortlisted for that award in 2002 and 2004, respectively.

2 For more on the ideological function of texts for young people, see Desai; McCallum; Stephens; Reimer and Rusnak; Totaro; Trites, *Disturbing*; and Walter.

3 Ellis's text is followed by an "Author's Note" which begins as follows: "Afghanistan is a small country in central Asia" (195). If the book assumes that its audience needs to be provided such basic knowledge *after* the novel's conclusion, it is unclear how it expects readers to follow the narrative that precedes it.

4 Consider, too, Janice Acoose's observation that, "With its protagonists seduced by popular terms like 'Native' and 'Halfbreed,' and confused by colloquial metaphors such as 'mixed-blood' and 'part-Indian,' the text does not successfully illustrate the Métis cultural identity" (228).

5 See Cynthia James's persuasive article, which argues that the adolescent Margaret also performs a transition between Canada, her present home, and the West Indies, her ancestral home. See also Zwicker.

6 "I felt that somehow I'd left my body and hovered high up there, watching the scene below. . . . How long does the boy lie there before he pulls his clothing back into place? As he struggles to his feet, before he can get up completely, he is sick. Like a dog, he kicks leaves and twigs over the mess" (102). Later, Travis takes a bath in an attempt to remove the feeling of "Shon's hands unable to leave my body" (104), which is reminiscent of April's attempts, while bathing, to rid herself of the smell of the "dirty, stinking bodies" of the men who sexually assaulted her (119).

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Un ouvrage de référence incontournable

Michel Biron, François Dumont, et Élisabeth Nardout-Lafarge; en collaboration avec Martine-Emmanuelle Lapointe
Histoire de la littérature québécoise. Boréal 39,95 $

Compte rendu par Louise Frappier

Il faut le dire, la parution de cette nouvelle histoire de la littérature québécoise fera date. L'ouvrage co-signé par Michel Biron, François Dumont et Élisabeth Nardout-Lafarge (en collaboration avec Martine-Emmanuelle Lapointe) arrive à point nommé dans le paysage critique québécois. Une nouvelle lecture de l'histoire de la littérature du Québec s'avérait en effet nécessaire, une telle entreprise n'ayant pas été tentée, comme le soulignent les auteurs, depuis *La Littérature québécoise depuis ses origines* de Laurent Mailhot, d'abord parue en 1974, puis rééditée dans une version remaniée en 1997. La « lecture historique des textes littéraires québécois » que propose l'ouvrage innove à plusieurs niveaux, à commencer par l'approche méthodologique, ressortissant à la fois à la sociologie de la littérature et à l'analyse textuelle. L'inscription de la littérature dans un « continuum » historique s'accompagne ainsi de commentaires éclairants sur des œuvres-phares, choisies en fonction de leur impact, de leur notoriété ou de leur importance, parfois méconnue. L'étude couvre ainsi l'ensemble de la production littéraire du Québec (incluant le théâtre et l'essai), divisée en cinq parties, depuis la Nouvelle-France jusqu'à aujourd'hui. Soulignons l'initiative heureuse des auteurs d'avoir intégré au corpus littéraire québécois la production de langue anglaise, jusqu'alors systématiquement écartée de l'historiographie littéraire québécoise. Ce parti pris repose sur le principe, à notre point de vue tout à fait justifiable, qui veut qu'une histoire de la littérature du Québec ne saurait faire l'économie des œuvres de langue anglaise dont la circulation et le retentissement ont pu avoir un impact sur le lectorat francophone.

Bien que la majeure partie de l'ouvrage couvre le vingtième siècle (environ 475 pages sur les 630 que comporte le livre), les deux premières parties, consacrées à la Nouvelle-France (1534-1763) et aux productions des XVIII^e^ et XIX^e^ siècles (1763-1895), brossent un portrait étoffé de textes peu lus. Si les écrits de la Nouvelle-France correspondent peu ou prou à la conception moderne de la littérature, il n'en demeure pas moins que ces récits de voyages, lettres, chroniques et mémoires, destinés à un lectorat français, témoignent d'un désir d'appropriation du nouveau territoire par le langage. Les textes de la période suivante participent quant à eux d'un projet d'élaboration d'une conscience nationale par le développement d'une littérature locale, ce que le développement de la presse écrite favorisera par la publication dans de nombreux journaux de textes variés (poésie, roman, conte, théâtre, prose d'idées, etc.). La troisième partie du livre, qui couvre les années 1895 à 1945, se caractérise par un

« conflit entre l'ici et l'ailleurs », incarné dans le clivage qui s'opère entre l'École littéraire de Montréal et les adeptes du régionalisme, ainsi que par l'émergence de voix singulières (Alain Grandbois, Hector de Saint-Denys Garneau) qui trouveront toute leur résonance dans la période suivante (1945-80). Marquées par « l'invention de la littérature québécoise », ces décennies voient le passage d'une littérature liée au « projet de survie nationale » à un ensemble de productions « qui seront immédiatement reçues comme autant de manières d'interroger l'identité nationale ». Le développement de l'autonomie de la littérature (1945-60) pavera la voie à la politisation du discours littéraire, à l'autoréflexivité et à l'affranchissement de la langue par rapport à un modèle normatif (1960-70), alors que les recherches formalistes et les revendications féministes feront de la décennie soixante-dix un moment d'« avant-gardes » et de « ruptures ». La dernière partie de l'ouvrage aborde la littérature québécoise contemporaine (de 1980 à aujourd'hui) à partir de son « décentrement » par rapport aux paradigmes sur lesquels elle s'était jusqu'alors construite (projet national, Histoire, France, religion, littérature). Il en résulte l'émergence de voix multiples, singulières, et l'expression d'une littérature de l'intériorité qui découle de la perte de repères identitaires.

Cette *Histoire de la littérature québécoise* deviendra, à n'en pas douter, un ouvrage de référence incontournable pour quiconque s'intéresse, en spécialiste ou en néophyte, à la littérature québécoise. D'une facture impeccable, elle remporte le pari difficile d'être tout à la fois d'une extrême rigueur dans l'évocation des contextes historiques et dans les analyses des textes, et d'une grande lisibilité pour un public étendu.

Qu'est-ce qui ne va pas?

Gérard Bouchard et Alain Roy
La culture québécoise est-elle en crise? Boréal 22,95 $

Compte rendu par Réjean Beaudoin

Gérard Bouchard et Alain Roy se penchent sur une vaste question dans un essai à quatre mains intitulé *La culture québécoise est-elle en crise?* Après avoir soumis un questionnaire à quelques centaines d'intellectuels québécois invités à s'expliquer là-dessus, les auteurs ont dépouillé les réponses reçues dont des extraits significatifs sont reproduits en annexe de l'ouvrage.

Comment distinguer le discours de crise (et la pente apocalyptique sur laquelle il glisse parfois) des manifestations réelles de la crise, si même crise il y a? L'examen prudent et attentif paraît montrer la difficulté de trouver de telles manifestations concrètes. L'enquête refuse en somme de confirmer la perception du malaise critique, si répandue qu'elle soit. Le sentiment d'un effondrement massif et imminent des valeurs de l'Occident s'exprime couramment, en effet, dans les milieux intellectuels et même dans une large partie de l'opinion plus ou moins éclairée, fouettée par les média. Cela ne signifie pas que le choc appréhendé soit sur le point de frapper, ni qu'il se prépare à plus longue échéance, ni qu'il se produira jamais, sans que que la menace puisse, par contre, en être écartée décisivement. Bref, la circonspection s'impose à l'interprétation des discours de crise. On ne saurait minimiser pour autant les graves périls qui accompagnent l'état du monde comme il va, mais il serait encore plus regrettable de conclure à l'impuissance qui stériliserait les opportunités de redressement et d'amélioration qui gisent dans la conjoncture actuelle, toute indécise soit-elle.

La description détaillée et critique des positions variées des répondants fonde une analyse nuancée, fine, subtile et très soucieuse d'objectivité. Rien n'est laissé de

côté. Rien n'est monté en épingle. Tous les éléments d'une problématique infiniment complexe sont admirablement mis en perspective de la façon la plus pondérée. Cette louable rigueur ne va pas jusqu'à la sécheresse et les auteurs n'ont pas voulu prétendre au détachement. Ils ne se privent donc pas de proposer leur propre réponse à la question posée, après l'étude serrée des commentaires recueillis.

Le mal qui nous ronge serait dans une forme de nihilisme : consentement désabusé au désastre annoncé et indifférence au malheur jugé inévitable. Ces attitudes, où se lisent la lassitude et le dépit, ont le défaut de hâter la dissolution d'une autorité consensuelle capable d'endiguer la débâcle, l'effritement et l'érosion du sol de la civilisation. En un sens, nous sommes tous des agents de crise par participation passive aux forces désintégrantes qui rongent les valeurs sur lesquelles reposent nos sociétés. Voici une contradiction, selon moi : d'une part, il n'y aurait pas de crise véritable, pas encore, soutient Gérard Bouchard, mais d'autre part, nous serions tous responsables de la crise qui éclatera peut-être si nous n'y prenons garde. Le chercheur se fait beaucoup plus solidaire qu'il ne veut l'admettre des discours de crise qu'il s'emploie à critiquer. S'il ne cache pas la vivacité de son inquiétude face aux défis de l'époque, il se veut aussi rassurant par la confiance indéfectible qu'il professe dans les ressources toujours vives de l'humanisme. Ce que Gérard Bouchard s'applique à démontrer avant tout, c'est que l'Occident n'a pas épuisé son immense capital symbolique et qu'il demeure capable de produire d'autres configurations imaginaires pour colmater les ruptures du présent et combler les vides creusés par les derniers siècles, depuis l'avènement de la modernité, même si la datation de l'ère moderne reste ouverte à plus d'une hypothèse historique.

Je ne suis pas sûr d'être rassuré. La pensée du livre illustre une belle intelligence critique, mais comment remédier à la panne des systèmes symboliques? Le seul fait de poser la question ne témoigne-t-il pas d'un phénomène inédit? Le nouvel humanisme dont l'historien nourrit le plaidoyer sera mobilisateur ou ne sera pas, mais pour redynamiser les masses vaguement démobilisées dans la léthargie des institutions politiques, il faudra plus qu'un appel à la bonne volonté générale. Gérard Bouchard fleurte doucement avec l'utopie. Il mise gros sur la puissance du mythe dont il connaît toutefois les retournements pervers. C'est le risque qu'il faut savoir courir, car l'histoire, celle des cultures, notamment, nous apprend ce qu'il faut méditer pour éviter le pire dans le développement des imaginaires collectifs. Refaire provision d'idéal pour orienter l'action vers des objectifs communément partagés, telle est la tâche à mettre en oeuvre collectivement. « Je crois qu'il nous revient, comme intellectuels, de restaurer—tout en les critiquant—la croyance, le mythe, de concevoir de nouvelles directions pour l'action, de casser la spirale de l'apathie et de l'impuissance. » (155)

Une importante différence se remarque entre l'approche d'Alain Roy et celle de Gérard Bouchard sur le sujet de l'enquête. Sans parler de divergence, les démarches n'en sont pas moins distinctes. La tension est d'ailleurs au centre de l'intérêt du livre. Alain Roy se fait plus perplexe que son illustre aîné dans la position qu'il formule au terme du dépouillement des commentaires recueillis auprès des répondants. Tandis que l'historien des cultures refuse de légitimer la réalité de la crise, l'essayiste de *L'Inconvénient* avoue volontiers son inclination à souscrire au constat d'un malaise sans précédent, non sans se livrer à l'autocritique de cette inclination. Au bout du compte, le jugement de Roy finit dans une réflexion finement nuancée. L'un des mérites du chapitre qu'il a rédigé réside, à mon avis, dans l'extrême attention qu'il apporte tant à l'interrogation soulevée qu'à la pensée appliquée

à résoudre la difficulté du problème. Les deux co-auteurs replacent judicieusement la culture québécoise dans le contexte élargi du désarroi général de l'Occident du siècle dernier. Alain Roy part de la conscience malheureuse qui est celle de la modernité, ce qui diffère, je crois, de l' humanisme renouvelé dont parle Gérard Bouchard.

La crise en question n'apparaît pas au terme de mesures quantifiables, lesquelles conduiraient plutôt à accréditer les indiscutables avantages du présent sur le passé, comme l'attestent les données de la médecine et la comparaison des niveaux de vie, des avancées technologiques et de l'espérance de vie. C'est seulement dans l'ordre du qualitatif et, par conséquent, de la subjectivité que se rencontrent les phénomènes qui relèvent des problèmes sans solution, les seuls du reste qui importent ici directement à la pensée, écrit Alain Roy : chute des valeurs, autorité chancelante, panne de la transmission et de l'éducation, affaiblissement des systèmes symboliques autrefois cristallisés dans le dogme religieux. Bref, ce qui fait défaut s'apparente à l'evanescence du sacré, mais cette crise-là résulte d'un choix délibéré de la modernité que personne ne songe à regretter sérieusement. Serions-nous dans l'attitude du déni et dans l'incapacité de vivre avec les conséquences de nos choix? D'une part, nous adhérons pleinement à l'injonction moderne d'un individualisme affranchi de la transcendance, et d'autre part, nous refusons de reconnaître que la place vacante de l'absolu ne pourra pas être comblée par des applications technologiques, si spectaculaires soient-elles. Il me semble qu'on approche de la définition même de la crise appréhendée : l'histoire des trois derniers siècles rejoint adéquatement le processus qui mène au constat du malaise critique, mais cette histoire reste à écrire dans la foulée d'une évaluation conséquente du progrès.

D'une façon plus pragmatique, la perte du sacré se traduit par le désintérêt total des sociétés modernes pour les problèmes sans solution. Tant que le lien avec le Tout était métaphysiquement fondé, chacun affrontait l'épreuve concrète de la souffrance et de la mort sans divorce avec la condition commune, tandis qu'on ne conçoit plus désormais d'autre recours que technique à la difficulté inchangée de vivre la maladie et la fin de la vie individuelle. Depuis une centaine d'années, la technocratie a remplacé le vieil ordre symbolique par des machines, mais le remplacement n'en est pas un à proprement parler, puisque la mort de Dieu ne peut que creuser démesurément le vide de la place qu'il tenait dans nos représentations. Il ne reste plus de communautés spirituelles que le vestige qu'on peut en voir dans le pullulement des sectes, mais l'efficacité symbolique de naguère leur manque, faute de consensus autour d'une mythologie unifiée.

Gérard Bouchard se demande comment restaurer une telle mythologie actuelle, tandis qu'Alain Roy s'occupe d'un impensé de notre monde, peut-être de son impensable, en scrutant le vertige existentiel qui ne nous laisse plus d'options qu'entre l'ennui mélancolique ou le désespoir lucide. Le premier estime que les symptomes de crise sont encore remédiables; le second les jugerait plutôt sans appel. Les co-auteurs de l'ouvrage paraissent ainsi incarner l'un pour l'autre l'antithèse intellectuelle de leur position, l'un se faisant presqu'idéalement le spectre que l'autre travaille à dissiper. J'y vois l'un des profits positifs de l'exercice. Les partenaires d'écriture ne sont pas divisés par un enjeu polémique, mais la fécondité de leur quasi divergence me semble l'un des plus beaux résultats de leur réflexion, en plus d'être hautement instructive.

Immigration Re-told

Randy Boyagoda
Governor of the Northern Province. Viking Canada $32.00

Cyril Dabydeen
Drums of My Flesh. TSAR $18.95

Reviewed by Juliane Okot Bitek

Randy Boyagoda's *Governor of the Northern Province* is the story of two Canadians trying to be Canadian, and what that means in local politics and the international arena. It is a face off between The Canadian, represented by Jennifer Ursula Thickson, and The New Immigrant, represented by the African, Bokarie.

Accordingly, Canadians are people who "don't want to get too excited or too offended, or too frightened, or too inspired." This is put to test as his main character Jennifer Ursula Thickson steps into the political arena. Her naiveté reflects Canadian immigration, ethics, and Bokarie's experience in the politics of his home country, Atwenty. Ultimately this is a letdown because Bokarie is more manipulative and experienced than Jennifer Ursula Thickson could ever imagine.

Both The Canadian and The New Immigrant mutually benefit from a relationship in which both spend much time trying to find their voice and space in Canadian society. Jennifer Ursula Thickson believes that she can find hers in the political arena. Bokarie, her new fast companion, searches for recognition and opportunity. It is only in the last few pages that both face the power of their voices in real time and space. By this time, their relationship has been transformed.

Boyagoda's intimacy with Canada is clear through his descriptions of place and the homogenous locals who remain suspicious towards the immigrant whose African-ness bothers them. Racism in *Governor of the Northern Province*, subtle as it appears, is unforgivable under the umbrella of ignorance where the people in Jennifer Ursula Thickson's home seem to hide, but it is insulting and obvious to Bokarie. He, in turn, manipulates his foreignness in a ploy to further his own agenda.

Boyagoda is suspicious of The Immigrant, but he is equally frustrated by the generosity of the Canadian political system represented by Jennifer Ursula Thickson. In the final analysis, Boyagoda does not believe that Canada's goodwill is enough to sustain it. That makes for a very long set-up, but it makes for a decent reading because of Boyagoda's accurate depiction of rural Canada and its uneasiness with race relations and the immigration policies of Ottawa.

Cyril Dabydeen's *Drums of my Flesh* is a first novel, a diasporic account of a family as told by a Guyanese immigrant father to his young Canadian daughter, set where the Ottawa and the Rideau Rivers meet. The father's account of his childhood comes in bits and spurts, pulling us back like a sudden breath. Indeed, there is a necessity for the displacement; this childhood is so lush, so intensely tropical that the heat waves threaten to suffocate. Dabydeen is a short story master, evidenced by several collections which contain stories that are the genesis for *Drums of My Flesh*. As he moves back and forth from present Canada to colonial Guyana, Dabydeen weaves interlinked stories in a chronological structure that works as a novel.

The larger cast of characters is reserved for the childhood past in which there is a further past revealed to the principal character, Boy, by his parents, grandmothers, extended family, and Jaffe, his imaginary friend. As an adult, the stories that he imparts to his daughter are in part stream-of-consciousness; he does not speak to her directly. They are at the park and he is watching as she interacts with nature and other children, struck by her innocence. His reflections on her childhood are, "what I

want to tell Catriona, no other." He has chosen to relate his stories to Catriona in the way that Jaffe, the imaginary world traveller, chose him.

Dabydeen juxtaposes the two worlds: past tropical Guyana with the large family and present wintery Canada with the nuclear family. The past and present are only reflections of each other, both unrecognizable, except in the narrative form of the narrator. Whereas little Catriona and her father are in a quiet park surrounded by nature, Boy's childhood is full of stories of jaguars, domestic abuse, sugarcane fields, unemployment, displacement, nightmares, and wasps. But this is also a place of plentiful mangoes, shrimp, coconut water, and the Corentyne sea air. Where the Ottawa and Rideau Rivers meet is clinical and safe, and perhaps it is the only place where Dabydeen's hero can finally present to Catriona her familial heritage.

The Aesthetics of Commemoration

Laura Brandon
Art or Memorial?: The Forgotten History of Canadian War Art. U of Calgary P $64.95

Reviewed by Rebecca Campbell

It is a contemporary truism of Canadian identity that we are formed by our twentieth-century wars, both as they are forgotten and as we recover them in public ceremonies like Remembrance Day services or the re-dedication of the Vimy Memorial in 2007. With the question mark in her title, *Art or Memorial?: The Forgotten History of Canada's War Art*, Laura Brandon addresses this cycle of memorialization and forgetfulness by way of Canada's twentieth-century war art. Brandon's discussion traces the production, loss, and exhibition of paintings, sketches, and sculptures, begun in 1916 through Max Aitken's Canadian War Memorials Fund, and including work from the First and Second World Wars, and work produced through the Canadian Armed Forces Civilian Artists Program (CAFCAP) in 1968, and its successor, the Canadian Forces Artists Program in 2001. She traces the political, cultural, and aesthetic dimensions of these officially commissioned works, phrasing her history as a series of oppositions: between individual artists and their committees; private artists and their national subjects; technical accuracy and psychological impressionism; aesthetic and memorial objects. In a parallel opposition, Brandon's book follows a familiar narrative of loss and recovery as she describes the collection's changing fortunes, using the works' curatorial record to interrogate issues of institutional and private memory.

Brandon frames her text with the current academic and public concern regarding the Canadian Great War and its official art, and she concludes the book with an account of her exhibition *Canvas of War: Masterpieces from the Canadian War Museum* of 1998 as well as a discussion of the new Canadian War Museum, which opened in 2005. Though she suggests a few explanations for this shift in public life, Brandon's text is more history than theory, and she argues that these events are part of Canada's rediscovery of its military heritage, demonstrating a new desire for public memorials and ceremonies of grief. Brandon further links this movement more generally with Canadian modernism, identified here with the rejection of public Christianity, militarism, and traditional, representational modes in the years following the First World War, a move repeated after World War II. The book is also a short history of twentieth-century canon formation in Canadian Art. Since these elements dominated Canada's First World War art, which employed Christian iconography in its celebrations of sacrifice and heroism, and stressed technical accuracy in its central pieces, Brandon argues that it lost both its

psychological and its aesthetic relevance to mid-century Canadian culture. However, in the last decades, the once neglected collection of war art has regained a place in the popular Canadian imagination, especially as that religious iconography has, in Brandon's view, been integrated into the nation.

Brandon explains this sacralized nation a little in the book's more general historical and theoretical discussions of memory, history, and Canada's relationship with its past, including cursory references to Pierre Nora, Eric Hobsbawm and Benedict Anderson. These references suggest a theoretical framework that locates Brandon's text in contemporary scholarship of memory and community, and those theorists also become a means of understanding both the creation of the Canadian War Memorials Fund in 1916, and the public rejection of War Art in the years following the First World War. Arguing that the paintings in the collection have become, in Nora's term, *lieux de memoire*, Brandon attempts to trace the invention of that memorial tradition by examining the way these works have been deployed officially, as in the case of the war art hung in the Senate Chamber, and the way the works have been received by the public, as witnessed by response cards from visitors to various exhibitions of war art. Brandon also includes several "case studies" of particular artists—Maurice Cullen, Gyrth Russell, Aba Bayefsky, and Pegi Nicol McLeod—and particular spaces—the planned, but never built, Canadian War Memorials Gallery of 1919 and the new, dedicated Canadian War Museum. These more specific discussions illuminate and complicate the theoretical framework, as Bayefsky's work on the Holocaust suggests other memorial traditions in Canada, and McLeod's marginalization has as much to do with her gender as with a general rejection of war art.

Art or Memorial? is a welcome contribution to the current debate regarding memory and violence in Canada, especially in conjunction with Brandon's earlier *Canvas of War*. However, its greatest contribution is in the images which it makes accessible. With its large format and many illustrations, the book becomes another site for the kind of meaning-making—whether aesthetic or commemorative—Brandon has set out to examine.

The Energy of Reading Body and Mind

Roseanne Carrara
A Newer Wilderness. Insomniac $11.95

Joanne Arnott
Mother Time: Poems New and Selected. Ronsdale $14.95

Gillian Wigmore
Soft Geography. Caitlin $15.95

Reviewed by Robert Budde

For me, a book review is the description of a relationship—much like one with a person—conditioned by context, histories, tastes, training, and a whole host of other variables. The reading act is the kinetics of contact and influence as two language-worlds cohabitate for a time. A natural tendency would be to begin by locating the poems in these books by connecting them through gender identity and commonalities that mark the writing as 'women's poetry'. While certainly all three texts contain evidence of various experiences and perspectives particular to female subjectivity, nothing in the texts allowed any summation of a common 'womanhood' or specific aesthetic. This is not surprising; the backgrounds, the literary influences, and the poetic forms each author works with are distinct and unique, creating more difference than sameness between them. I would be saddened if it were not so.

Roseanne Carrara's *A Newer Wilderness* is framed by a cover reproduction of

Jean-Paul Lemieux's *Lazare*. The painting is complex and stately, and Carrara's poems match this tone perfectly. She uses long striated lines that draw out visuals ("one of the men bent over his measuring tool, / . . . his orange helmet catching / a slant of light that stripped through the kudzu") or reflect on the metaphysical. Carrara's poems are sophisticated, so sophisticated that they partially impeded my reading. What I found myself sensing as I read through *A Newer Wilderness* was that there was a kind of forced goal of 'high art,' that content and form decisions were made based on a preconceived notion of what constitutes 'serious poetry.' Now, this is more of a matter of my reading stance, a preference for more organic or less weighty work, than any indictment of the book. The elevation of language connects well to the plethora of allusions in the text, most of which are to classics of English literature: Horace, Austen, Dickinson, Frost, Pope, Shakespeare, among others.

Joanne Arnott's poems in *Mother Time*, on many registers, are the polar opposite in their approach to language. Ambling in short line ease, these poems refer not to the Bible and Pythagoras but to the kitchen table and the human body. Arnott is a Métis/mixed blood writer known for her anti-racism work and her representations of birthing and child rearing. Her poems are not of a finished thought or philosophy, but of a process of becoming, growing, connecting, and reconnecting. They are provisional and address the issues of self-awareness and history, a history that has perhaps failed to take into account the experiences Arnott holds dear. The cover art, by Hamelin, is a drawing of a mother's belly, breast, and fetus, and the piece shows its lines, its strokes, the marks of its own making. Arnott's most striking poems are about birth, documenting something so achingly human, yet something that barely registers in the shelves of 'classic' literature:

> I am hearing
> your mouth
> still enclosed in me
> words of parting
> greeting
> birth/wide/spread

This book is sophisticated in a new way, wise to the rhythms of the body and healing.

Gillian Wigmore's *Soft Geography* has a soft place in my heart because of where it comes from. The poems in this book are rooted in Northern British Columbia where I live, and a strong sense of identity is envoked for me by the writing. Some writing pretends to be written from anywhere, drawing on universal (or apparently universal) themes and generalized experiences. The poems in *Soft Geography* do not pretend to be anything but homegrown; they are located in geography and family. The most striking poems deal with childhood memories of the narrator's veterinarian father and deal bluntly with the gritty details of such a job. It is the specialized language that distinguishes these poems; I cannot believe another poem in the world would have the phrases "electro-ejaculator," "a heifer's prolapsed uterus," or perhaps the most memorable lines in the book: "the hot bulk of a downed stud horse beneath her / she holds a cock for the first time ever." This last passage is from a poem called "Vet's Daughter" and not at all eroticized in the context of the rest of the poem. This series tends to dwell on the dark, oddly poetic moments of connection and disconnection between the narrator and her father. What Wigmore maps is the emotional geography of a place, the tensions and issues involved in being part of a back-country world as a woman and as a thinker.

Langue et culture en contexte minoritaire

Benoît Cazabon

Langue et culture : unité et discordance. Prise de parole 25,00 $

Compte rendu par Cécile B. Vigouroux

Sous le titre ambitieux de *Langue et culture* : *unité et discordance* Benoît Cazabon se propose de réfléchir sur le sort des minorités linguistiques françaises au Canada en s'appuyant sur les dynamiques linguistiques et identitaires en Ontario. L'ouvrage est un recueil d'articles scientifiques et de billets (d'humeur) de longueur et de qualité inégales, parus entre 1990 et 2005, et s'adressant à un public très différent. Nous montrerons qu'à trop vouloir embrasser, l'auteur fini par ne pas trouver son lecteur.

Le livre se compose de deux parties qui annoncent la couleur : *réflexions* (partie I) et *engagements* (partie II). Les cinq chapitres qui composent la première partie nous sont présentés par l'auteur comme ses contributions scientifiques les plus importantes de sa carrière. Les deux premiers chapitres s'appuient sur un corpus de journaux de bord d'étudiants de linguistique relatant leurs diverses expériences de locuteurs minoritaires de français. À partir d'une analyse de narrations écrites, il s'agit de montrer les dynamiques identitaires individuelles (chapitre 1) puis de s'intéresser à la relation entre groupes, notamment en milieu scolaire (chapitre 2). La grille d'analyse théorique qui sert de base à cette étude emprunte à la psychologie sociale et à l'analyse de contenu. Les analyses proposées contribuent malheureusement peu à notre compréhension du déploiement identitaire complexe et mouvant des locuteurs minoritaires, et l'on déplorera que des travaux importants sur l'identité n'aient pas été exploités à la lumière des données. Le chapitre 3 est un travail réflexif sur la recherche *sur* et *en* contexte minoritaire. Les deux derniers chapitres s'intéressent plus particulièrement au contexte éducatif minoritaire.

La deuxième partie est, quant à elle, constituée d'articles brefs parus dans le journal *Le Droit*. L'auteur y évoque des situations quotidiennes où la diversité linguistique est menacée et essaye d'en expliquer les mécanismes. Ces billets sont souvent réactifs et s'apparentent pour certains à des coups de gueule sur la démission des institutions à faire respecter les droits linguistiques des Franco-Ontariens.

L'hétérogénéité des écrits présentés dans le livre aurait pu constituer une trame solide à la réflexion en montrant comment les discours sur les minorités linguistiques françaises au Canada se déclinent à la fois dans la sphère institutionnelle et universitaire ainsi qu'auprès du grand public. Mais voilà, force est de constater que cela ne marche pas. Le lecteur referme le livre quelque peu perplexe sans avoir au bout du compte une idée très claire sur ce qu'il y a à retenir de tout cela. Plutôt que de reprendre tels quels des textes à l'architecture fort différente, un réel travail d'édition aurait été souhaitable pour intégrer tous ces textes en un discours cohérent et ainsi éviter les répétitions d'un chapitre à l'autre. La republication de ces textes sous forme d'ouvrage aurait pu être l'occasion pour l'auteur de revisiter certains de ses outils théoriques et méthodologiques et de retravailler ses positions à la lumière des travaux récents sur des questions analogues à celles qu'il traite. En conclusion, l'ouvrage n'est malheureusement pas à la hauteur des ambitions affichées dans son titre.

Transforming Literature

Norman Cheadle and Lucien Pelletier, eds.
Canadian Cultural Exchange / Échanges culturels au Canada : Translation and Transculturation / traduction et transculturation.
Wilfrid Laurier UP $85.00

Reviewed by Natasha Dagenais

The Argentine-Canadian writer Alberto Manguel associates translating with "reading for the meaning… as the ultimate act of comprehending." Similarly, David Homel and Sherry Simon describe translation as a practice of reading and writing, as a vehicle through which cultures travel. In Norman Cheadle and Lucien Pelletier's *Canadian Cultural Exchange*, published recently in Wilfrid Laurier's Cultural Studies series, there is a dialogue between reading, writing, and translating. In fact, the presentation and content of this anthology subsume the overall theme of opening up the dialogue between languages and cultures: four of the articles (out of a total of 17, plus appendix) are in French, as well as Pelletier's Postface. *Canadian Cultural Exchange* presents a variety of articles on the multifaceted word/world of trans/cultural translation. Specifically, its interdisciplinary articles discuss to varying degrees the negotiating and creating forces involved in the process of translation and transculturation, as indicated by the subtitle, in bilingual, if not multilingual, and, increasingly, multicultural Canada. The growing numbers of immigrants, exiles, and refugees from various linguistic and cultural backgrounds fit under what Smaro Kamboureli labels Canadian multicultural literature. Correspondingly, their works contribute to the cultural and literary expansion of Canada.

This collection differs from many studies on literary translation partly because of its corpus, which, while by no means exhaustive, as Cheadle explains in his introduction, gives a voice to Others who do not always have a literary space to be heard, except in translation. What is particularly interesting is that it opens up the definition of translation to explore, challenge, and reconfigure traditional notions of "the cultural interactions and transactions among ethnicities." The anthology is divided into five sections that reveal this cultural hybridization, reflected in turn in the diversity of subjects and subjecthoods at play. In "Transitive Canada (1): From where to here?," the authors examine "that cultural space constitutionally mediating between the descendants of the two imperial European powers that successively colonized Canada." Alexandra Kinge and Alan MacDonell position the space given to the voice of the Other, here read Aboriginal, in the travel narratives of Quebec explorer La Vérendrye in his quest for the Western Sea. Albert Braz continues this exploration of how the Other's voice is "translated" into textual space by addressing Maurice Constantin-Weyer's creative licence in the historical novel *La Bourrasque* (1925), loosely based on Métis leader Louis Riel, and the anonymous translator's creative licence in the Canadian translation, *A Martyr's Folly* (1930). While Braz discusses what is added to and omitted from the English translation(s), Susan Knutson, in "'I am become Aaron': George Elliott Clarke's *Execution Poems* and William Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus*" (one of two articles on Clarke), examines in particular how intertextuality is per/formed through Africadian cultural identity.

In the second section, "Cultural Appropriation Revisited," the translation of culture and the process of transculturation are appropriated to capture "the very condition of possibility of culture." Here translation and transculturation are adopted and adapted by Latin-American identities in Canada, as suggested by José Antonio Giménez Micó in his analysis of Chilean-Canadian poet Luis Torres' *El exilio y las*

ruinas (2002) and Bolivian-Canadian novelist Alejandro Saravia's *Habitante* (2000) and *Rojo, amarillo y verde* (2003). Their "active incorporation," to borrow Giménez Micó's expression, in the Latin-Americanization of Canada, while not without difficulty as they write (for the most part) in a major language that is considered "minor," shows how the broadening of the Canadian literary landscape is made possible through its appropriation by these multicultural writers. In "Repatriating Arthur Nortje," George Elliott Clarke makes a strong case for "appropriating" the biracial South African poet as an African-Canadian poet, thus arguing for broadening the canon's "Canadianité." Carol Stos' article "I Write My Self" in the third rubric, "The Transcultural Body," maintains this examination of new cultural identities in Canada trans/forming "Canadian" realities. Indeed, Stos opens up the "hyphenated existence" of Chilean-Canadian writer Carmen Rodríguez through her discussion of the Spanish and English versions of the short stories *De Cuerpo Entero* and *and a body to remember with*, both published in 1997. Rodríguez self-translated, or "transcreated," the Spanish stories "within the context of transculturation." Through this process, the Chilean-Canadian writer, as writer-as-translator, transcreated for her targeted audiences bodily narrative memories of the female experience.

Unlike Stos, Stephen Henighan, in the fourth section, "Reconfiguring the Solitudes: Two plus other(s)," posits that Canadian writers, such as the Romanian Eugen Giurgiu, "who work in languages other than English or French experience a curtailed form of cultural exchange" are relegated to being "a reduced solitude." Yet, it must be noted that the contribution of translators and presses has helped many of these writers resist reduction to literary solitude: for example, poet and translator Hugh Hazelton's English translation of Nela Rio's *Túnel de proa verde* (1998) and *Cuerpo amado* (2002), published in bilingual format by Broken Jaw Press, adds to the forming of a Latin-American literature in Canada. In fact, Hazelton, in "Polylingual Identities," also in this section, argues that a number of writers work in sometimes two, sometimes more, languages because of their transcultural existence in multilingual Canada as they attempt "to bridge the divergence and isolation created by different languages." In the last rubric, "Transitive Canada (2): From here to where?," Neil Besner negotiates his role as translator, namely as the translator of Carmen Oliveira's Portuguese biography of Elizabeth Bishop. Even though Judith Woodsworth also problematizes the cultural politics of translation, she introduces the translator as emerging "out of the shadows," and the emergence of protagonists-as-translators of two novels, Carol Shields' *Unless* (2003) and Kate Taylor's *Mme Proust* (2003). Just as the characters of novels can be translated for the page, the characters of plays can be translated and trans/formed for the stage, as Beverley Curran makes clear in her study of the "translation" of Tomson Highway's *Dry Lips* (1989) for the Japanese stage with Japanese actors. This article affirms, as the others in this critical anthology, the potential of cultural translation *here* and *now* in transcreating cultural exchanges in Canada and elsewhere.

L'exigence littérale du Messie

Anne Élaine Cliche
Poétiques du Messie : l'origine juive en souffrance.
XYZ 28,00 $

Compte rendu par Stéphane Inkel

Anne Élaine Cliche, romancière et essayiste de premier plan, poursuit de brillante façon avec *Poétiques du Messie* une œuvre exigeante commencée en 1992. Si la question

de la trace du signifiant religieux dans la littérature moderne était déjà présente dans ses premiers essais, cette interrogation sur le legs biblique a subi un infléchissement notable avec son livre précédent, *Dire le livre*, qui ouvrait pour le plus grand bénéfice du lecteur l'univers infini de l'interprétation propre au Talmud. Querelles, polémiques interminables dont l'objet est toujours la *lettre* de la Loi, à lire et à interpréter, le Talmud s'y donnait déjà à voir comme une méthode, voire une poétique dont l'objet est à ouvrir, déplacer, permuter, selon une pratique dont se rappellera Freud lorsqu'il s'agira de se mettre à l'écoute du rêve.

Dans ce nouveau livre, l'auteure s'intéresse à l'une des figures centrales du judaïsme, le Messie, afin de montrer comment il s'agit avant tout d'une figure indéterminée, infigurable, véritable « signifiant errant » pour le dire avec Meschonnic. Une figure de temps, comme la définit Gérard Bensussan, dont la particularité est précisément de le *fracturer*, d'en interrompre la fausse linéarité dans des moments de surgissement « où l'Autre est atteint » et qui est toujours susceptible d'ouvrir un autre « possible » à l'intérieur même de l'histoire, comme l'avait bien compris Walter Benjamin dans ses thèses « Sur le concept d'histoire » qui n'en finissent plus d'inspirer des travaux dans les champs les plus divers. En montrant comment cette figure juive s'apparente à la structure du *Witz*, Anne Élaine Cliche montre d'une part comment le Messie et l'attente qu'il met en jeu arrivent à produire des « éclats » de temps jusque-là virtuels, et d'autre part comment ces virtualités sont précisément autant d'effets de la parole de l'Autre qu'il s'agit d'actualiser par l'interrogation soutenue dont elle fait l'objet.

Il s'agit donc de faire entendre comment le Messie, en tant que figure d'engendrement, de filiation, vise à faire de l'expérience de l'histoire qu'il soutient une affaire de désir et de jouissance, en d'autres mots de *transmission* (du désir, du nom). La littérature étant constituée de cette intrication du désir et de la lettre, Anne Élaine Cliche s'applique ici à mettre en lumière la levée du « refoulement de la lettre » que l'Occident chrétien aura permis en s'appropriant cette figure du Messie pour en faire une figure non plus *à venir* mais toujours *déjà advenue*. Le meilleur exemple à la fois de ces poétiques et du désenvoûtement qu'elles sont susceptibles de produire est à cet égard le *Quichotte* de Cervantès, dont l'auteure offre ici une relecture brillante à partir d'une remise en contexte de l'Espagne du XVI^{e} siècle, qui depuis l'expulsion des juifs de 1492, est prisonnière d'une entreprise de purification qui la confine à un imaginaire des plus mortifères (pour elle-même, et surtout pour l'autre). S'opposant à ce messianisme fou de l'Espagne qui repose sur l'usurpation d'une élection dont elle détourne le sens—ce qui l'oblige aussi à faire disparaître les représentants de cette élection—la « messianité » du *Quichotte* consiste surtout à mimer ce jeu des masques, démontant du même coup la logique de cet imaginaire par une parole « marrane » mise en acte, disséminée dans le texte et visant à rappeler la « place étrangère et sans image d'où la vérité d'une parole énigmatique et décentrée peut sortir ».

Interrogeant tour à tour la dimension signifiante de la psychose du Président Schreber à la lumière de la cabale, la parole « talmudique » d'Abraham Moses Klein et la fonction des inépuisables jeux de Perec sur la lettre, le chapitre le plus intéressant est peut-être celui qui s'attaque à l'antijudaïsme de Céline; antijudaïsme qui a pu verser dans l'antisémitisme le plus primaire, mais qui en même temps s'en distingue de par la rivalité et l'identification avec le peuple juif qu'il suppose. Céline s'avère ainsi « infréquentable par les antisémites même, du fait qu'il reconnaît, assume, expose, défend, hurle, dans sa vision prophétique, que le corps est dans la lettre ».

L'érudition et la rigueur de cet exercice de lecture virtuose montre en somme

le bénéfice qu'il y aurait à retourner aux délibérations sans fin de l'univers talmudique—maintenant accessible au lecteur francophone grâce à l'entreprise éditoriale des éditions Verdier—délibérations qui montrent bien comment l'éthique est avant tout l'assomption de la division entraînée par la parole, enjeu même de la littérature.

Two Takes, Different Worlds

Douglas Coupland
The Gum Thief. Random $32.00

Tom Osborne
Dead Man in the Orchestra Pit. Anvil $18.00

Reviewed by Karl Jirgens

Tom Osborne's *Dead Man in the Orchestra Pit* begins with a film-noir style, moves to a rocking rhythm midway, then gallops madly while a hapless, lonely, Hank Pazik knocked senseless by a mattress tossed by party animals from a hotel balcony finds himself kidnapped by desperados who botch a robbery at Vancouver's Hyatt Regency during the historic Grey Cup game between the Argos and Stampeders. Harry as hostage is removed to the Opera house until the heat is off, but it all goes terribly wrong. The book's frontispiece featuring football locker-room graffiti philosophizes: "When Calliope's flight has failed thee / and Melpomene's the friend you've known / Best don't think of lost ball games / And all the third-down calls you've blown." After flashbacks and cross-references between operatic form and literary structure, over-determinations of language, Hunter S. Thompson stylistics, and allusions to the muses, Hank is delivered safely home but not before extra-terrestrials carve the Nazca lines, an agoraphobic gunman with a Mossbert "Slugster" slide-action is blown to pieces, inebriated football fanatics shout synonyms for "penis" from hotel balconies, and opera singers performing *La Traviata* are transformed by the mind-bending effects of tackle-boxes of drugs purveyed by paranoid schizophrenics. The lives of Hank and the buffoon-nonpareil thieves are suddenly transformed when an obese theatre director accidentally falls into the orchestra pit, instantly killing the tuba player who was to "fence" the heist. This fully omniscient narration montages multiple plot lines and spatio-temporal leaps into a disjunctive, rapid-fire pastiche, offering a big bang for your buck.

Featuring multiple plot lines, *The Gum Thief* reconsiders the role of text in a digital age while portraying psychic meltdowns during the imminent eco-apocalypse: "Earth was not built for six billion people all running around being *passionate* about things. The world was built for about twenty million people foraging for roots and grubs." One plot, set in an office-supply superstore, features a hack-writer working on a manuscript reminiscent of Albee's *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf* (with cross-references to the cinematic version starring Richard Burton and Liz Taylor). The hack befriends a younger, semi-suicidal, neo-Goth, female co-worker who thinks him a crackpot, but later is inspired by his talent. The novel features intergenerational connections between late boomers, gen-Xers and millennium kids. Coupland's meta-fiction features Kyle, a writer whose last book sold ten million copies, and Roger, the struggling hack, motivated by a morbid curiosity about what new indignities life will heap upon him. The palimpsestic books within this book swallow their own ouroboro plots, echoing M.C. Escher's Möbius-strip topologies. To paraphrase Magritte, "*Ceci n'est pas un roman*." As I read this, I lost track of whether I was a character, the author, or a review critic. A turning point comes when the draft manuscript of *Glove Pond,* Roger's oddly titled book-within-a-book is discovered and derisively mocked by co-workers at the superstore. The enraged Roger hurls baskets

of Bic pens about the display aisle and marches out of his workplace, hesitating long enough to pilfer a pack of Bubblicious gum. Roger is fired on the spot; his passion is captured by security cameras and appears on YouTube, "where it goes viral," garnering 180,000 viewers. *The Gum Thief* is heroic, but reckless. Reckless, because who wants to read about the dysfunctional lives of nihilistic-basket-case-loser-booze-hounds? Heroic, because we each inhabit two worlds, the real world and the end of the world. We share a common fate. *Glove Pond* was given a "C-" by the protagonist's creative writing instructor, who offered private editing at $40 an hour, but *The Gum Thief* was picked up by Random House, and is a best-seller. The conceptual loops integrated herein are reminiscent of Borges' writer who attempted to re-create Cervantes' famous *Quixote* without ever having read it. Some top writers have the uncanny ability of tapping directly into the collective unconscious. After reading this book you may experience a profound sense of *déjà vu* and exclaim, "Dang, I dreamt that entire book, word-for-word." And, the fact is, you did, except that the author read your mind and got it all into print. Bound between thick layers of pink bubble-gum, *The Gum Thief* is a crazy-wonderful, self-reflexive, eco-cultural *tour de force*, rich in allusions to literary masterpieces and dialogical interior monologues, all gesturing to the ubiquitous questions, "Did you find everything you were looking for?" and "What have you written lately?"

Children and Death

Marie-Danielle Croteau; Isabelle Arsenault, illus.; Susan Ouriou, trans.
Mr Gauguin's Heart. Tundra $22.99

Jean E. Pendziwol; Jirina Marton, illus.
Marja's Skis. Groundwood $17.95

Natalia Toledo; Francisco Toledo, illus.; Elisa Amada, trans.
Light Foot/Pies Ligeros. Groundwood $17.95

Reviewed by Hilary Turner

In life as well as in literature, people today try hard to keep children and death in separate conceptual categories. Unlike our Victorian ancestors who seemed to relish a good weep over a dying or orphaned child protagonist, we prefer to shelter fictional children as well as real ones from the visitations of the grim reaper. It comes as a surprise, therefore, to find three picture books that serenely violate this contemporary taboo, and that do so without saccharine or sentimentality.

Death enters the life of the young Paul Gauguin while he and his family are en route by ship from Denmark to Peru. As recounted by Marie-Danielle Croteau, Gauguin *père* is suddenly "carried away by his heart," leaving young Paul to imagine his own explanation for the sad event. The proud possessor of an invisible orange dog, the future artist spins a fine tale in which his father is transmuted into the setting sun—an object of precisely the same colour as his dog—and is borne back again every morning at sunrise. A gift of paints and paper confers on Paul the power of "bringing things to life," and his career as an artist begins in the mysterious transformation of his loss into colour, shape, and form. Susan Ouriou's English translation of this story is lucid and understated, and the illustrations that accompany the text echo its matter-of-fact tone: Isabelle Arsenault portrays a sober little boy at his easel, diligently restoring order and making meaning on a sheet

of paper. Death is rightly shown here to be a part of life, a beginning as well as an end.

Seven-year-old Marja of *Marja's Skis* is also suddenly deprived of a father and must call on an inner strength she did not know she possessed. Jean Pendziwol has set her story in a small Finnish community north of Thunder Bay where logging is a way of life, and where children ski to school from their remote homesteads. Marja's skis are the badge both of her mobility and of her readiness to join the older children. In such a setting, logging accidents are not unexpected, but the central event of this narrative is not the collapse of the timber pile that fatally injures Marja's father. Rather, it is the young girl's ingenuity in using her skis to rescue another logger from a hole in the ice in which he is about to drown. Unable to save her father, Marja is nonetheless equipped to contribute to the life of her community. The warmth of that community, despite its snowy location, is vividly portrayed in Jirina Marton's gentle watercolours—as is the hopefulness of the ending. This is a comforting book in which loss is once more balanced by gain, and sadness is offset by growth.

Quite a different note is struck where death is concerned in the father-and-daughter collaboration of Francisco and Natalia Toledo. A fable rather than a realistic narrative, *Light Foot/Pies Ligeros* personifies death as a seemingly well-intentioned cosmic clean-up artist—grim in appearance, to be sure, but dedicated to her appointed line of work. Someone, after all, has to see to it that the world does not become overpopulated. Death therefore challenges all she meets to a skipping contest. Confident in her own immortality, she outlasts Man, Toad, Monkey, Coyote, Rabbit, and Alligator in the game of their lives. She clearly enjoys the competition, goading her victims with macabre impromptu rhymes and leaving their corpses without a backward glance.

The engravings that chronicle the adventures of Death in fact preceded the text, as the author explains in a foreword. One surmises that it was in part to preserve her father's art that Natalia Toledo recorded the story, and that art is well worth preserving. In the tradition of the Zapotec people of Mexico, the drawings are full of motion, some of them almost electrical with energy, and all of them unsettling. (It goes without saying that Death with a skipping rope is unsettling, but Toledo makes the most of the incongruity.) The text, in both English and Spanish, brings out the humour latent in his surrealistic vision.

In the end, thankfully, the joke is on death. Overreaching herself at last, Death entices Grasshopper to join her in the skipping contest. Not only can he skip faster than she, he is also able to cling to the rope as she whirls it around, saving his energy while she expends hers. Death concedes defeat temporarily—and resolves to change her *modus operandi* as well as her name. Known from now on as Light Foot, she will seize her victims by stealth, quietly, without fanfare.

In their different ways, all three of these books accept death as a fact—and so diminish its terrors. Croteau and Pendziwol set the fact of dying alongside the fact of growing up, reminding us that both are on the same continuum. The irreverence of the Toledos, on the other hand, provokes zany laughter. Readers of these books will thus take a first step in coming to understand an event that is, after all, as commonplace as birth and scarcely more necessary to be spoken of in hushed tones.

The Poetics of Love and Death

Rienzi Crusz
Love Where the Nights Are Green. Pasdeloup $15.00

Micheline Maylor
Full Depth: The Raymond Knister Poems. Wolsak & Wynn $17.00

Reviewed by Anderson Araujo

"This is all there is and this is everything," reads the epigraph Rienzi Crusz borrows from Joyce Carol Oates for his latest book of verse. Oates' bold affirmation of existential plenitude bears out the lush lyricism that animates Crusz's poetry. For long-time readers of Canadian verse, *Love Where the Nights Are Green* will doubtless recall Irving Layton's noted anthology of Canadian love poems, *Love Where the Nights Are Long* (1962). However, where Layton's collection featured a range of voices, Crusz's is very much his own.

The five sections and more than fifty poems by this self-styled "Sun-Man" shed new light into the "dark antonyms" that inform his poetry: death and desire, ends and beginnings, time and transcendence. Here, love is a "raging chaos." It "hangs exotic and hard / like a bunch of king-coconuts / on the palm of our dreams." No "breed of plums," this. Nature reifies the abstractions of love. In "Karma," nasals and sibilants choreograph the intimacy of nature, body, and art, so that the "valley bloomed / to new poems / written on olive skins," while in "Elegy for an Orange" animate and inanimate nature perform a sensual "chemistry of assimilation." No accident, then, the "green" of the book's title. It encodes metonyms for fertility, growth, transience, and the *élan* of a reality pregnant with all-too-many possibilities. It is indeed in this hybrid hue that the poet inscribes the "dark diaspora" of the immigrant song, knowing only too well that the "sweet inventions of memory" can hardly hope to "restore the omphalos blood / that sang my green days."

Crusz's sibylline aesthetic intersects the cosmic and the mundane. His poems inhabit liminal, restive spaces. Above all, it is in the mock-heroic "small martyrdoms" of immigrant experiences that his poetry finds a local habitation. And yet, Crusz's poetics of exile eschews facile antinomies. Elegiac laments for "my beloved country" are tempered by wit, irony, and the joys of the adopted homeland, "this igloo of heaven." Rather than dwell on the romanticized travesties and wistful longings that often entangle diasporic narratives, poems such as "Legacy (for Anne)" celebrate the "brown skin," "the music / and fatted calf of the prodigal story." With Eliotic overtones, "Roots" insists that "What the end usually demands / is something of the beginning." Crusz locates this dialectic in the colonial encounter. Rather than read it as a harbinger of cultural apocalypse, the poet digs deeper. At its root, he finds none other than himself—"I, burgher of that hot embrace" between Portuguese and Sinhalese ancestors. Love, as this resplendent collection suggests, may redeem even history, "the bloody equation."

History, too, subtends Micheline Maylor's book of verse, but only tangentially. *Full Depth* is "a work of impressions" on the death of Canadian avant-garde poet and novelist, Raymond Knister. At thirty-three, Knister drowned under mysterious circumstances while swimming near Stoney Point, Lake St. Clair in August, 1932. His body was found three days later. "Whispers of suicide" would not be far in the offing. Yet, Maylor laudably avoids sensationalizing his death. Here, the Knister myth interweaves with his motley personae, "Writer, cab-driver, farmer, / father, dreamer, lover." The poet situates Knister's widow as the tragic consciousness, delicately enmeshing her gnawing grief—"the silence / of my panic and the colour of / my mouth stretched into

a scream"—and tender nostalgia—"The dream of us, limbs entwined / Out from the abyss again this morning." But it is "Dee" (the poet Dorothy Livesay, with whom Knister allegedly had an affair) who arguably makes the poetic sequence her own by glossing the book's title in "Crush": "He was the only man / who considered the full depth / of the half full green pitcher and me." Time, death, love, memory, and imagination alternately stage the presence of his absence.

In lieu of the "easy" narratology of "a mystery or romance," *Full Depth* shores up "fragments" to fill in the interstices between the brute fact of Knister's death and its many unknowns. Voices, intertexts, impressions, and mythologies jostle in a transhistorical bricolage. In the six sections and fifty six poems that make up the collection, the drowning recurs as an inescapable marker amidst the welter of shifting perspectives. In "The ship," the discovery of Knister's body is stripped bare of euphemisms, "a stiff and bloated mess / decomposing," while in "Lake," the drowning is recast as a rebirth in "water thicker than dreams, warm as amniotic fluid." Elsewhere, however, Maylor pushes the conceit of the lake as "black womb" too far. A case in point is the strange reverie in "Imagine," where "Under the surface he inhales a foreign air / a foetus born." Rare missteps aside, *Full Depth* charts an extraordinary journey through the eclectic spaces Knister inhabited, from his fascination with Keats, to the bliss of tilling the earth, to his final descent into "the cave of dreamers." Maylor's imagistic poetics and exquisite lyricism ensure an enthralling read.

From Nova Scotia to the Cosmos

Michael DeBeyer, Kate Kennedy, and Andrew Steeves, eds.
Gaspereau Gloriatur: Liber Beati Anni Decimi, Volume 1: Poetry. Gaspereau $21.95

Don Domanski; Brian Bartlett, ed.
Earthly Pages: The Poetry of Don Domanski. Wilfrid Laurier UP $14.95

Reviewed by Bert Almon

A poetry anthology with a Latin title (meaning "Glorious Gaspereau, Book of the Blessed Tenth Year") had better be good or it will be convicted of pretentiousness. Fortunately, this book does commemorate a glorious achievement. Gaspereau excels in its choice of authors and its presentation of them in elegant printed form. Good literature is not diminished by appearing in pedestrian volumes, but Gaspereau's books are a pleasure to hold and read. A note at the end of the book comments on its typefaces. The only press in Canada to match Gaspereau for book design and quality of content is Tim Inkster's Porcupine's Quill.

This collection, arranged alphabetically from B (Bartlett) to Z (Zwicky), is dominated by mainstream lyrics, but it also presents journals, a lengthy translation from the Cree by Robert Bringhurst, and prose poems. Anthologies are usually most exciting when they have a polemical purpose, but this one is engrossing for the quality of its contents. Interesting young poets like K.I. Press are included, but it is good to see substantial selections from veterans like Harry Thurston, Harold Norwood, Douglas Lochhead, and David Helwig. The book has poems by many prizewinners, including GG laureates—Don McKay, George Elliott Clarke, and Jan Zwicky—and a Griffin winner, Robert Bringhurst. A reader can detect some inclinations: toward Maritime writers (this is a press in Kentville, Nova Scotia, after all), toward formalism (lots of stanzas

here), and toward rural rather than urban experience. But the collection is by no means parochial.

Don Domanski's 2007 Governor General's Award for *All Our Wonder Unavenged* confirmed what his readers have long known: he is one of the finest poets Canada has produced. Brian Bartlett's selection of poems provides a most helpful introduction to Domanski. Bartlett's opening essay explores sources and affinities (Wallace Stevens, Rumi, and many more) without diminishing the poet's originality. Bartlett, one of Domanski's most perceptive critics, also looks at the range of his work, both the allusiveness and the reach into space (from critters of the forest floor to the stars) and time (back as far as the origins of life). Domanski is a devoted paleontologist who has found important amphibian remains at Horton Bluff: his knowledge of the cosmos does not come merely out of books. Critics of his work should ideally take field trips to the woods in the Annapolis Valley. Bartlett might have said a little about the deep influence of Buddhism on Domanski, who clearly finds its doctrines of impermanence and interdependence helpful. His first book was called *The Cape Breton Book of the Dead*, which conjures up *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*. Domanski sees beyond matter to the spiritual. He likes to quote a saying by Novalis: "All that is visible clings to the invisible."

The volume concludes with a concise, powerful essay by the poet himself, an exploration of his ideas about intuition, about language ("language itself is transient, and the usage we lean so heavily upon is nailed to thin air"). Domanski is acutely conscious of the impermanence of life and language, but his quest is still to nail down his perceptions. And how does he do it? With metaphors, guided by intuition. For him, intuition is "the golden hunch behind all the explanations and theories, which allow you to take advantage of the fluidity of meaning." It is pre-linguistic, but of course it enables the poet to create metaphors, intersections of meaning that lead the imagination through the cosmos. Aristotle said in the *Poetics* that skill in metaphor is the most important linguistic skill, a sign of genius.

The core of the book is poetry, thirty-six poems that illustrate Domanski's genius, his ability to nail meaning to thin air. The poems introduce us to a universe rich and strange and full of perilous seas, and the metaphors persuade us that it is our own. The motif of the journey is common in the poems, often a journey by night in a world marked not only by wonders but by predation. Owls may be emblems of wisdom, but they live on mice, and this poet's vision never turns away from the grief of the world. One of the most haunting poems, "Summer Job: Hospital Morgue," brings the poet's gaze up close to human death: "now years later I remember detail / a half painted nail a half opened eye / a clenched fist / a brief heart to heart with an irredeemable face." Domanski's universe is sometimes as familiar as a folk tale, one which has not been stripped of its terrors in the manner of a modern children's book. Terror is one of the roots of the sublime. In "Hammerstroke," a driver in endless darkness has his lap filled with glowing dust, "the fine blue dust that a god leaves / when it is flying toward new worlds / to be born." Traces of the invisible are everywhere visible in this poet's work, and that is an earned paradox.

Three Readers Writing

Christopher Dewdney; Karl E. Jirgens, ed.
Children of the Outer Dark: The Poetry of Christopher Dewdney. Wilfred Laurier UP $14.95

Shane Rhodes
The Bindery. NeWest $16.95

Patrick Friesen
Earth's Crude Gravities. Harbour $16.95

Reviewed by Adam Dickinson

Reading is a form of writing in these three books. The poems in each collection reckon with the intensities, displacements, and materialities of signification in distinct ways, from the epiphenomenal reading of consciousness for Christopher Dewdney, to the geopolitics and poetics of travel for Shane Rhodes, to the generation of stories themselves in the intertexts of spirit and corporeality in the work of Patrick Friesen. Moreover, these three collections engage the very peculiarity of what it means to be a reader and a writer in the world. For example, in his "Afterword" to *Children of the Outer Dark*, Dewdney distinguishes between attention to "strangeness" in his poetry and the act of making the "commonplace" unusual. This is a poetics concerned not simply with estranging the everyday—as so much contemporary Canadian poetry has abundantly explored—it is about encountering poetry at the margins of disciplines, in the alternate archives of geological depositions and recombinant re-visitations to the scene of writing, in ways that resonantly throw into question the parameters of both "common" and "place." The poems in the collection, drawn representatively from the spectrum of Dewdney's career, "merge into / the details of the world" ("Seven Electrical Angels") in a consistently surprising and thoughtful manner. The resulting selection is a fascinating archive of the way in which those details have merged differently over time—having subtly remodeled Dewdney's poetics like a language remodels the brain ("Fitting the Language Prosthesis"). Karl E. Jirgens' introduction surveys Dewdney's work in terms of the epistemological and semiological consequences of the associative leaps across natural and cultural histories. However, the "Introduction" is overburdened by unnecessary and distracting word-for-word repetitions from the preceding "Biographical Note," as well as repeated definitions of terms. Nonetheless, Jirgens' observations are suggestive and the accompanying bibliography of critical sources constitutes an important contribution to the study of Dewdney's work.

Part travelogue, part genealogy, part guide to Latin-American commerce, part cabinet of wonder—the poems in Shane Rhodes' *The Bindery* are "replete with historical rhyme" ("The Market Place"). The anchor of the book is the title poem, a polysemic catalogue that unfolds in 99 sections, moving from a grandfather escaping the "unneeded attention of gods" on his birthday, to the renovated pastoral of "Arcadia, / lashed / to the lamp post!" Rhodes explores the resonances and dissonances of cultural, physical, and emotional rhyme. Whatever is bound together (family, history, economies) inevitably escapes such binds. This is a book about the semiotics of travel, between territories and bodies, between aesthetics and ethics: "For the Mexican bus driver who stopped in the middle of a busy street and, with an array of honks and complicated hand gestures, made a date with the woman working cash at a convenience store" ("On Travel"). Rhodes' inventive poems travel between different forms (prose poem, catalogue, anaphora, to name but a few) at once employing the luminous descriptive resources of the lyric and also subverting the totality of any finished picture, any final destination. The metaphorical leaps, the paratactic contingencies in these poems reinforce not only the affective materiality of travel in unfamiliar places but also the

difficulty with which language travels to and from the referent—the words we bind and that bind us. *The Bindery* is Rhodes' third book and builds on the considerable accomplishments of his earlier works *The Wireless Room* and *Holding Pattern*. This is a book worth taking along on any trip.

To read Patrick Friesen's *Earth's Crude Gravities* is also to be written into a multiplicity of narratives. The ubiquitous "you" in the book is a kind of intertextual invitation into stories of faith, mortality, and the chance encounters of desire and artistic creation. Beyond the implications of the narrative voice, however, intertexts appear as direct quotes from other artists (Nina Simone), and in the biographical details that ground the stories of how other stories get made. James Joyce in Trieste, for example, haunts the speaker of "stone forgets and lasts" as a writer in the act of writing: "all that absence / where joyce pled poverty / and sprawled across a bed / in a single room / writing toward *ulysses*." In "vanity of the road" a speaker discovers the underlined passages in his father's bible. The found-text enters the poem like the recognition of the way in which the spiritual enters the corporeal: "it runs through my blood and / the dust on my feet and / the vanity of the road." *Earth's Crude Gravities* also interrogates the difficult recognitions and misrecognitions in narratives of cultural identity: "and you think you're canadian / that version of democracy / james dean and st. laurent / a menno boy with a guttural tongue / and a mission" ("j & a lunch"). The constant recourse to "you" in the book enacts the collision of contexts and identities; however, it also threatens to encumber the collection at times with formulaic convention. Nonetheless, despite these issues with narrative voice and other occasionally strained metaphors that diminish poems such as "Is there a knife?," *Earth's Crude Gravities* is a moving and thoughtful book that questions itself, and by doing so remains precarious and compellingly generative. Like *Children of the Outer Dark* and *The Bindery*, it demands to be read and re-read.

Migrations

Farzana Doctor
Stealing Nasreen. Inanna $22.95

Gale Zoë Garnett
Room Tone. Quattro $16.95

Patricia Robertson
The Goldfish Dancer: Stories and Novellas. Biblioasis $24.95

Reviewed by Jodi Lundgren

"Oh, we're not exiles, are we Linda? Exile is something you didn't choose. Something you can't go back from. This is—oh, a kind of temporary floating." Thus Patricia Robertson's twenty-something Annabel, raised in a wealthy West Vancouver family, describes her life as an activist in London, England. The phrase "temporary floating" also suits Gale Zoë Garnett's narrator, Nica Lind, a European actress who accepts thirteen weeks of work in Hollywood—then stays for eight years. Conversely, most of Farzana Doctor's characters have left Bombay for Toronto permanently: "This is home now," Shaffiq, an accountant-turned-night-janitor tells his homesick wife, a teacher-turned-tutor named Salma. Whether or not their characters enjoy the luxury of choice, the authors' choices of tone, narrative structure, and psychic distance shape the reader's journey through each text.

A third-person, linear narrative, *Stealing Nasreen* creates an extraordinary degree of intimacy by juxtaposing sensory detail—"the air holds memories of thousands of meals cooked here, hints of cumin mixed expertly with tumeric, coriander, and chili"—with the probing self-reflections of the central characters. Shaffiq's perspective alternates with that of Nasreen, a Canadian-born social worker whose

parents emigrated from Bombay; the two work in the same building. Their lives intertwine further when Nasreen, preparing for a trip to India, takes Gujarati language lessons from Shaffiq's wife, Salma (who then becomes a third point-of-view character). Bringing the novel to its crisis is the couple's mutual (but secret) obsession with Nasreen. As a lesbian, she represents Shaffiq's fears of what a Canadian upbringing can do to his daughters while, for Salma, she triggers memories of a past love affair.

Doctor's concern to educate the reader about conditions faced by diasporic people occasionally creates a false note, as when Shaffiq says to Salma, "perhaps in a few years, you can go back to university to take those courses you need," and Salma informs him, "I am a fully trained teacher, but to even be considered for a job I need more courses." The point is made more organically when Shaffiq examines budget sheets at work after emptying a recycling bin. Challenged by "the woman in the business suit," he explains that he is an accountant: "'I see,' she says with a frozen smile that tells Shaffiq that she doesn't, that it would take a leap of understanding to see beyond his janitor's uniform, and listen beyond his Bombayite accent." If accompanying Shaffiq to his job night after night becomes tedious—well, Doctor rests her case, and the reader understands all the better the characters' quests for work in their fields.

The child of a Swedish filmmaker and a French actress, Gale Zoë Garnett's Nica Lind works in the "Family Business." Teased at school for her deep voice, at age ten she embraces Marlene Dietrich as a role model because, like Nica, her voice is "*not* froglike. It is throaty." Memoir-like, *Room Tone* sustains a candid, lucid pitch throughout. Garnett selects peak experiences in Nica's life and shapes them into titled, standalone episodes, and some of them, like the one-page "Room Tone," resemble prose poems: "Room Tone is, for a moment or two, humans at our best. Quiet. Listening together to the sound of the room—a sound of which each of us is a breathing part." Unfortunately, Garnett's compression (into three pages) of the decade in which Nica establishes herself as a European film star means that subsequent references to her "career" and "life" in Europe ring hollow. Still, this stature empowers her in L.A. when, for example, her agent wants her to "have a rack job." Outraged, she resolves to decamp until she is offered a lucrative TV series (sans surgery).

Although Nica enjoys a privileged cosmopolitan lifestyle, she longs for home. Doctor's novel ends with Nasreen's widower father proposing that he and his single daughter buy a house together: "I believe we make home with the people we love." Similarly, Nica buys her father a flat in his hometown of Stockholm and moves in with him. Freud would pathologize the way that Nica's deep affection for both parents (long divorced) replaces romantic love. But her re-rooting suggests that, regardless of wealth, connections to family and place mean everything.

Many of Patricia Robertson's characters in *The Goldfish Dancer* not only migrate but also create stories. In "Graves of the Heroes," a Canadian academic travels to Spain looking for her great-uncle's grave but finds a dead baby instead; she thinks contentedly of her affidavit as "her own version, in her own words." In "My Hungarian Sister," a girl in England fantasizes about an adopted sibling but loses interest when she meets an actual Hungarian refugee. In "After Annabel," the Canadian point-of-view character, Linda, supports her London roommate in her work at the Immigrant Welfare Council, where the clients include Sri Lankan and Bangladeshi refugees, but she resists devoting herself to the cause. Back in Vancouver when disaster strikes, Linda knows that "among each set of fragments was a story," and she attempts to find

it. Detached and observant, Robertson's characters generally stand apart from the flow of life.

Robertson's exactness of imagery is reinforced by her control over perspective; for example, the sky appears "pink as a peeled scab" when a seven-year-old boy is filtering the narration (of "Badlands"). In another story, a prairie farmer "still didn't believe in the existence of any job that involved sitting down." "Agnes and Fox" sympathetically depicts an ailing, elderly British Canadian woman (who has an imaginary pet fox); the narration intermittently dips into the mind of her hired caregiver, who has recently emigrated from Pakistan (and is ostracized by her local relatives for fleeing an abusive Canadian marriage). Impressive as is the range of this collection, the emotional centres of the stories often do not hold, leaving us with masterfully executed exercises in diverse settings and points of view. Still, Robertson proves that between Doctor's didacticism and Garnett's sometimes decadent aestheticism (did I mention the orgy in Helsinki?) lies a middle ground of conscientious artistry.

Wonder and the Sacred

Don Domanski
All Our Wonder Unavenged. Brick $18.00

Don Domanski
Poetry and the Sacred. Institute for Coastal Resarch $20.00

Reviewed by Paul Milton

In his capacity as Ralph Gustafson Chair of Poetry at Malaspina University College, Don Domanski delivered an address in 2005 in which he sought to extricate the sacred from the conventionally religious so that poetry might share in it. For Domanski, the sacred is "the fundamental experience one has with time and space, with the seemingly endless corporeality that flows into our consciousness." As such the relationship with all things that exist constitutes the sacred because each of those things reflects the most basic of all mysteries, the mystery of existence itself.

Poetry conveys this mystery not through the communication of meaning, but through the infinitely renewable act of creation. Where once poetry was considered to be the Promethean theft of fire, it now represents the effort to keep the fire alive. Domanski articulates a modernized version of the romantic/transcendentalist notion that poetry is a process rather than a product, a process connected to the creative processes of the natural world.

Ultimately, Domanski illustrates the points in his lecture by quoting in full the title poem of his 2007 Governor General's Award-winning collection *All Our Wonder Unavenged*. The poem's title begs the question, why should our wonder be avenged at all? The answer lies in the poem's own reflection on the excess of wonder produced by life in "a world of abundance," a world which overwhelmingly presents the subject with poetic possibilities and natural signs crying out for imaginative response.

The poem itself reflects the opulence of yet another attempt to respond to the fecundity of the natural world. Yet, the response is not requital or repayment; requital will not suffice to describe the poet's sense of being decentred by wonder. Only through energies equal to those of revenge can he match or repay the gift or curse of wonderment.

The repayment comes in the production of the poems which necessitate and model the mindfulness in both the poet and the reader. Mindfulness, he says in the lecture, becomes a subversive act in an age centred on the self. The line "all our wonder unavenged" appears in the poem when the poet professes to understand the barking dogs' motivation for biting their master. Their unlimited awe expresses itself in natural violence because it cries out

for vengeance, for repayment of nature's inexhaustible bounty.

The poems in this collection embody the ideas expressed in that lecture; simple everyday acts become transformed through metaphor and mindfulness into creative intensities. The act of tinkering with a clock provides a set of metaphors for a metaphysical examination of time. A walk to the river becomes a walk over Devonian hieroglyphs past a landscape of closely observed details towards the mythical Acheron, tributary to the Styx. On this walk Domanski observes the two mourning doves, like Whitman's lonely hermit thrush, circling an absent third: "it's the third dove the soul is always seeking / some part of us always looking for what can't be seen / what won't be revealed." Oh what an endless work the mindful observer has in hand.

In essence, Domanski attributes to poetry the capacity to reacquaint the self-obsessed modern reader with the world in a sacred communion. As he says in the lecture, "[i] t takes a great deal of effort to see what's in front of you, whether that's a stone, a mountain, or another person. After much watching, after much witnessing of the metamorphoses from object to presence, you find that everything is self-luminous."

Domanski's poetry is marked by an intense interaction between its speaker and nature, reflective of a mystical experience of the natural world. Nothing remains as it would appear to the eye trained by convention or limited by the literal. Domanski's world is forever in a state of recreation to the observer who remains mindful. His is a world of curves and deflections, not the world of edges occupied by the dulled people living in "The Rouged Houses."

Whatever else Domanski accomplishes, he fills his poetry with lush language and vital metaphors. The body of a dead crow in "Twa Corbies" becomes "a trunk full of God's dark clothes / to be worn on the Day of Judgement." In Domanski's world, a cormorant carries the universe, headlights breast the dark, and the shadows of rabbits sleep among hounds. His poems demand the mindfulness that transforms perception into a confrontation with the sacred. One must have a mind of winter to slip seamlessly back into the world of ordinary dead perception. Be careful once you lay this book down; the world won't seem as simple and solid as it may have been before.

Time Travels Convincing

Lois Donovan
Winds of L'Acadie. Ronsdale $9.95

Claire Carmichael
Leaving Simplicity. Annick $10.95

Reviewed by J.R. Wytenbroek

Historical fiction can be dull, but if well-written, it entices readers into the past, bringing it alive and helping them feel they are actually there. Futuristic science fiction, on the other hand, is expected to be exciting, and it takes some effort to make it dull. Making it believable, however, is a different matter.

Lois Donovan's *Winds of L'Acadie* involves a very modern, rather spoiled city girl who is blown back into the 1700's in Acadia, just before the deportation of the Acadians, one of the bleakest chapters of Canadian history. Forced to be interested in someone other than herself for the first time in her sixteen years, she finds herself caring deeply for the Acadian family who take her in when she is completely confused and disoriented by her time-travelling experience. Sarah works desperately to save the family from the deportation with the help of the young man from her present whom she treated so badly when she first arrived in Nova Scotia.

The questions that arise are whether the changes in the initially unlikable Sarah are believable and do the readers come to care enough about Sarah's adopted Acadian family to make them want to find out what happens to them. Donovan pulls both off

very well. The spoiled city girl changes convincingly into someone utterly committed to trying to save her adopted family through a gradual and realistic process. The family itself is so likeable and so real that most readers will care about saving them every bit as much as Sarah does by the time the deportation begins. The themes of love and friendship, belonging, and the cruelty of prejudice and hatred are worked nicely through the characters, their interaction, and the historical situation. Readers may well leave the book wondering what happened to the families that were so widely dispersed by the deportation and, by extension, wonder about the lives of those being displaced due to hatred and prejudice today. The book is powerful and thought-provoking while leaving the reader longing for more—high praise indeed for a young adult historical novel, surely the most difficult of all genres for that age-group.

Carmichael's *Leaving Simplicity* has few of the obstacles to deal with that *Winds* has. Science fiction is a popular genre with young people, and even mediocre science fiction can do well. However, *Simplicity* is definitely not mediocre. It also involves another spoiled city girl, but her transformation is effected not by the past but by a cousin who may as well be from the past. In this near-future novel, the world is inundated with advertising. Even classroom desks are supplied by corporate sponsors whose ads run in holographic form over the desks. Teachers wear t-shirts announcing which company is sponsoring the lesson for the day and billboard ads are designed to broadcast directly into each passing vehicle. It takes very little effort to imagine such a world, given the state of advertising in our society today. But Taylor's cousin Barrett is from the country, in fact from a community based on the principles of simple living, completely cut off from the consumer-driven, high-speed and endlessly chattering world that Taylor lives in. The contrast between the two, and Barrett's complete culture shock when suddenly immersed in Taylor's world, are well-drawn. When the two are caught up in a plot to use them both as guinea-pigs by big corporations, and have to expose the plot just to save their own lives, most readers will care what happens to them.

The plot is fast-paced and exciting. Both characters are, surprisingly, quite believable, as both are based on templates we see every day in the "real" world. Taylor, like Sarah, is used only to the best, fastest, and latest. She is appropriately appalled at the thought of showing her "farmie" cousin around the school, and mortified at the thought of her friends meeting him. She is manipulative and demanding, yet her gradual transformation into a critic of her own society is convincing. Barrett's shell shock when propelled without warning from his quiet and thoughtful albeit insular life at Simplicity into the endlessly noisy, sensory-overloaded world of the corporate-driven city is also convincing. He learns a lot but, unlike Taylor, he is not transformed by his experiences. Instead he becomes the force of transformation for others, refusing to compromise his principles. Absolutely firm in his beliefs and values, he becomes the rock upon which the illegal and immoral get-rich-quick schemes of his power-hungry aunt Kara and her even more greedy and scheming friend, Senator Rox, crash and sink.

Thematically, the book is rich and complex, tackling everything from the pharmaceuticals' callous disregard for the AIDS epidemic in under-privileged countries (here transformed into the Q-plague) to the powerful control corporations have today on every aspect of our society, and their voice of manipulation, the advertising industry. With its corporate sponsorship even of individual classes, the novel is clearly a satire on our world today. It is a little heavy-handed, however, even didactic in places, which undercuts its power somewhat. There is also a flaw in the plot near

the end which may leave readers scratching their heads. However, as a way to get young people to think about the influences of corporations and advertising on every aspect of their lives, it is excellent, and could readily be used by teachers and parents alike who wish to challenge young people to think.

Both *Winds* and *Simplicity* are excellent books to challenge and involve young adult readers. With exciting plots, convincing characters and strong themes, both are great examples of the high quality fiction written by Canadian authors for young people today.

The Writer and the Beast

Janice Fiamengo, ed.
Other Selves: Animals in the Canadian Literary Imagination. U of Ottawa P $45.00

Reviewed by Heinz Antor

Animals have always had a very special position in Canadian literature. They have been a constant presence in the nation's imagination from the earliest pioneering and settler days right up to the present. Margaret Atwood was the first critic to write about this phenomenon in her *The Animals in That Country* in 1968, but the topic has recently gained new relevance in the context of ecocriticism. This is why the English Department at the University of Ottawa, in its series of annual Canadian literature symposia, organized a conference entitled "The Animals in This Country" in May 2005, and the volume under review here, based on this symposium, provides a wide-ranging survey of some of the most important issues connected with the role of animals in Canadian texts.

In her excellent introductory chapter, Janice Fiamengo surveys the central theoretical and conceptual aspects connected with the representation of animals in literary works of art. There is, for example, the thorny question of how the species boundary between humans and animals has been negotiated in imaginative writing. Do authors speak about animals or for them? Are the latter to be seen as a radical other or rather as something to be explored in a human-centred endeavour? While nineteenth-century writers often depicted animals as sentient beings, sometimes even invested them with rational capacities, twentieth-century scientific rationalism dismissed such attitudes as untenable. More recent approaches in research on animal cognition, however, seem to have blurred the species boundary again and suggest certain cognitive domains that are shared by many species. This has given rise to attempts at refiguring human-animal relations that set out to view animals as our "kindred of the wild". This has serious consequences for our rather contradictory relations with animals, which range from raising them in factories and slaughtering them for food to treating them like family members and play fellows for our children. The modern confusion about the right way to think about animals is also to be found in much Canadian writing at least since Fred Bodsworth's *Last of the Curlews* (1954).

Fiamengo also provides an excellent account of animals in Canadian literary criticism from Northrop Frye's conceptualization of the animal as a symbol of "the non-literary, bald fact undignified by the creative imagination," via Margaret Atwood's theory of animals in Canadian literature as victims and as symbols of a colonized people, to more recent analyses and the "ideological lenses" critics bring to representations of animals, e.g. the feminist focus in the work of Marian Scholtmeijer, Misao Dean, and others.

The fifteen essays that follow Fiamengo's introduction are subdivided into three sections: the first, "Reading Strategies for Animal Writing," deals with issues of representation such as realism, accuracy, authenticity, and anthropocentrism or its avoidance. The second section, "Animal

Writers," focuses on the work of individual authors and analyzes how Thomas McIlwraith, Marshall Saunders, Charles G.D. Roberts, Grey Owl, Timothy Findley, and Dennis Lee constructed animals in their texts. Issues such as the specific quality of the connection between human being and animal, the personal and cultural associations connected with animals and the rhetorical strategies used to represent animals are of central importance here. The third and last part of the volume is entitled "The Politics of Animal Representation," and focuses on the ideological and social contexts. The essays in this section concentrate on the connection between the literary depiction of animals and the politics of travel, hunting, and colonialism. Among the writers discussed in this volume, in addition to the ones mentioned above, are Ernest Thompson Seton, Marian Engel, Farley Mowat, Don McKay, Katherine Govier, Barbara Gowdy, Suniti Namjoshi, and Yann Martel.

These essays address the theoretical issues at stake in very accessible language, and they provide illuminating readings of the texts. Some of them, such as Cynthia Sugars' article on Govier's Audubon in her novel *Creation*, Christoph Irmscher's contribution on Thomas McIlwraith's *Birds of Ontario,* or Wendy Roy's essay on "The Politics of Hunting in Canadian Women's Narratives of Travel," are lavishly illustrated and supplement readerly pleasure with visual interest as well.

Prairie Past, Prairie Present

R. Douglas Francis and Chris Kitzan, eds.
The Prairie West as Promised Land. U of Calgary P $54.95

Sean Johnston
All This Town Remembers. Gaspereau $27.95

Reviewed by Ryan Porter

With a stated editorial focus "on the tension revealed by those in the past who have reflected on the concept of the Prairie West as Promised Land," this volume offers a comprehensive analysis of the conceptual Prairie West as a place of hope, promise, disappointment, and exclusion. Its eighteen essays, roughly ordered according the subjects' chronology, trace the often contradictory and shifting conceptions of the Prairie West as wasteland, agricultural Xanadu, utopianist laboratory, and finally as a post-second world war balance of the urban and the agrarian.

This comprehensive text (462 pp) may be of chief interest for its individual chapters on the seemingly endless cast of eccentrics, blowhards, and activists drawn to the Prairies. These include a disheartening but fine exploration of Bishop Lloyd's Anglo-extremism and generally successful anti-immigration crusade of the 1920s; a look at Nellie McClung's clumsy and prescriptive literary output and steadily darkening social vision, which adds shades of ash and charcoal to her already complex reputation; and, a study of Co-operative Commonwealth Federation (CCF) founder J.S. Woodsworth's early flirtation with Promised Land rhetoric and gradual advocacy of multiculturalism, which helped shaped his later commitment to social reform.

Despite the varied subject matter, the writers and editors strive to keep this volume focused on what becomes a repetitive phrase: "Promised Land." But it is not until Chapter nine that a writer provides a working definition of "Promised Land"; in this case, the writer prefaces her analysis with an interpretation of the Exodus story and various narratives of American exceptionalism. These efforts at thematic contextualization highlight where the other essayists fall short, since the frame of reference for many resembles the open Prairie they discuss. In some cases, "Promised Land" becomes restrictive, cumbersome, even extraneous as the discussed privation and adversity experienced by settlers would suggest they had arrived in the desert, and their Promised Land lies elsewhere.

However, the phrase only serves as an organizing theme, and the many excellent essays chart a loose narrative of the conceptual, physical, and literary visions of the Prairie, while revealing the tension between inflated rhetoric and harsh reality; the attention given to individual experience often makes for compelling reading. The initial three overlapping sections focus on the Prairie's nascent and developing agrarian reputation, the problems of settlement agriculture, and the increasing appeal of unorthodox or novel social theories within a Prairie society whose lack of (white European) historical texture offered a sort of social *tabula rasa*. Section four, "A Promised Land for the 'Chosen People,'" marks a dark volta as the racialized exclusion alluded to in earlier sections becomes the central focus, and the absurdity of this exclusion is tragically obvious in a discussion of the Plains Cree's thwarted attempts at agriculture. In the post-settlement Prairie society of the early twentieth century, conceptions of racial and gender dominance contrasted with an existing egalitarian impetus; the former helped solidify a cultural, economic, and political prohibition enforced by the Government and RCMP, and often advocated by the dominant Anglo culture.

Section five evaluates the "readjustment" of Promised Land rhetoric in the post-second world war prairie landscape. The chapter on the differing prairie modernist and postmodernist artistic visions demonstrates the breadth of this volume. The editors choose to conclude with an essay on the development of prairie co-operatives, suggesting their interpretation of Promised Land rhetoric moves away from the individualistic towards the far more humane conceptual and physical landscape responsible for the CCF.

What is particularly fine about this volume is its transcendence of a species of reflexive rural veneration associated with discussions of rural heritage. Modern sentiments expressed about a post-war rural decline range between the elegiac and celebratory. To some, generational debt can never be paid off, while to others, the past offers no ideal: both perspectives are studied here.

The Prairie West as Promised Land is a testament to the weight of the prairie past, a weight that proves burdensome to many of the characters of Sean Johnston's novel, *All this Town Remembers*. Memory condemns the inhabitants of the fading town of Asquith SK to an annual Sisyphean fate of reliving the death of the suitably-named rising hockey star Joey Fallow, the "unseeded" field of Asquith's future hopes. Twenty years later, best friend Adam must come to terms with his own memory problems and cope with the CBC, which is in town to make a movie about his friend.

Johnston ascribes to the coarse language and chain-smoking school of small-town malaise. Particularly tricky is the subtext concerning rural "authenticity" (stated right on the back cover) and urban insincerity, confusingly represented by the CBC and its attendant "money." And while discussion of Adam's memory problems bookend the narrative, it is never clear just how they affect the reliability of his voice, which constantly pokes through the third-person narration by way of free indirect discourse. His inability to remember the absent signified, the pivotal accident, does explain the rift between him and Asquith, a town he has come to see as obsessed with death. But is his "brain damage" responsible for his loose lips, or do those result from his beer intake?

Johnston excels at depicting moments of masculine posturing which lead to explosive confrontation, and there are a few rather gripping scenes. But the main interest lies in Johnston's depiction of a man in conflict with a town's repetition compulsion; Adam's lack of memory liberates him from a heavy past. This theme, though, remains shrouded

by a haze of cigarette smoke. The novel does offer a disquieting vision of small-town Prairie life in an age when capital flees to the oil patch or the city, a vision in which the death knell of rural Prairie promise sounded long ago. And while weighty memories remain of what could've and might've been, it is Adam's absence of memory that provides the real promise.

Pebbles and Panes

Christiane Frenette; Sheila Fischman, trans.
The Woman Who Walks on Glass. Cormorant $22.95

Carol Bruneau
Glass Voices. Cormorant $22.95

Reviewed by Beverley Haun

Glass is a universal analogue; it can mean anything, or nothing at all, and possibly both at the same time. The elusive intimations of Virginia Woolf's notion about life as a glass pane are invoked by Carol Bruneau as a way of reading her novel and melding the shards and fragments of characters shaped by the 1917 Halifax Explosion into a cohesive whole. An epigraph from Tennessee Williams sets up the stories in Christiane Frenette's allusive collection, although her lovely image of glass pebbles on a beach or garden path seems more appropriate as a descriptor than the conceit of a glass menagerie.

The stories in *The Woman Who Walks on Glass* read like tales conjured in a confessional while waiting for the priest to arrive. Much as in autobiography, or in the confessional, the real story is the telling itself and not the tale. And yet Frenette somehow stays outside the narratives, the observer observing, while you, the reader assimilate the stories into your own experience. Each is radiant, spare, contemplative, dynamic, haunting, evasive, precise, and strangely mercurial. Characters are often not merely without names but identified by their absence. As Robert Kroetsch might observe, they are intentionally "unnamed," making the liaison they form between writer and reader both intimate and detached.

The book is conceived as a whole. The prologue and epilogue are a breathtaking foray into second person narration which provides a unity of consciousness that is almost painfully poetic and self-effacing. The brief stories between are not linked in any conventional sense, but by the mind of a writer as authentic and naked and honest as in any portrait of the artist imaginable. In a masterful sequence of sketches and anecdotes, Frenette balances differing versions of a common event or episode, using different voices but all in the same poetic idiom, to create moments of awkward perfection. These are burnished gems of glass from the beach not from the garden path; they are weatherworn and subtle, yet startlingly new (her favourite is Noxzema blue).

The first story, "Photo of Élouard with Dominique." exhausts the reader in six pages—in a good way. The reader's life has been subtly changed. And, at the end, you realize the writer's life, as you suspected, has been changed as well, in the act of writing. After a break, you read another, you don't think it can get any better. "The Guardian Angel" is possibly better. And several others are even better; stories about little girls, about brief affairs and foundering relationships, stories about peeling an orange and a visit to Bruges. Christiane Frenette has reinvented the short story collection as something familiar and exquisitely fresh. The translation by Sheila Fischman, as might be expected, is up to the challenges of a text where intimation and nuance are everything.

In stark contract, *Glass Voices* by Carol Bruneau uses language with a brutal directness inseparable from the mean and troubled lives portrayed. Images born of the author's imagination sweep over the limited consciousness of her characters, offering the reader points of connection beyond their

own capacity to understand. Lucy Caines is a character in the mold of Hagar Shipley, although without the tragic dimensions and moral complexity. She is rough and proud, both as a young woman and when she is old. Bruneau's world is more complex than Laurence's, with rich evocations of past events, not as memories but as occupied moments in actual time. Her story is not an orderly sequence of flashbacks but an architectural reconstruction of events in their historical context.

Halifax: December, 1917, the explosion. Autumn, 1969; a few months after Americans walk on the moon. Lucy's story fills in the gaps between, from her own feisty and blinkered point of view. She loses a small daughter in the great explosion; her husband is hospitalized, as the 1960s hum in the background like a dissonant chord. A complicated mystery opens between these events with brooding inevitability. A family story slowly closes over, as if closure were possible. In the end, the reader has functioned as witness from a strangely godlike and somewhat unsettling perspective outside of time.

Bruneau writes in a sustained third-person stream of consciousness—which might seem a contradiction but in fact works quite well. The idiomatic expressions, the quirks of thought, the effusions of memory, do not arise within Lucy's mind but seem imposed from outside. She is engaging, at the centre, without necessarily being engaged. She is surrounded by flourishes of extravagant and flamboyant vernacular identifying her class, gender, and limited awareness, and sometimes she is obscured. She is inseparable from the plot, despite the welter of domestic details and personal idiosyncrasies. At her best, she is an embodiment of place in time; at her least, she is all too ordinary, a woman made only of words.

Fiction can do such different things. *Glass Voices* displays the barely restrained virtuosity of a talented writer. *The Woman Who Walks on Glass*, as great writing can sometimes do, invades the reader's sense of self. Bruneau, on the whole, is a pleasure to read. Christianne Frenette, in small vignettes, shards polished smooth, haunts like the fragments of a life-changing dream.

Letters and migration

Yves Frenette, Marcel Martel, John Willis, dirs.
Envoyer et recevoir. Lettres et correspondances dans les diasporas francophones. PUL 39,00 $

Reviewed by Ursula Mathis-Moser

Envoyer et recevoir is a remarkable publication in many respects: By focusing on the multi-layered experience of migration, it appeals to experts in cultural studies, history and literature alike and it does so in a very innovative way. Throughout its 300 pages it shows that migration can be comprehended not only as a traumatizing experience of separation, deracination and alienation, of loss, marginalization and stigmatization, but also as a space of creative energy and a catalyst of creative processes, which include the art of writing letters and of articulating the individual's self. Besides, the letter, which is "a private document" but "in terms of its function, anything but private," becomes the touchstone of what could be described as the "mental history" of the francophone diasporas in the Americas.

The volume, which is divided into four parts (methodology, letter writing and family bonds, letter writing and the Church, letter writing and literary or political networks), covers an impressive range of themes and issues: geographically, it presents case studies dealing with French-Canadian migration in North America (US, Canada) and with immigration from France to Canada or Latin America. Sociologically, it lends expression to the mental universe of working class families, but also to more literate "authors" representing the

"bourgeoisie d'affaires" in the New World and the aristocracy of the Old World, clergymen, intellectuals, and political dignitaries. It focuses on men *and* women who write letters and includes reports on individual migrants, on groups of people, and on networks of as many as 3700 correspondents. What the ten studies united in this volume have in common, however, is the fact that they are all based on authentic, handwritten letters and that these letters go back to the "high tide of emigration" in the Americas, i.e. the decades between 1870 and 1930.

Among the many findings of this publication, some deserve particular attention: the volume as a whole refutes both the myth of the "immigrant solitaire et déraciné" and that of "les masses laborieuses comme des marionnettes ou d'éternelles victimes de forces et de circonstances hors de leur contrôle." The close reading of the epistolary material confirms that even working class migrants have to be considered as "acteurs à part entière qui réagissent à leur milieu, le façonnent et, dans une certaine mesure, le contrôlent". The qualitative analysis of letters written by (im)migrants permits furthermore to discover—next to the "statistics of ruptures and breaks" (hard facts) —the emergence of "formes de continuité entre le passé prémigratoire et la société d'arrivée." In this complex process, in the course of which the immigrant symbolically equates emigration and death, the letter with its conventional linguistic patterns helps to psychologically recreate the writer's genealogy. Other elements of interest are the dominant and sometimes contradictory patterns of migration, such as chain migration or, on the contrary, dispersing a community's members to a large number of different destinations. In all cases, kin relationships and even family hierarchies tend to survive in the new surroundings while at the same time the development of infrastructure becomes an essential means of acculturation. On a contextual level, the emergence of postal services and the general increase of literacy seem to have had a positive effect on migration processes in North America.

The volume gives excellent insight into the latest developments of research in the field, in the problematics of using the private letter as a historical source and the basic functions of the letter in migratory contexts. As to Québec, the analysis of Lionel Groulx's epistolary activities allows us to reconsider his ideological position with regard to the francophone communities outside of Quebec while Louis Dantin, in his Cambridge "exile," appears as one of the first cultural mediators between Quebec and the US.

Envoyer et recevoir is a convincing collection of high quality essays and a useful tool not only for those fascinated by the francophone diasporas of the Americas but also for those interested in the complexities and the psychology of migration.

Shelter from the Storm

Larry Gaudet
Safe Haven: The Possibility of Sanctuary in an Unsafe World. Random House $34.95

Reviewed by J.A. Wainwright

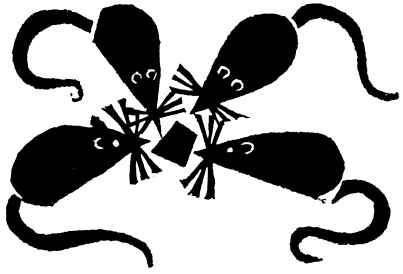
Larry Gaudet knows well that places of sanctuary have always been a privilege, whether they were entire cities in ancient Greece, churches in pre-1623 England, mosques and synagogues throughout history, privately perceived landscapes, collective havens like Lourdes and Elvis' Graceland, or interior worlds of retreat and solace that allow for ontological meditations. They are a privilege because they exist despite a world gone consistently wrong in so many ways with its collisions of personal and public histories and violent intrusions into individual lived experience and psychic space. Sanctuaries are places where time

slows down and there is the possibility of "confronting who you are or might be," where family love often offers protection against external threats, where asylum is, for the fortunate, a state of mind and heart rather than a construction of physical borders to keep away the troops of darkness. Although Gaudet perceptively explores the "diverse historical legacy" of sanctuary and its "enduring cultural importance around the world," he is more concerned with examining his own quest for safe haven and how it emerges from his unstable Acadian past and constantly-negotiated present with his wife Alison and their two sons.

Gaudet has previously written two fine novels, and much of the strength of his writing in this book lies in his characterization and dialogue. Most of his exchange with Alison, Jackson, and Theo occurs in Foggy Cove, a community on Nova Scotia's south shore that was once "truly isolated" but now exists on the faultline where "rural meets the money" and insularity is increasingly defined by the value of property. He and his wife bicker over his ongoing engagement with exile and her need for big city urbanities, but their always inquiring (rather than unquestioning) deep love for one another and the Cove's natural beauties and cast of diverse characters is evident in everything they say. This is true despite Gaudet's self-admitted insecurity in the face of spousal complexities and because of his assured knowledge that each of them "completes the other's labyrinth" in their shared search for who they are in relation to where they exist. His two boys, still young enough to create fantasy worlds that are gates in their heads rather than gated communities, constantly redefine Gaudet's sense of sanctuary parameters.

His family roots were in Prince Edward Island's Acadian community, but Gaudet was raised as an anglo-Acadian in Montreal. His was a double émigré condition that left him trying to find home without constructing a tourist-brochure vision of sanctuary wherein "you can wander down to the beach to boil pots of lobster…and strum the guitar with friends who will sing until their voices crack. . . . On the road, drivers in oncoming cars will acknowledge you with a casual nod or wave, even if you are 'from away.'" To deal with the troubling complexities of his personal past and the searing realities of his communal history, Gaudet invents an alter ego, one Antonine Baptiste Savoie ("Tony") through whose journals he examines the journeys of other pilgrims of the labyrinth to learn that "there are no dead ends and you can't get lost" when you keep the faith of an open, probing mind. Tony provides a kind of Ariadne thread for Gaudet who will confront the minotaur of his often dysfunctional distance from immediate family members and make a separate peace with the ghosts of PEI and Cajun country where *Guh-det* is pronounced *Gode-ay* and "there is dignity in meandering through the competing truths of who you are."

But Foggy Cove remains the crucible ground of existence where the debate between the acknowledged privilege of sanctity (from the Latin root of *sanctus* meaning holy) and the obscene advantage of safety in a world awry alternately rages and quietly percolates in the writer's purview. Gaudet incisively conveys the universal qualities of the local landscape that usually lies at the centre of our desire for shelter from the storm.



Œkoumènes endogènes du conte

Claude Gonthier et Bernard Meney, dirs.
Treize contes fantastiques québécois. XYZ 11,95 $

Joseph-Médard Carrière; Marcel Bénéteau et Donald Deschênes, dirs.
Contes du Détroit. Prise de parole 29,95 $

Ange-Émile Maheu
Mon oncle Émile conte. Prise de parole 24,95 $

Compte rendu par Emir Delic

Depuis la fin des années 1980, le conte s'exonde, s'affirme, se renouvelle. Les trois ouvrages dont il sera question ici témoignent, chacun à sa façon, de l'emballement pour cet art de la parole qui ne cesse de se répandre au Canada français et dans toute la francophonie.

L'anthologie préparée par Claude Gonthier et Bernard Meney regroupe des textes de cinq conteurs québécois qui partagent un penchant pour le genre fantastique: Philippe-Ignace-François Aubert de Gaspé fils, Joseph-Charles Taché, Honoré Beaugrand, Louis Fréchette et Pamphile Le May. Les treize textes choisis illustrent bien les figures, les motifs et les thèmes représentatifs des contes orientés vers l'insolite qui circulent dans les milieux francophones au XIX^e^ et au début du XX^e^ siècles ainsi que les attitudes différentes qu'adoptent les auteurs à l'égard de l'autorité cléricale et des croyances populaires de l'époque. Le recueil comprend également un dossier d'accompagnement qui est, sans conteste, bien étoffé et qui offre au lecteur une documentation pertinente et variée. Cependant, on pourrait regretter que, dans leur discussion du fantastique, les deux commentateurs ne fassent aucune allusion aux différents théoriciens de cette notion, tels Pierre-Georges Castex ou Tzvetan Todorov. À plus forte raison que la définition du fantastique de ce dernier correspond parfaitement à celle donnée par les deux commentateurs. Un autre point qui aurait gagné à être élaboré davantage concerne la distinction entre « conte » et « légende ». Même si l'on acceptait la description à caractère définitionnel que Gonthier et Meney proposent du conte (« Contrairement à la légende, le conte se présente habituellement sous forme écrite. Au Québec, il s'avère une transcription littéraire de la légende orale. »)—explications qui me paraissent fort problématiques étant donné que, s'il existe, dans la nuée des définitions du conte, un élément qui fasse l'unanimité ou qui soit, pour le moins, le plus souvent repéré, c'est bien l'oralité du genre—l'emploi des termes « conte » et « légende » ailleurs dans le texte se trouve teinté d'un certain flou sémantique. Malgré ces quelques réserves, il ne fait pas de doute que le dessein principal de cette anthologie est atteint puisqu'elle constitue une solide introduction au conte fantastique québécois.

Alors que ce premier recueil de contes concerne le territoire québécois, les *Contes du Détroit* se rapportent au territoire ontarien. Marcel Bénéteau et Donald Deschênes nous présentent dans cette collection vingt-six contes, y compris un récit inachevé, qu'a recueillis, en 1938, Joseph-Médard Carrière dans la communauté francophone de la région du Détroit. L'approche « hybride » adoptée par les deux chercheurs dans la transcription des contes qu'a laissés le grand folkloriste sous forme de manuscrits dactylographiés en orthographe phonétique est particulièrement bien réussie. C'est qu'elle permet de préserver le caractère oral des contes tout en les rendant accessibles à un lectorat plus vaste. En outre, comme l'attestent les analyses approfondies des contes développées par Jean-Pierre Pichette à la fin du recueil, les *Contes du Détroit* constituent un ensemble assez hétéroclite où se côtoient notamment contes merveilleux, facétieux et animaliers. N'empêche qu'un lien thématique s'y trahit : le pauvre ou le faible l'emportant souvent

sur le riche ou le fort, la fin de la majorité des contes est marquée d'un ton jubilatoire. Jubilatoire, la fin l'est aussi pour les manuscrits de Carrière, car cette trouvaille précieuse, qui met en valeur l'héritage de la plus ancienne communauté de l'Ontario français, se voit enfin livrée.

Dans son nouveau recueil, qui fait suite aux *Contes d'Émile et une nuit*, Ange-Émile Maheu nous offre, quant à lui, un autre échantillon brillant de contes prélevés de son riche répertoire. Si *Mon oncle Émile conte* fait, à plusieurs reprises, écho aux *Treize contes fantastiques québécois* et aux *Contes du Détroit*, au point que le recueil de Maheu renferme des contes dont une version différente se retrouve dans un des deux recueils (« Le Diable danseur » et « L'étranger », « La justice de Ti-Jean » et « Cornencul »), l'intérêt particulier de ce mélange hétérogène de récits réside dans l'art de Maheu de piquer la curiosité du lecteur et de retenir son attention jusqu'à la fin de l'aventure. C'est sans doute à cette fin que le conteur agrémente son recueil de commentaires portant, entre autres, sur les sources plus ou moins précises des contes, qu'il se plaît à déjouer les attentes du lecteur et qu'il cherche à adapter les contes au public moderne en y glissant, par exemple, des préoccupations et des expressions contemporaines. À ce souci de modernisation, lequel me fait, d'ailleurs, douter de la convenance du sous-titre de « contes traditionnels » attribué à *Mon oncle Émile conte*, s'ajoute un effort continuel de souligner la véracité des récits, qui, émanant de tout le recueil, le dote d'un charme envoûtant. Toutes ces stratégies narratives, qui mettent en évidence les pouvoirs de transmission et de (re)création propres au conte, contribuent à établir une connivence entre conteur et lecteur et à engendrer ce que François Falhault appelle un « être-ensemble » et ce, dans le but d'accueillir le lecteur dans l'illusion vraie du conte. Et si jamais on désirait se laisser séduire autrement que par la lecture, le disque compact qui accompagne *Mon oncle Émile conte* nous permet d'apprécier le conteur en exercice.

On le voit, suivant la trajectoire qui lui est particulière, chacun des trois recueils considérés ici projette quiconque s'y laisse emporter dans de véritables œkoumènes endogènes du conte, ces espaces habités dont la matière première provient des profondeurs de l'imagination humaine et que l'on prend plaisir à explorer par échappées.

Generations

Lorna Goodison
From Harvey River: a memoir of my mother and her people. McClelland & Stewart $29.99

Dawn P. Williams, ed.
Who's Who in Black Canada 2: Black Success and Black Excellence in Canada, a Contemporary Directory. UTP $35.99

Reviewed by Katherine Verhagen

Lorna Goodison's *From Harvey River* records and transforms her family history into a multi-generational narrative about perseverance and adaptation. Dedicated to her parents, this book is a family memoir in which Goodison appears as a character who frames the narrative in a few short pages at the beginning and at the end of the book. Doris, Goodison's late mother, leads the narrative from Part Two onward, meeting challenges from crowded urban housing, economic hardship, working in a lunatic asylum, the loss of a spouse, and family illness. Goodison does not present a simple account of her mother but of her "generations, familial relations as the Jamaicans call them": whenever Doris is faced by great adversity, she finds strength in thinking of her forebears, such as her sister, Cleodine, or her grandfather, George O'Brian Wilson. Similarly, in the epilogue, Goodison (the character) awakens confused in a hotel room but reorients herself by recalling her lineage and her place within it. Underneath

the surface of her thoughts, she dives to find the "evidence of my generations" as the bedrock of her "mind like [a] riverbed." The book begins with the dedication to her parents and then her family tree, all presented before we get a glimpse of young Lorna "asking urgent questions" of her mother and father about their genealogy.

Yet as the opening African proverb to Dawn P. Williams' directory warns, "[u]ntil lions have their own historian, [t]ales of the hunt will always glorify the hunter." Goodison relates her family memoir that uses the history of post-plantation, pre-Independence, and then post-Independence Jamaica. She uses not only her family members to tell the nation's story but also unrelated characters who populate the rural landscape of Harvey River—the river that bears her family's name—to "hard life" urban Kingston. As a result, I find some of the extra-literary promotional writing, on the inner leaves and back of the book covers, to be distracting and trite. For instance, the McClelland & Stewart book leaf description states that Goodison "tells a universal story of family and the ties that bind us to the place we call home." As well, one of the reviewers, Merilyn Simonds, gushes that "these characters will move right in and take up permanent residence in your heart." Goodison's story is not universal; it is the story of Jamaica. Also, her characters are fallible human beings, not clichés. Therefore, Austin Clarke's quoted review is far more apt in revealing the context of Goodison's memoir: "she has 'taken back her language' from the clichés and drowsy characterizations of a country and its people." Like her mother before her, Goodison loves her Harvey River roots, but she is not infatuated with them.

Dawn P. Williams also believes that it is necessary to know one's roots in order to grow as she compiles the second edition of *Who's Who in Black Canada*. Not only are several prominent members of the African-Canadian community included as prospective role models for African-Canadian youth but so are the models' mentors, mapping a generational tree of influence. To develop a mentoring theme, Williams has many contributors include personal mottos in their entries, to motivate their potential readers. For instance, Dany Laferrière quips, "J'écris comme je vis" while Althea Prince warns, "Never cut anything that can be untied." Several entries have e-mail contact information listed, to permit readers to expand their networks to include these writers, artists, businesspersons, educators, and so forth. Readers can also search for role models by primary activity of interest as well as by province and will see advertisements for mostly secondary and higher education and business "black excellence."

In her acknowledgements, Williams comments on how many reviewers and readers understood the first edition's "significance . . . for Black youth [and] that it serve[d] as an affirmation of achievements and an acknowledgement of possibilities." However, another important use for this invaluable resource representing those who are "striving and achieving," in Williams' words, is for "African/Black Canad[ians] . . . to know each other better and to organize," in the words of George Elliott Clarke. This expanded edition gives a more coherent network to a community in need of a better understanding of its breadth and diversity in order to, one day, achieve more political and economic power.

Both Goodison's and Williams' works give their African-Canadian readers a lineage—personal and political, respectively—as well as an understanding of who they are in respect to those generations before them. I would recommend both texts as necessary reading, Goodison's for her Standard and Jamaican English lyricisim and Williams' for her comprehensive and enlightening wealth of African-Canadian talent and success.

From Trogs to Blogs

Nigel Hamilton
Biography: A Brief History. Harvard UP $21.95

Reviewed by A. Mary Murphy

Nigel Hamilton's methodical and chronological overview of the ways in which humans have recorded their life stories may well be indispensable as a touchstone text for those who want either an introductory grasp or an anchoring guide for reading life records. Following the trajectory of a variety of modes, always careful to contextualize these cultural products, Hamilton convincingly tells the story of life stories without isolating them from their historical moments, theoretical debates, censorship laws, or civilizing purposes. The book is an accessible critical history of biography in Western cultures.

It all started in a cave, with two-dimensional "matchstick" figures, and now includes statuary, portraiture, hagiography, film, television, and weblogs, in addition to a plethora of complementary literary genres. Hamilton's compelling case for expanding the definition of what constitutes biography includes a discussion of how biography came to be so named in the first place and how that exclusive term, privileging writing as it does, has long been in need of a makeover; his sweeping inclusivity demonstrates how broad and vibrant a field the study of lives is. Hopefully, this book also expedites the rehabilitation of biography as a viable area of expertise for scholars, both in spite of and because of its pop culture appeal.

Hamilton has cast his net widely and has integrated commentary on single works with his overarching discussions of periods and genres. In this way, he has provided a creditable reading list for those who want to pursue the subject. Reaching back to the oral tradition "from Homer through the Vinland Saga," on to the cuneiform record of *The Epic of Gilgamesh* and stopping awhile with Plutarch, Hamilton demonstrates that individual lives have always been a central and serious concern of creative and scholarly output. Ultimately, he wonders what will be the effect of cloning and genetic modification on how humans negotiate the individual.

As Hamilton observes, while most academic institutions dismiss biography as a potentially legitimate undertaking, the fact is that their departments are rife with closet biographers and students of life records, along with some self-declared life writers. "The Death of the Author" being wildly overstated, Anatole France spoke truly when he said that "we speak of ourselves every time that we have not the strength to be silent." Nevertheless, biography and biographical criticism remain unrespected in the academy, due in part to the problem of "opposing epistemological worlds" that scholars find it difficult to reconcile.

Nevertheless, Hamilton points to the biographical explosion of "informational, critical, and creative overlaps and crossovers with almost every art, every discipline, and every field" over the last half century, resulting in a "biographical bazaar." Offerings in this bazaar now include "complex narratives, interpretations, spoof narratives" and, he might add, even MTV's *The Totally Untrue Story of* series, in which the antithesis of biography is played out. Biographical projects, "artistic and inartistic, noble and tacky," make up the composite human story, surely worthy of examination.

As the book traces the continuum of biographical practice, generic development, and social function, it includes numerous plates (from a cave drawing of a wounded hunter to a lobby poster for *American Splendor*) as exemplars of various schools of portraiture and various modes of representation. There are also block quotations from selected works of significance to Hamilton's project, and the presentation of these blocks, interrupting Hamilton's text

as shaded boxes occupying a page or two, is really the only shortcoming worth noting. Situated as they are, they create an annoying distraction and may have served their purpose better if placed at the conclusion of chapters where they also are more likely to be read.

All the big names are here—Augustine, Shakespeare, Rousseau, Freud, Woolf—but they are part of a very large whole, one which has near encyclopedic scope in under three-hundred pages. Hamilton's engagement with his subject results in an engaging history of biography from "self-portraits of Paleolithic men and women" and "Painted Egyptian mummies" to "women, blacks, homosexuals, postcolonials, and other hitherto marginalized minorities," stopping along the way with Boswell's Johnson and Malcolm's Plath, and taking time to raise an eyebrow at J.M. Barrie and James Frey. The scholarship is impressive, and the tone is conversational, producing a book that is eminently readable and reader friendly.

Saving Generations

Don Hannah
Ragged Islands. Knopf Canada $32.95

Gayle Friesen
The Valley. Key Porter $29.95

Reviewed by Jennifer Fraser

Ragged Islands tells its story from the narrative point of view of a dying matriarch interspersed with her adult son's thoughts as he discovers a package in her room labelled "TO BE SAVED." In *The Valley*, a thirty-eight-year-old daughter, who has been away for twenty years, collects her teenaged daughter and returns home. The former novel, although set in a hospital in Toronto, mostly takes Nova Scotia as its setting. The latter unfolds in a Mennonite community in BC's Fraser Valley. From one coast to the other in Canada, these stories unfold within families and chart the changing landscape of our country and our times.

Ragged Islands opens with two quotes: one from Dante's *Divine Comedy* and the other from Ernest Thompson Seton. Dante's poetry speaks of shades in Purgatory who so affected the pilgrim that his eyes "hazed over" and he "closed them" and "transformed what [he] was thinking into a dream." Seton's line, although more prosaic, is nonetheless more haunting: "The life of a wild animal *always has a tragic end*." Susan Ann, as she approaches death, is still looking to fill in blanks in her story. She seeks papers, sentimental jewelry, pictures, houses, moments; all the shades of the past clamour for her attention, and her final dream is of them. In contrast, her adult son, Carl, strives to be rid of the mementos saved by his mother. He sends them zinging off into the garbage thinking: "*Ancient history now, of no importance to anyone*." The thought of wild creatures and their tragic end, however, belongs to a defining childhood book belonging to Carl. And yet, his approach to wild creatures is to contain them: "*He was thrilled by the idea of foxes standing in glass cases, of owls displayed in bell jars*." With the echo of Sylvia Plath's novel ringing in one's head, the way Carl considers history and wilderness seems easy and dangerous. His mother comes at the past more like her granddaughter Meg, who is an anthropologist. She believes in saving even the fragments of the past. One of the most important companions of Carl's mother, as she travels from life into death, is her wild dog Sally. Original and compelling, *Ragged Islands* juxtaposes the bravery and loyalty of the creature with the distance of one's family during the death watch. Her daughter pats her hand, and Susan Ann notes: "it was the way she would pet a cat, or a dog that wasn't her own."

One of the concerns shared by each novel involves becoming like Lot's wife, a figure turned to the past for all time, transformed into salt as if made of condensed tears. In

Ragged Islands, the question of Lot is raised around the fact that Susan Ann's grandson Tommy is gay. When Susan Ann asks why God turned Lot's wife into a pillar of salt as she gazed back on the destruction of Sodom, her daughter responds: "I just think it's a load of crap." She explains: "They didn't even give the poor woman a name. *Lot's wife*. Not even her own name. Or her daughters either. *The Daughters of Lot*. Just a load of patriarchal crap."

In *The Valley*, the story of Lot's wife is only one of many biblical allusions. Gayle Friesen has a remarkable way of exposing the deadly reasoning of the Bible while simultaneously revealing its contemporary power. Thus, Gloria has believed through her adult life that when tragedy struck her family it was because of sin. When she, a fallen Mennonite, returns home, she continues to struggle with the deep lessons that have shaped her life, one defined by depression, migraines, and grief. As the novel works through to its conclusion and she debates, rages, rails against God, while fearing Him all the while, she listens to her betrayed friend draw on scripture to find a new way of being: "And then I discovered the Gospel of Thomas, the doubter no less. *That which is within you that you bring forth will save you. That which is within you that you do not bring forth will destroy you.*" These words resonate for Gloria, whose psyche cries out for a parallel enactment.

At the outset of *The Valley*, Gloria has received an insistent call from her mother, and her therapist has assigned her homework: literally she needs to work out what home means to her. Although the subject matter is serious, oftentimes the book is very funny. The wry unforgiving narrator, the strong Mennonite grandparents, the fed-up teenaged daughter all lead to an often amusing banter in both thoughts and dialogue. Friesen's novel is as funny and as heart-rending as Miriam Toews' *A Complicated Kindness*.

Two Tales of a City

Mike Harcourt, Ken Cameron, and Sean Rossiter
City Making in Paradise: Nine Decisions that Saved Vancouver. Douglas & McIntyre $24.95

Peggy Schofield, ed.
The Story of Dunbar: Voices of a Vancouver Neighbourhood. Ronsdale $39.95

Reviewed by Maia Joseph

Two recent contributions to the growing literature of planning and development in Vancouver examine the project of city making at distinct scales. The first, *City Making in Paradise*, co-authored by former Vancouver mayor and British Columbia premier Mike Harcourt, longtime city planner Ken Cameron, and civic affairs columnist Sean Rossiter, explores the history of regional planning in Greater Vancouver. The second contribution, *The Story of Dunbar*, approaches city making from a more local perspective. Authored by neighbourhood residents, *The Story of Dunbar* traces the settlement patterns and community dynamics that have shaped Vancouver's inner suburb of Dunbar-Southlands. Each book offers a valuable, scale-specific perspective on the dynamics of community building; read together, they have much to say to each other about the limitations of their respective points of view, and about telling the story of city making.

City Making in Paradise promotes the idea of the city-region as "an organic entity that grows and changes in response to internal and external influences." In keeping with this theme, the authors critique the amalgamated mega-city model that has been implemented in many Canadian cities, arguing instead for the flexibility and consensus-oriented decision-making of Vancouver's regional planning and governance structures. A chief strength of *City Making in Paradise* is the authors' refusal to gloss over the difficulties involved in

the model they advocate. Harcourt and Cameron put their extensive insider experience to good use, drawing on an impressive range of personal reminiscences and interviews to describe the often fractious relations (between municipalities, with the provincial and federal governments) that inform—and sometimes encumber—planning projects in the region. Using specific case studies, they focus on keys to success in this context, highlighting the crucial functions of bi-partisan thinking and relationship building, creative leadership, and resident participation and buy-in.

Anyone sensitive to the boosterism that can dominate conversations about planning and development may find aspects of *City Making in Paradise* off-putting. With its tourist-brochure title and cover image (a mosaic of sun-kissed sky, water, glass, and garden photographs—no rain in this version of Vancouver), the book does not shy away from "selling" its vision of city making. It opens, moreover, with a decidedly celebratory historical overview of city building in the region that includes only the briefest acknowledgement of impacts on Coast Salish communities, and relegates to its final paragraph the idea that Vancouver still faces significant challenges.

Fortunately, the book offers considerably more than these reductive frames promise, and the authors atone for their Introduction with a final chapter that argues for meaningful Aboriginal involvement in planning, and that identifies interconnected challenges facing the city-region as it attempts to move toward a more sustainable future. These challenges include managing growth in an environmentally sound manner, enhancing the transportation infrastructure in ways that respond to resident, economic, and environmental requirements (the much-debated Gateway Project features prominently, with Harcourt and Cameron taking divergent stances), and making social justice a foundational priority of sustainable city building.

It is important to note, too, that Harcourt, et al. would likely defend their book's "selling" tactics. Indeed, they emphasize the role of marketing in planning, describing the need to transform data and ideas into messages that induce the all-important ingredient of resident buy-in. Critics, however, would likely argue that much can be lost, ignored, or left vulnerable to misinterpretation in the move to simplified, appealing messaging.

The Story of Dunbar emerged at least partially as a result of a perceived gap between reality and messaging. In the mid 1990s, when the City of Vancouver initiated a participatory planning process in Dunbar-Southlands, resident Peggy Schofield became fascinated with her community's history, which she felt held vital information for future decision making. Her research became a book project that was completed by a group of neighbourhood residents following Schofield's death in 2005. The authors convey dissatisfaction with the planning process that sparked the research, citing a lack of detailed content and specific project plans in the final neighbourhood vision document, and recalling that Schofield recommended to city council that the document not be adopted because it was incomplete. Significantly, *The Story of Dunbar* begins with a statement about the authors' attempts to avoid boosterism. Unlike the authors of *City Making in Paradise*, they take the stance that addressing the complicated dynamics of a particular place is at odds with simplified messaging.

This does not mean that the book has no planning "vision." Indeed, a key aim appears to have been to create a historically rooted argument for protecting the neighbourhood's single-family housing stock and extensive green spaces. However, *The Story of Dunbar*'s strength lies not in its articulation of this agenda, but in its dedication to documenting the community's

history of social, economic, and political diversity, especially in early chapters about the Musqueam first people, early European and Asian settlement, community relations, and commercial development. Every neighbourhood deserves such a carefully crafted record of its beginnings. The book is particularly instructive in revealing how inhabitants related across, or despite, social barriers. Drawing on archival research and interviews, *The Story of Dunbar* presents a range of voices speaking about their experiences as early inhabitants, and also about their perceptions of, and interactions with, other groups. This material helps the authors think about community in expansive and intricate ways. When they discuss the removal of Musqueam children to the Coqualeetza residential school near Chilliwack, for example, they suggest that the policy was destructive not only for the Musqueam but also for the settler-Aboriginal population as a whole, because the play of children together was key to forging inter-group bonds.

This approach weakens somewhat later in the book, and the final chapter, which deals in part with the idea of sustainability, is rather disappointing. The chapter highlights the preservation of biodiversity in local wetlands, but the importance of socioeconomic diversity and social justice to sustainability is largely overlooked. It is here that Harcourt *et al.*, with their regional approach, and in their attention to the social dimension of sustainability, are able to articulate a more sophisticated conceptualization of community. *The Story of Dunbar* does offer a regional perspective on particular environmental issues, such as waste removal, which has impacts beyond the neighbourhood's borders; however, it does not fully engage notions of regionally oriented social responsibility and interrelationality. The work ahead for Dunbar-Southlands residents, Harcourt *et al.* might suggest, lies in the difficult negotiation of local and regional concerns and needs. Fortunately, *The Story of Dunbar* provides a strong foundation for the nuanced thinking about community that such work requires.

Out of Bounds

Freda Jackson
Searching for Billie. TouchWood $18.95

Sean Dixon
The Girls Who Saw Everything. Coach House $21.95

Reviewed by Andrea Wasylow

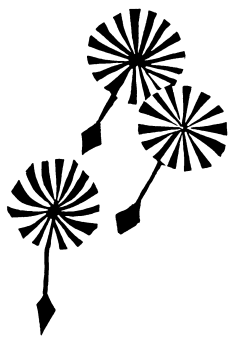
Searching for Billie by Freda Jackson and *The Girls Who Saw Everything* by Sean Dixon deftly demonstrate starts and stops in the discoveries that beckon these narratives. Both authors propel their characters through setbacks and shy secret smiles to reach a moment of truth or grace. As Dexter's character Aline proffers, "I see reality! I am capable of rising above the limitations of my body and my surroundings, through the strength of my will and desire! But I also have eyes, ears, and a brain! I can look at the world and see it as it is!"

Freda Jackson's novel cracks open history to provide us with an account of Billie, a "home child" who was shipped to Canada in the hope for a better life during the British Children's Emigration Movement. *Searching for Billie* shows how misplaced good intentions not only defer or complicate healing, but can really prevent its realization and in effect compound suffering. The well-mannered Englishwoman Jane dispatches herself to Canada in the fall of 1897 to locate Billie and assess his situation. We know what Jane does not: that the thieving Billie is trying to survive excruciating poverty by trading his innocence to the grimy "Dook" for sour food and boots that fit. The novel begins by describing the extraordinary dichotomy between Billie and Jane, their only tenuous thread

of connection being Jane's pursuit of Billie, read Jane's pursuit of superior purpose. Jackson give us less of Billie's narrative compared to Jane's, and this disproportion seems like a tactic to make Billie seem lost in the wilds of late nineteeth-century Canada, at large in the largest area. Billie struggles but does not languish, driven by a stubbornness which seems metaphysically to reach Jane herself, as circumstances force her to unexpectedly endure miseries which encounter her. Connecting with Luc and providing assistance for another home child are part of what enables the "Anglaise" to ultimately serve Billie in the way he needs: as Luc says, "she rescues things." Billie first needs freedom from pain and entrapment, and then, just freedom. Jane, already possessing freedom, needs Billie.

Similarly, the members of the Lacuna Cabal Montreal Young Women's Book Club seek each other out and depend on each other for adventure, reasons, and explanations for their lives. Sean Dixon's novel *The Girls Who Saw Everything* is a decidedly exhilarating blend of crises (both self-induced and inherited) of the many characters, such as Runner Coghill (sister of Neil, the real Coghill). She identifies with Anna: "you're a bit of a damaged masterpiece yourself, aren't you?" Through right and wrong, life and death, explicable and inexplicable, the Cabalists are "like a unit of the army in battle, like the chorus in an old Greek tragedy, like the Scooby-Doo gang." The fact that the women (and men) actually enact the events from the stories of their study is what distinguishes the book club from any other, but that they take such creative license with interpreting possible offshoots and variations to their novels is what leads to complication, peril, mystery, sex, death, and journeys around the globe. The cuneiform Coghill Tablets provide the group with their current text, "The Epic of Gilgamesh," and the most intense play-acting reaching its apex in the killing of the monster Humbaba, after which nothing is the same between the Cabalists. Dixon creatively treats a vast array of subjects such as prostitution, cross-dressing, orphans, rituals, brainwashing, the underworld, the will to die, and disease (well, dis/ease) in his chapters and footnotes.

Where Freda Jackson shows how her characters are ginger and the wilderness is inner and outer, Sean Dixon's characters are nimble, adaptable, but not interchangeable. Why, for so long, could Jane not find the home children she was pursuing? Perhaps Jane herself needs to suffer, to receive purification or emancipation from her gentility and privilege. Jackson explores how the mind and the body can be disconnected: "she wanted her spirit back. Wanted her memories to float away, not her spirit, wanted to sleep soundly at night and think straight during the day… How long did it take to heal a mind?" Likewise, Dixon writes, "there's always the small comfort in knowing a part of one's mind can't be touched. It's detached. The trick, though, is not to allow the detached mind to take over for good, nor to let it take over so much that you won't struggle." Case in point: why does Runner keep falling through the floor? These novels delight in miscalculations, but not in self-indulgent ways. The characters proceed altered, with a series of approaches. Will they succeed?



Nature Red in Tooth and Claw

Barbara Wyn Klunder
Other Goose: Recycled Rhymes for Our Fragile Times. Groundwood $17.95

Wallace Edwards
The Painted Circus: P.T. Vermin presents A Mesmerizing Menagerie of Trickery and Illusion Guaranteed to Beguile and Bamboozle the Beholder. Kids Can P $19.95

Shelley Falconer and Shawna White
Stones, Bones and Stitches: Storytelling Through Inuit Art. Tundra $24.95

Christopher Patton and Cybèle Young
Jack Pine. Groundwood $18.95

Reviewed by Sarika P. Bose

The four illustrated books examined here are loosely connected by their focus on some area of human confrontation with nature. Much of the art and narrative in these books acknowledge, on some level, a fear of nature's power.

Other Goose, a reissue of Barbara Wyn Klunder's 1980s collection of "nursery rhymes" is a slim hardcover with a black and greenish beige colour scheme. Each poem is accompanied by the author's own etched illustration on the facing page. Klunder revises well-known Mother Goose rhymes to concoct some mildly amusing poems that are not subtle in their satire. Klunder takes the Mother Goose rhymes as a starting point for commentary on current issues that seem relevant to the discussions familiar to urban Canadians, particularly in the focus on environmental responsibility. Her rhymes include commentary on worthy issues such as logging, fuel consumption, poverty, the hazards of smoking, etc. Klunder's rhymes present nature as the victim of human ignorance, selfishness and greed, on the brink of destruction by human tooth and claw. The target audience seems to be adults, despite the reference to and format of the nursery rhyme. There may be a specialized group of children that would find the issues or rhymes comprehensible, but in general, these would go over the heads of children who might be at an age able to read or listen to a book of nursery rhymes. The woodcut illustrations have a certain stark appeal, and emphasize a harsh, polluted world, but again, seem geared more to adult than child audiences.

Wallace Edwards, a Governor-General's Award recipient whose previous books include *Alphabeasts* and *Monkey Business*, has written a playful picture book that aims to entertain children with its colourful illustrations and its puzzles. In *The Painted Circus*, the author puts together an elaborate visual illusion on every page of this handsome hardcover book, inviting each child, in the brief text at the bottom of the page, to challenge his or her expectations about what he/she sees. It will be difficult not to become actively engaged with the puzzles contained in the illustrations. The author himself has lavishly illustrated this circus book. Colourful watercolours and gouaches fill the entire space of every page. The complexity of every illustration suggests that readers will return more than once to each page—there is something new to discover each time. Every illustration is literally framed, but outside the frame lurk many strange, often violently coloured creatures—which, like many of the creatures within the main frame—are somewhat disturbing, with distended mouths, large teeth and disproportionate heads and bodies. The human figures interspersed with the animals are given the same exaggerated treatment. Children's literature in particular, often makes use of anthropomorphism, and audiences are familiar with talking mice who wear boots and coats or birds who wear hats, but here, that anthropomorphism goes a step further. The expressions on the faces of the characters, whether human or animal, are so similar, that the boundaries between animals as humans are blurred. As these creatures

break the boundaries of the orderliness the frame tries to impose, they underline the controlled chaos and rebellion that threaten to overwhelm the action within each frame. While many children may enjoy the chaos, the puzzles and the imaginative creatures, children younger than six might find many of the images overwhelming.

Stones, Bones and Stitches analyses and articulates connections between photographic images of Inuit life and photographs of Inuit art. Each piece of art is accompanied by interviews with the artists and analysis of their work and artistic philosophy. The works exhibited in this book are associated with the McMichael Canadian Art Collection. Human beings' perception of and connection with the natural world are the concepts that unify the various images and artistic media. The media here includes sculptures of stone and of bone, as well as fabric-based work, such as beaded embroidery and felt stitching. Although some of the art's primitive style, seen in the stone and bone sculpture of the evil spirit, Alliok, might disturb some younger readers, the variety of art is wide enough that there will be something to interest most readers. The authors not only locate the art culturally, but also geographically, providing maps and brief informative paragraphs on those regions. This non-fiction book is illustrated with many black and white and colour photographs to accompany museum displays of Inuit art. This book would appeal to a wide audience of children: younger children would find interest in the illustrations, and could have much of the text read to them, while children over 12 would find it fascinating to read this and find out more about the art they themselves may have encountered in museum visits. The accessible language and varied formatting of text and illustration on each page would retain their interest. This is a solid, informative early book for children interested in Inuit art, culture, and history.

Christopher Patton's *Jack Pine* is a prose poem that is both informative and imaginative as it teaches children about the natural world. The author sympathetically portrays the pine's role in the ecosystem and represents the history of human misunderstandings about it by focusing on one fictional, though realistic case in which a farmer blames the pine for the poor soil quality and even for the death of his cattle. The pine is seen as useless and even harmful by humans, while the ecosystem, including the other varieties of pine, benefits from its sheltering qualities and its hardiness. Each type of pine in the poem is given its own voice, so that the poem is told from many perspectives. The author also provides a brief one-page history of the pines featured in the poem for the curious child—aged from six upwards—who might want to know more. The connection between all different aspects of animal and plant life is constantly evoked by the collage illustrations. The technique of printing photographs of Cybèle Young's etchings and subtle watercolours, rather than printing them directly on the page makes them tactile and immediate.

Each very different in its nature and intended audience, these books all acknowledge a deep, primeval relationship between the natural world and human imagination.

L'art de la biographie

Dominique Lafon, Rainier Grutman, Marcel Olscamp, et Robert Vigneault, dirs. *Approches de la biographie au Québec.* Fides 26,95 $

Compte rendu par Melanie E. Collado

Approches de la biographie au Québec est un recueil de neuf essais sur le genre biographique au Québec. Il se divise en deux sections: d'une part cinq textes explorant le genre biographique dans le contexte québécois, d'autre part quatre textes décrivant l'expérience du praticien. Les nombreuses

biographies auxquelles il est fait référence dans l'ensemble des articles témoignent des multiples formes que peut prendre le récit d'une vie : l'essai, le roman, l'éloge religieux ou politique, la poésie, la pièce de théâtre, le scénario.

L'introduction signée par Robert Vigneault pose la question des visées du projet biographique et reconnaît que l'ambition de « raconter une vie » n'est peut-être qu'une utopie. La biographie, dit-il, « exprime le besoin d'arrêter le temps, d'accéder à la durée, d'éterniser l'instant ». Utopie ou pas, le genre fascine et il ne manque ni de lecteurs ni d'écrivains.

La première section s'ouvre sur une étude où Lucie Robert examine les « mutations » de la pratique biographique. Comme la plupart des autres contributions au recueil, celle de Robert relève le problème posé par le rapport entre la narrativisation d'une vie et la vérité historique. Robert Vigneault se penche sur l'essai biographique où s'exprime, sans prétention à l'objectivité, une réflexion personnelle sur une vie particulière. Marcel Olscamp met en évidence le double travail du romancier biographe qui, tout en se livrant à une recherche minutieuse, écrit son texte sans se laisser emprisonner par « la rigueur documentaire ». John Hare souligne le rôle joué par les biographies dans la transformation de la défaite de 1837-38 en célébration de héros nationaux au Québec. Patricia Smart conclut de son exploration de la biographie au féminin, que ce qui distingue cette dernière c'est la difficulté d'écrire le récit d'une vie traditionnellement confinée au domaine privé. Prenant comme exemples plusieurs biographies, elle remarque que, quelle que soit la femme dont on raconte l'existence, une tension entre sa vie privée et sa vie publique persiste.

Dans la deuxième section du recueil la parole est donnée aux biographes qui parlent de leurs techniques et des paradoxes de leur art. Bernard Andrès commente la part d'inventions « vraisemblables » et les procédés narratifs qu'il emprunte au roman pour recréer une vie révolue. Hélène Pelletier-Baillargeon décrit son expérience d'écrivain biographe qui, d'une part, recherche et respecte les traces d'une réalité passée, et d'autre part comble certains vides pour pouvoir raconter l'histoire d'une vie. Le texte de Stéphane-Albert Boulais met l'accent sur l'apport de la création dans sa biographie de Pierre Perrault ainsi que sur son désir d'exprimer l'impact que la vie qu'il raconte a sur la sienne. François Ricard clôt le recueil avec un texte où il révèle ses réticences vis-à-vis du genre biographique et où il explique son choix d'étudier la vie de Gabrielle Roy en se concentrant sur le rapport entre l'œuvre et la vie de l'écrivaine.

Approches de la biographie au Québec est un ouvrage de réflexion sur l'écriture biographique. Son principal intérêt tient à la diversité des points de vue réunis en un seul volume. Ce livre est également une excellente source de références pour ceux désirant explorer la tradition biographique québécoise.

In His Own Words

Klaus Martens, ed.
Over Canadian Trails: F.P. Grove in New Letters and Documents. Königshausen & Neumann €58,00

Reviewed by Alison Calder

Occasionally, I imagine that I'm stuck in an elevator with one of a list of Famous Canadian Writers, exchanging *bon mots* and witty rejoinders to pass the time. Frederick Philip Grove has never been one of the writers I've imagined there and, having read *Over Canadian Trails*, a selection of his letters, I won't be adding him to my cast of characters.

A selection of Grove's letters was previously published by Desmond Pacey in 1976, but Klaus Martens' edition includes previously unpublished documents, particularly

concerning Grove's life in Germany as Felix Paul Greve. These letters show Greve's tenacity and ambition as he works to find publishers for the many translations he produced of leading writers like André Gide and H.G. Wells. Descriptions of his scandalous years—running off with another man's wife, spending time in prison, and faking his own death—are disappointingly absent. One thing his letters make clear is the sheer amount of *work* required to maintain a writing career. Though his attempts to bring his work to the attention of well-placed people may come off at times as social climbing, they also illustrate the necessity of developing and preserving networks of contacts. The Greve depicted in the letters is vigorous, accomplished, the victim of what he sees as others' perfidy. Of the transformation in his life that was to come, nothing is said, but a theatrical letter in 1905 to Gide concerning travel in France seems prescient. Greve writes, "I do not want any mountains, or hills, except for dunes! Avoid everything that is picturesque! if possible: I want the plain, the entirely flat and boring plain. I have a real craving for a simple plain land without elevations."

The energy that Grove shows in his early letters turns, however, to an increasing bitterness and disillusionment when he surfaces as a writer again in Canada. With the exception of stalwart supporters like Arthur Phelps and Watson Kirkconnell, who became Grove's friends as well, his work was largely unappreciated, and financial worries dogged the Groves continually. He remained isolated from the Canadian literary community at large, by geography to a certain extent, but moreso by temperament, though he saw himself as an outcast from a milieu that he largely looked down upon. Evaluating his position in a 1940 letter, he wrote, "Isn't the only possible comment on my life as a writer . . . that, apart from my very brief time with Graphic, I met none of my contemporaries in the field of letters, arts, or whatnot, except *academic* friends? That, to put it mildly, these contemporaries shunned me?" (italics Grove's). With the 1925 publication of *Settlers of the Marsh*, his position as a teacher was imperiled by the perceived indecency of the novel. The difficulties the Groves faced were more acute because of popular anti-German sentiment. While Grove's own German origins were disguised through his claims of Swedish ancestry, his wife Catherine's Mennonite background was also cause for persecution. In a 1926 letter to Arthur Phelps, Grove describes how some citizens in Rapid City, where the Groves lived, tried to get the school board to dismiss his wife, despite her exceptional teaching record, by circulating a petition stating that Catherine "(owing to her descent and to her connection with myself) is disloyal to Canadian ideals and is not a suitable type of personality to mould the characters of the young people of our community."

Despite the many disappointments he suffered, Grove's sense of his own value as a writer remained undamaged. "If Mary, mother of Christ, after the annunciation, had deliberately aborted, her crime or sin would not have been greater than mine would be if I ceased pondering that book," he wrote of a manuscript in progress in 1939. Though he often wrote of being misunderstood and unappreciated, he was unable to accept what positive reviews he did receive, often claiming that the reviewer had misread the novel or praised the wrong things. It is easy to characterize Grove as a sour fellow, but this perception cannot be entirely true. Many letters from Grove's correspondents speak of enjoyable shared holidays and other pleasant visits, suggesting dimensions to his character not exhibited in print.

The problem with Grove as a letter writer is that the letters themselves are not written in an interesting way, by which I mean that the content may be interesting (what they

reveal about the workings—or non-workings—of the Canadian publishing industry), but his style is not engrossing. The sheer volume of letters included in this selection may be part of the problem. Grove's concerns about money and about his reputation remained constant throughout his life, and he returns to these topics time and time again. It's easy to forgive him his financial worries, but his constant rehashing of every insult—or worse, every compliment—that he ever received may be enough to turn the most generous reader against him by the end. It may also have wearied his friends at some points: a number of Grove's letters begin by stating, sadly, that he has not heard from his correspondent in some time.

Martens' edition may have difficulty finding a readership, as it falls between genres. With more editorial commentary, many fewer letters, and more attention to Grove's personal life, it would be an interesting biography; meanwhile, scholars in search of a complete set of Grove's letters will still have to go to the archives. At times, the reader needs much more direction to navigate through the intricacies of Grove's dealings with various publishers. The importance of his correspondence is not always clear since the personae keep changing, as do the manuscripts, markets, and publishing houses. An editor's impulse may be to step back and let the letter writer speak for himself, but in this case a more intrusive biographer would be welcome.

One note: contextualizing notes for the letters are provided at the book's end, which necessitates a good deal of flipping back and forth for the reader.

Emerging Edge

Teresa McWhirter
Dirtbags. Anvil $20.00

Zoe Whittal
Bottle Rocket Hearts. Cormorant $19.95

Nathan Sellyn
Indigenous Beasts. Raincoast $22.95

Reviewed by Kate Morris

Teresa McWhirter's second novel *Dirtbags* tells the story of young, outlaw characters who find and lose themselves in Vancouver. These are the down and outs who are either hell-bent on self-destruction or are indifferent to the slippery slopes of intoxication, poverty, drug abuse, and infidelity. They are self-absorbed in ways that only youth can get away with. These characters make undiscerning and easy human connections based on their necessities, whether that means housing, drugs, money or someone to sleep with. As a result it is difficult to have much empathy when things don't work out. Like many twenty-somethings, they act thoughtlessly and feel little about the repercussions. Unfortunately, this doesn't make for a good story and neither does its method of delivery, which is hurried (77 pages represents a year of linear novel time), lacks transitions, and yet manages to get caught up in particularities without explaining their larger importance.

Relying perhaps too heavily on dialogue, the novel builds characters who ultimately lack depth. The novel is at its best in "Part Two: A Hard Light," where the protagonist, Spider, returns to her hometown. In this section we are given a history of her life until her arrival in Vancouver, which demonstrates a more interesting and penetrating view of aging, family and rural environments, and provides much needed background in the development of Spider's character. Ironically, though, this section reads more like young adult fiction, a stark contrast to the plot and language of the

other two sections which describe the illicit behaviours, drug abuse, and raunchy sexual desires of a collection of misfits and self-defined social outcasts.

Zoe Whittal's first novel *Bottle Rocket Hearts* accepts that sometimes the goal is to "shirk all responsibility," particularly when characters are "plagued with a scattered inability to decide," but unlike *Dirtbags* it also contends that one needs to move beyond the contagion of an ambitionless and indifferent existence, insisting instead on a fraught marriage of identity politics and personal reality. Through Eve, the eighteen-year-old protagonist, the novel articulates the endless negotiations involved in forming an adult identity against the backdrop of a highly charged separatist movement in Montreal.

There is something honest and refreshing in Whittal's descriptions of the emotional highs and lows of this process. Compelling elements like her girlfriend's ex "narrating her most insecure moments" while acknowledging that "even though everyone gets jealous, even if you're adept at fronting like you don't, jealousy makes people ordinary and weak" reveal a complex construction of character that resists cliché. One of the more interesting structural devices used here is the diary, which grounds the narrative at first and then helps to reveal that the differences between truth and fiction are unfortunately difficult to discern in everyday life.

Nathan Sellyn's first book *Indigenous Beasts* is a collection of short stories displaying an impressive range of narrative voices and their attendant emotional registers. Sellyn collects a vast array of fleeting moments, tenuous and tender human encounters that are comedic and tragic in turns, and are usually captivating. These stories are developed with subtlety rather than possessing any straightforward simplicity. There are boys in the suburbs of Montreal scheming the summer away, elderly Greek men reminiscing, stories of high school bullying, and a private school teacher who spent time inverting sheep in New Zealand: the variety of geographies here reflects the various stories. While some of these stories seem to end abruptly, I suspect that Sellyn intends to leave us wanting to read more. From one story to the next, there is nothing formulaic about this collection that already suggests a mature style.

Celebrating the Unsung

Ameen Merchant
The Silent Raga. Douglas & McIntyre $32.95

Reviewed by Sudeep Ghosh

The frozen sleepy pause
of the half moon
has broken the harmony
of the deep night.
—Garcia Lorca

India-born and Vancouver-based Ameen Merchant's debut novel, *The Silent Raga*, inspired by a Tamil novel, is an exquisite blend of tradition and transition, exile and reconciliation, silence and eloquence, society and self, crisis and consciousness, where various stages of a raga's performance in recital breathe life into the mellifluous flourish of evocative prose.

Adopting the metaphor of Indian classical music, *The Silent Raga* fills the bridgeable and the inexplicable between two sisters—Janaki and Mallika. The novel, with all its postmodern hybridity, arrests the accents and inflections of the protagonist on the threshold of inflamed isolation and inimitable glorification in flashback and forward narratives. The novel with its different chapters—*varnam, alaapana, krithi, ragam thaanam pallavi, padham, thillaana* and *mangalam*—conforms to the rhythmical cadences of Carnatic music of South India.

Unlike the mythical Janaki, the protagonist Janaki does not stifle her inner voice. Like Ibsen's Nora in *A Doll's House*, she abandons her elusive "House of Desire" to

set forth on her journey from the "nowhere" of self-annihilation to the "somewhere" of self-discovery. The iconoclastic Janaki, be it in her self-struggle or her marriage to a Muslim actor or in abandoning her typical Brahmin self of Tamil Sripuram upbringing or registering her biting sarcasm, forges her own fate, bringing her "silent raga" to life. She has the answer to the question posed by the omniscient narrator: "Where do MIDDLE- CLASS, Tamil Brahmin girls go when they turn eighteen?" She refuses to subside into silence by submission to the male chauvinist's deference to moribund caste-ridden customs. The feminism in the novel seems to be a conscious reaction against the true-blue male-chauvinistic protagonists of writers such as Updike and Roth.

Janaki defines the role of a liberated woman described in Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* as she renews creative power in her husband and makes her house, which is permeated by her creative force. Janaki subverts and wins over her metaphorical exile. That exile calls up the hauntingly beautiful lines of Wallace Stevens who describes exile as a mild winter in which the pathos of summer and autumn as much as the potential of spring are nearby but unobtainable. Grappling with her exile—self and societal—she asserts herself at the end in a moment of epiphany: "I am my song, and my song is the red of the sun." This line is gracefully draped in an elusive philosophizing in a Whitman-like celebration of the Self. Isn't the door to the "lila of the raga" flung open here? Janaki takes after Bernard's cry in *The Waves*: "Heaven be praised for solitude!" Her breathless rush of words betrays, to use Georg Luckacs' phrase in *Theory of the Novel*, a novel of "transcendental homelessness."

Merchant's poetic self is evident in his glittering array of metaphors, tactile, aural, and kinesthetic images. His unerring instinct for sound words bears out the poet-musician in him. Steeped in verbal music, Merchant's fidelity to colloquial dictions and phrases of bourgeois Tamil-speaking Brahmins asserts the linguistic identity of the South Indian culture. The language of the novel calls up Raja Rao's description of typical Indian speech rhythm in *Kanthapura:* "We, in India, think quickly, we talk quickly . . . There must be something in the sun of India that makes us rush and tumble and run on." R.K. Narayan also declares about Indian English in his essay entitled "A Literary Alchemy" in *A Writer's Nightmare* about Indian English: "We have fostered the language for over a century and we are entitled to bring it in line with our habits of thought and idiom." And Narayan's observation in his essay "Toasted English" will not be out of place here: "Bharat English . . . still has a swadeshi stamp about it unmistakably, like the Madras handloom check shirt or the Tirupati doll."

Merchant, as one of the Midnight's Children, uses English as his narrative tool, but when it comes to capturing the indigenous Indian ethos and locale, he resorts to code-switching. Why? Here, Vikram Chandra's reflection on the inability of English to evoke and express that which is left "unsaid and unspeakable and invisible" in *Red Earth and Passing Rain* breezes into mind. Merchant's use of language is a pointer to India's multicultural, multi-religious, and multi-linguistic society. On the use of language, *The Silent Raga* confirms Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of the appropriation of language in *The Dialogic Imagination,* for Merchant takes words from other people's mouths to serve his own narration.

Be it the insane awfulness of the conventions, the sharp-edged reality diffusing the self-pitying individual, the outer chaos of egregious society bringing the inner poise of the protagonist to her knees, the passionate intensity of *The Silent Raga* eventually leaves readers in the refuge of an enchanting mistress, music.

L'enfance sans voix

Madeleine Monette
Les Rouleurs. Hurtubise HMH 34,95$

Compte rendu par Julie Gaudreault

Dans *Les Rouleurs,* sous les auspices d'une narration lentement menée par une instance omnisciente affectionnant la digression, une séquence de quelques mois de l'existence du personnage d'Arièle est découpée. Le récit décrit l'enchevêtrement des errances citadines de cette chanteuse d'opéra. L'on y rencontre notamment Théo, son cousin, Sidney, son amant douteux, et, surtout, le petit Chalioux, l'enfant en colère qu'elle tente d'apprivoiser.

Les hommes qui gravitent autour d'Arièle sont tous privés de l'un de leurs sens : Théo et Sidney voient difficilement, alors que le petit Chalioux est sans voix. Ce dernier, rouleur adepte du patin extrême—du « roller »—et adéquatement surnommé « Mute » par ses acolytes, est rebaptisé « Mioute » par Arièle : « le Muet ». Elle ne découvre le nom véritable de l'objet de sa quête qu'à la faveur de circonstances obscures, qu'elle ressasse et que la narration même n'arrive pas à fixer précisément. Nico Chalioux, enfant délaissé en proie à la violence, commet un crime dont elle est discrètement témoin.

L'indécision dont le roman fait preuve quant à la dénomination des personnages—même du principal, car Arièle, autrefois appelée en anglais Yell en vertu de sa voix, est également nommée Yelle par son amant—redouble non seulement l'ambiguïté de l'identité du petit Chalioux, dévoilée au terme d'un lent rapprochement avec la chanteuse, mais aussi l'équivoque des événements. Même à la lumière de la multiplicité des points de vue présentés en procès, on ne déterminera pas exactement le motif du geste criminel posé par le petit Chalioux.

C'est alors l'apprentissage de la parole et, avant tout, de l'usage de sa voix propre, qui permettra à l'enfant criminel d'expliquer son geste. À la toute fin du roman, à la faveur de leçons de chant et d'ateliers de musique rap dispensés par Arièle, Mioute trouve sa voix. Il précise enfin son identité : émaillée des signes de la culture de la rue, qui abondent dans la langue de ce roman, elle est nécessairement grevée de l'absence d'enfance.

L'enfance frustrée de ses privilèges par des parents non adultes est déjà largement sous examen, notamment dans la littérature féminine actuelle. Il est cependant intéressant de noter qu'un fait divers relaté par Madeleine Monette dans la section des remerciements semble avoir servi d'exemple pour l'histoire du petit Chalioux : « Merci également à . . . Lisa Lovejoy qui, emprisonnée à seize ans pour tentative de meurtre, est retournée à l'école où elle a écrit un poème intitulé *Rage of Fear*. » C'est contre une peur d'enfant tout sauf enfantine que le jeune criminel a dû lutter avant de passer aux actes. Voilà donc un roman dont la propension didactique et moraliste présente tout de même le souci d'un certain réalisme qui se diffuse tout au long de la lecture et dont le pathos stimule une réflexion de la part du lecteur.

Whose Bones?

Bernice Morgan
Cloud of Bone. Knopf Canada $34.95

Reviewed by Fiona Polack

Bernice Morgan takes the epigraph for her ambitious third novel from Milan Kundera's *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*: "the struggle of man against power is the struggle of memory against forgetting." *Cloud of Bone* focuses most intently on memorializing the destruction of the Beothuk in Newfoundland, although it dwells, too, on the Battle of the North Atlantic and the London Blitz. Its tripartite structure allows Morgan to juxtapose scenes of slaughter

from different historical moments, and from varying narrative perspectives.

Part 1, "The Sailor," is the most effective of the three presented. As Kyle Holloway, a deserter from the Royal Navy, tries vainly to forget the moment he cut the throat of his brutish best friend, Gup, he recalls scenes from his adolescence in St. John's. In the most disturbing, Kyle and his friends abet the rape and murder of a young girl. Instructed by Gup's uncles, they find her "squatting in moss, picking partridgeberries. There was nothing special about her, stick-like arms and legs, straggly brown hair. She was wearing boy's boots and a faded print dress, and dropping berries one by one into a string-handled tin." The deftness with which Morgan summons the girl's poverty and vulnerability is also evident in her ability to capture the voices of the Newfoundlanders in this section. Temporarily ashore to bury victims of the Battle of the North Atlantic, Kyle thinks how his officer is "a shag-bag, nervous away from his own kind. He'd only spoken once since the climb began, barking, 'Dout it, Sailor!' at some poor sap stunned enough to light a smoke."

Unlike Gup, who finds the perfect outlet for the destructive side of his nature in war, Kyle lacks an instinctive inclination toward violence. He kills his friend to prevent Gup cutting the lifeline to a drowning German sailor. Kyle's horror at what he has done leads him to entomb himself in a childhood refuge under St. Mary's Church, across the Narrows from St. John's. As he awaits death, the voice of Shanawdithit—the "last" Beothuk woman, buried over a century before in the adjacent graveyard—addresses him.

Part 2, "The Savage," (curiously titled given the perspective from which the section is narrated) does not sustain the magic realist shift which enunciates it. Instead, we move into a realist account of the Beothuk people's demise, narrated in the first person by Shanawdithit. This move is putatively justified by Shanawdithit's statement to Kyle: "I speak to hold memory, to hear words, to make time pass. Since you are listening I will try to speak straight, the way I would to a child." But Morgan's decisions here compromise her stated aim of pitting memory against forgetting. The seamlessness of the narrative in Part 2, and the steadiness of Shanawdithit's voice, construct a compelling tale of horror and loss, but they gloss too easily over substantial gaps in settler culture's knowledge of the Beothuk. Critic Tim Gauthier notes that literary ventriloquism "depends ultimately on some affective and empathetic reading of the past." It relies, too, though, on narrative structures that can acknowledge when a definitive rendering of that past might be, and perhaps even *should* be, elusive. Morgan's desire to approach Beothuk history with empathy is clear, but her textual choices make what is intended as a commemorative gesture appear appropriative.

The text self-reflexively acknowledges the difficult issues at play here. In Part 3, we move into the present and meet the inadvertent possessor of Shanawdithit's skull, British archaeologist, Judith Muir, who is mourning her recently murdered husband and workmate, Ian. The introduction of the Muirs facilitates the raising of questions related to the project Morgan undertakes in *Cloud of Bone*. Judith wonders, "are she and Ian fellow plunderers? And yet, and yet—what would we know of the Turkana Boy, dead these 1.53 million years, were it not for Leakey and Walker . . . of Shanawdithit's vanished world were it not for Cormack and his like?" Elsewhere the Muirs discuss the statement which forms the novel's epigraph, pondering the problem that "the slaughtered cannot remember." Yet, while it acknowledges the importance of these issues, *Cloud of Bone* does not ultimately deal with them in a satisfying way.

At the conclusion of the novel, Judith gives Shanawdithit's skull into the care of the now elderly Kyle. While Kyle,

Shanawdithit, and Judith have all been presented as solitary figures, people made lonely by the violence around them, the linking of Shanawdithit and Kyle at the novel's end is deeply unsettling. As Kyle walks out of St. John's with Shanawdithit's skull tucked inside his coat, he again listens to her now-affectionate voice: "They move forward, snow still falling, her voice and the snow all around, enclosing them in a white cave that is filled with nothing but story." The whiteness of this world is emblematic of the viewpoint from which *Cloud of Bone* ultimately renders the past.

Surfing the Fragments

Garry Thomas Morse
Transversals for Orpheus & the untitled 1-13. LINEbooks $16.00

Lionel Kearns
A Few Words Will Do. Talonbooks $16.95

bill bissett
ths is erth thees ar peopul. Talonbooks $17.95

Reviewed by Meredith Quartermain

Garry Morse is one of the most engaging and interesting poets emerging now in Canada. Wide-ranging and eclectic in thought and style—a one-man Gung Haggis Fat Choy—he adroitly weaves Dante or Catullus with plastic bags, bank machines, heroin addicts, chicks, cooking recipes, hospital wards, HBO, Robbie Burns, or the Dunbar bus. As anyone who has heard him read will attest, he's also a wonderful performer who luxuriates in sound textures, regularly breaks into melodic tenor (he's an opera buff), and gets lots of laughs from the audience. In *Transversals*, his semantic and sonic textures are reflected in varied typefaces, and ingeniously deployed open spacing and diacritical marks.

The title "the untitled" suggests the un*en*-titled too. A disentitlement to be found in the pervasive pressure of consumer culture and private interest which fragments everything from Dante to a dying parent in bite-size sales. Surfing the fragments, Morse reconfigures them with insightful irony offering us a critique of our world with a large dose of humour. The "influx of stimuli is like a real / {pAniC aTtacK}" he notes, "I have arranged the most unnerving / *impromptu* Meet me where the line ends." The poem is an "imaginary turf war" against a real war outside. The poem is "a pair of trains" circling in thought.

In contrast to the loose, open form of "The Untitled," "Transversals for Orpheus" is tightly constructed of dimeter and trimeter lines in three- to four-line stanzas, each "transversal" containing four stanzas. Rhyme and meter combine for megapunch, as for example in "A promissory note / dying for belief in / mythological relief," or "wool over / feral eyes, the / wolves feeding."

In *A Few Words Will Do,* Lionel Kearns gives us charming, sometimes whimsical, sometimes deeply moving reflections born of a lifetime's contemplation, many of which mull over the passing of generations of living creatures—on the small scale of father to son, or on the grand scale of bacteria to trees. Dedicated to Kearns' conservationist, outdoorsman father, the book includes boyhood memories of forbidden matches that led to a forest fire, camping with dad, the endurance of a cookstove door in the ruins of his grandparents' house versus the endurance of his cantankerous elderly uncle. "Trophy," where father shows son the consequences of hunting for fun, brought tears to my eyes. Time and being during time are abiding themes. In "Taking Your Time" he writes

> We carry time
> in our heads, keep it
> on the bookshelf,
> put it on film or tape
> and roll it up
> or spread it on a disk.

Punctuating the book with lighthearted humour are concrete poems playfully

arranging letters or words for shape as well as meaning. Playfulness emerges too in poems about poems: the poem as animal gazing at you, the poem as carnivorous, the poem as fatso, as Canadian, as lacking confidence, as ruined structure, as depressed in bookstores, as professional journalist. "Here is a poem that thinks about / the nature of its own being or not being," Kearns writes in "Existential." "What is the role of the poem / in a consumer society?" he asks in "Roundup Time." Then says "This poem needs brand name loyalty. / This poem needs to be branded. / The desperate poet pulls a red hot iron . . ."

bill bissett's *ths is erth thees ar peopul* brings us a mix of short, lineated poems and longer, prosy pieces (lines ragged left and right), interspersed with playful line drawings. Many of these are written for the chanting and sound-play for which bissett is renowned. They are all of course written in bissett's trademark spelling, which importantly forces us into the sight, sound and texture of words, just as bissett, in his performances, grounds poems in the physicality of his shaking rattles and rhythmically moving body. Here the reader must articulate and feel each syllable; the experience of words is as important as any abstract conceptual meaning.

bissett is a visionary poet, and this is a deeply philosophical book, conducting us to a world of colourful spirits and opening us to bodily experience (sexual or otherwise) which is the ground of our existence. bissett sings of a gold ball radiating through us all: the sun, the earth, our spiritual radiance, while reminding us of the global gold/oil rush which has thrown the earth off balance. The cleaning of the Love Canal is both a personal sexual matter and one of global pollution. Plato's essences and the delusions of narrative, representation, and ideology all come into this radiant eye.

The Recompense of Memory

Claire Mulligan

The Reckoning of Boston Jim. Brindle & Glass $24.95

Reviewed by Wendy Roy

Claire Mulligan's first novel is a complex and evocative exploration of the repayment of ethical debts and the power of human memory in forming personal identity. Set in British Columbia during the Cariboo gold rush of 1863, *The Reckoning of Boston Jim* presents three characters whose lives become inextricably intertwined through a brief meeting that includes a relatively small act of kindness and generosity. A lone trapper and trader who goes by the name Boston Jim has his view of the world as harsh, indifferent, and full of self-interest shaken when voluble lower-class English immigrant Dora Timmons finds a pouch containing 126 pounds and ten shillings in English money that he has lost on Cowichan Bay, and returns it to him. Jim finds her decency so unaccustomed and unaccountable that he upturns the bleak order of his life to find a suitable method of recompense. He rehearses and rejects various possible ways of evening the score, until he at last becomes convinced that the only worthy gift is the safe return of Dora's common-law husband, English remittance man Eugene Augustus Hume, who has set out for the goldfields of the Cariboo.

Mulligan's descriptive prose works together with the complex structure of the novel to bring to life these three characters, along with a multitude of other secondary characters, some of whom can also be found in British Columbia's history books. Most of the novel is narrated in third person, but the focus of the chapters shifts between the two male characters—the taciturn Boston Jim as he struggles to find a way to pay his debt, and the self-deceiving Eugene as he

becomes more and more mired in the consequences of his own shallowness, naivety, and criminal stupidity. Until the epilogue, narrated in Dora's first-person voice, she is present mostly in the two men's memories. The rosy and often fuzzy glow of Eugene's recollected sexual passion contrasts with the clarity of Jim's ability to recall the exact words with which Dora has, on the one afternoon they met, poured out her life story.

The novel includes passages of magic realism, evoked by the Aboriginal women who have briefly been part of Jim's life but also by Dora herself, whose memories Jim comes to inhabit. Her story mingles with his because Jim's curse—and as curse it is more and more clearly defined—is that he can remember every word that he has heard, every person and thing that he has seen, and every act that he and others have committed since he washed up on the shores of Vancouver Island as a shipwrecked six-year-old child. What came before he cannot remember, except that the now-dead man on whose ship he stowed away took his revenge, and ensured his own place in the historical record by carving his name and place of origin on the boy's chest. The boy does not know his own name or hometown, but others assume he is Jim Milroy of Boston from the identifying marks written indelibly in blood and the scar tissue on his body. His frightening lack of personal identity is evident twenty-five years later in his curiously elliptical speech which, the reader gradually comes to realize, lacks not only metaphor but also the words "I" and "me."

The reckoning on which Jim embarks seems out of all proportion to the minor act that provoked it. His life story as it gradually unfolds, however, filled as it is with violence and tragedy punctuated by only a few acts of caring and kindness, eventually clarifies the value of the money pouch to Jim in the complex emotions and memories it evokes. As Jim reflects on this value, he comes to the realization that "all his fine exchanges cannot balance his poor ones." What happens to him as he pursues Eugene to Barkerville thus becomes his own personal weighing of the good and evil deeds that he has both experienced from others and committed himself. Mulligan's book leaves readers with despair at its representation of human greed and cruelty and simultaneous hope through its rich evocation of time, place, and the force of human character.

Romance of Ambiguity

Leilah Nadir
The Orange Trees of Baghdad: In Search of My Lost Family. Key Porter $32.95

Reviewed by Therí Alyce Pickens

When Leilah Nadir's cousin-in-law Karim says that he prefers she "choose to write romantic stories [and] not sad ones," he voices the desire that many readers have about memoirs: that they resolve themselves neatly (if not happily) and that they provide some adventurous romance. Fortunately, Nadir does not obey her cousin. *The Orange Trees of Baghdad* rests in a state of ambiguity and remains decidedly unresolved. The only romance present is the rapturous love between Nadir and her family. These characteristics give the text its buoyancy and its poignancy.

Nadir's memoir explores the lives of her paternal family members over the course of the latter half of the twentieth century including Saddam Hussein's government, the 1991 Gulf War and the current "War on Terror." She oscillates between their memories, her memories and her own journalistic commentary as she delineates their daily lives as shaped by power and politics. Her memoir also charts the frequent excursions of photographer Farah Nosh into Baghdad and her ability and sometimes inability to document Iraqi perspectives. Because of this oscillation into and out of her family, into and out of the West and into and out of

memory, the text retains a multiplicity that makes it difficult to pin down one specific Iraqi perspective and, instead, forces an engagement with the complexity of politics and the tragedy it creates and often ignores.

Certainly, Nadir relies on her background as a political commentator for the CBC to tell her family's (and Nosh's) stories. Though it can border on feeling like a detached article rather than a personal narrative, Nadir's prose remains quite powerful. She retells the news stories with which most consider themselves familiar—the capture of Saddam Hussein, the protests of George W. Bush's decisions—with a sense of the uncanny. Her cousin, Maha, says, "No, we didn't know it was going to be war, invasion and occupation. We knew nothing about what was coming"; the statements feel eerie given Nadir's delineation, and, presumably, her Western audience's familiarity, with the events leading up to the USA's current occupation of Iraq. These moments recur in abundance throughout the text, most notably at the beginning of each chapter. Nadir quotes various political pundits and commentators before delving into birthdays, meals, and other facets of daily life. The result of this juxtaposition is a halted familiarity. That is, Nadir's text forces us to relive these moments in her family's shoes.

As Nadir narrates her family's experience, she gains the momentum of their voices without sacrificing their anger, angst, or ambiguity. When discussing her father's reaction to Bush's foreign policy, Nadir quotes his sarcasm—"I'm sure Bush is going to be really scared by all this peaceful protest"—and she writes, "he marched anyway." Her prose does not distill his reaction into simple indignation, nor resignation. In other words, the text rests in the complication. Because there is no simple resolution, this memoir disrupts the collective memories and perceptions of this event (and many others), depriving the text of being wholly melancholy or wholly triumphant. Herein lies the poignancy: Nadir's text renders multidimensional that which so many others have insisted be monolithic. The endings, indeed there are multiple endings within the text, rest on similar moments of ambiguity as well. The multiple deaths and Nadir's last few musings do not miraculously find the "lost family" in the title. Instead, the text reflects on itself and the memories therein. It creates fecund moments so similar to everyday life in their uncertainty, frustration, and hope.

Nadir's work is stunning in its brilliance and poignant in its elegance. The text does not provide the kind of satisfaction readers may hope for in terms of easy resolution, but *The Orange Trees of Baghdad* is a compelling memoir, worthy of every reader's time, precisely because it eschews a simplistic understanding of all the issues it discusses.

He Became His Admirers

Elaine Kalman Naves
Robert Weaver: Godfather of Canadian Literature.
Véhicule $19.95

Reviewed by Robert Thacker

Writing to Robert Weaver at the CBC on 7 May 1975 to advocate for a young writer she wanted to help, Margaret Laurence made her case and, before closing, continued a bit apologetically, "I hope you don't mind my approaching you about this, Bob, but as you have long been the Writers-Rock-of-Gibraltar, I thought you would not mind. Any suggestions would be greatly appreciated." Found among the Robert Weaver *Fonds* at the National Archives (MG 31, D 162), this letter both encapsulates the central assumption of this book and offers an apt phrasing for Robert Weaver's relation to Canadian literature. Working from the CBC between 1948 and 85, Weaver *was*, in fact, *the* "Rock-of-Gibraltar" for Canadian writers, something that Laurence knew well when she wrote to him.

She also knew that he would certainly not mind her inquiry and that, quietly and characteristically, Bob Weaver would do whatever he could to help the writer she was advocating. That is what he did, that is what he had always done, and that, seemingly, is what Weaver would always do. Anyone who knows Canadian writing from the 1950s on knows of Weaver as key presence and national institution: at the CBC—*Canadian Short Story*, *Anthology*, *Critically Speaking*, and other literary programs—as the leading editorial figure at *The Tamarack Review* (1957-82), as an anthologist of Canadian writing—thirteen volumes published between 1952 and 1999—and as the initiator of the CBC's ongoing literary competitions. Throughout, Weaver knew all the writers, he made things happen for them, he encouraged and connected them to each other, he responded, he cared. He was "a one-man national literary network," as Robert Fulford once said of him, a writers' "Rock-of-Gibraltar" indeed.

Given this, *Robert Weaver: Godfather of Canadian Literature* is an aptly fortuitous book. Having grown as "a companion piece" to the two-part radio profile on Weaver that Naves prepared for broadcast on CBC's *Ideas* (one which aired, ironically, within a fortnight of Weaver's death in late January 2008), it is less a biography than it is an apt assemblage, a mélange of brief expository biography, archival illustration and, especially, interviews. These interviews begin, as they should, with Weaver himself, but Naves continues on to others she calls "The Legacy": Margaret Atwood, Barry Callaghan, Robert Fulford, Alice Munro, Alistair MacLeod, Eric Friesen, and Janice Kulyk Keefer. These interviews make up fully two-thirds of the book's text and, because together they reflect a variety of perspectives on Weaver's presences and works over time, they effectively elaborate his utterly unique importance to Canadian letters during the latter half of the twentieth century. A writer herself, Naves brings that perspective to this work—the book is not, she says at the outset, "a definitive biography," nor is it "an exhaustive scholarly treatment"; rather, *Robert Weaver: Godfather of Canadian Literature* is a celebration of Weaver and his work, a celebration of writers and their works, and a recognition of the effects that one person, possessed with both a generous and a critical attitude, can have. And the book is something of a memorial piece too, since it was launched just as Weaver died and as Naves' *Ideas* program was broadcast.

When Weaver began working at the CBC in November 1948 as a program organizer, Naves writes, he "decided his overarching objective was the advancement and development of Canadian literature." And though Weaver was notoriously self-effacing, Naves got him to admit "I guess self-consciously I created myself." He did, and as he did, he played a critical role in the creation of Canadian literature at a critical time. No nationalist, Fulford and others assert here, Weaver sought out the best writing he could find and consciously nurtured it. As is well known and detailed here again, he was lifeline to Alice Munro during the 1950s and early 1960s, the only literary person she really knew then. And so he was to countless others as well. And this was not always easy. Barry Callaghan, offering his perspective as both a writer and as the son of Morley Callaghan, whose contacts with Weaver were many, says that Weaver "was a shy man dealing with egomaniacs who not only wanted him to publish them on the radio, they wanted his money. Those people can get restless. Those people can get difficult. Those people can get abusive. They can get pleading, they can put enormous guilt moves on you." So they did, Naves shows, but Weaver worked through it all, seemingly serene, his eye ever on getting the quality writing he sought.

As he did, Bob Weaver both knew and appreciated what he was doing. Naves quotes what she rightly calls "an unusually revealing personal reflection" he published in the preface to *Canadian Short Stories, Third Series* (1978). There, after noting his thirty years at the CBC and his twenty with *The Tamarack Review*, Weaver wrote: "I know all of the writers who have stories in this book, and in some cases I have known them and worked with them from the very beginning of their careers. Watching their development, and the development of the modern short story in Canada, has been the most rewarding experience of my editorial career." Such comments, and many others like it here, confirm Weaver's presence and effect, his significance and importance, unequivocally. Now that he is gone, Bob Weaver is, truly, very much like Auden on Yeats: a man who "became his admirers." So Naves' book memorializes.

Yet *Robert Weaver: Godfather of Canadian Literature*, apt as it is, should not be the final telling of Weaver's story. A scholarly biography, one that draws with precision from Weaver's papers in the National Archives and from relevant individual author archives, remains to be done and is still needed. As Naves notes, Mark Everard's 1984 MA Thesis on Weaver's career is a good start, and I have myself told the story of Weaver's nurturing of Munro's writing, but a thorough broad-based biography grounded in Canadian cultural history remains a great necessity. The story of Robert Weaver—at the CBC, leading the editorial group at *The Tamarack Review*, making and collaborating on his many anthologies, knowing almost everyone involved in Canadian writing—is a critical story of Canada's cultural past. Quiet, gracious, knowing, determined, and driven, Robert Weaver did an enormous amount to make Canadian literature happen from the 1950s on. This book is but a good beginning.

Trudeau Biographers

Max and Monique Nemni; trans. William Johnson

Young Trudeau: Son of Quebec, Father of Canada, 1919-1944. Douglas Gibson $27.99

Reviewed by George Egerton

If history results from what the late Canadian historian Donald Creighton termed "character and circumstance," then Pierre Trudeau, who dominated Canadian politics from 1967 until 1984, is surely a compelling subject for political biography. It would be Trudeau, as Liberal Justice Minister 1967-68, and then Prime Minister 1968-84 (with the brief Conservative interlude under Joe Clark in 1979-80), who would direct a Liberal re-imagining of Canada—modernizing laws on divorce, birth control, abortion, and homosexuality, getting the state out of the bedrooms of the nation by separating morality and law while privatizing religion, designing bilingualism and multiculturalism to counter the challenge of Québécois separatism, and leading Canada to the political watershed of 1982 with entrenchment of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms in a newly patriated constitution.

The legacy of Trudeau's liberalism in office, together with his previous challenges to the politics of Premier Maurice Duplessis' Quebec during the Asbestos strike of 1949 and his writings in *Cité Libre,* have led most Canadians, including historians, to see Trudeau as a born liberal, fighting as a rebel through school and university against the intense Catholicism and political corruption of Quebec's "*grande noirceur*" under Duplessis. Certainly Trudeau's own memoirs did little to alter this view. Max and Monique Nemni's *The Young Trudeau* serves brilliantly to demolish the myth of continuity in Trudeau's liberalism: the authors demonstrate convincingly that the young Trudeau was a faithful acolyte and advocate of *la grande noirceur* itself.

The Nemnis were apparently granted full access to the Trudeau papers, which are now deposited in the National Archives of Canada. The arrangement made in 1995 was that they would show Trudeau each chapter as it was drafted, and he would respond with comments but leave his biographers free to publish what they chose. The project, however, was delayed as the Nemnis, with Trudeau's support, took on the editorship of a revived *Cité Libre*, promoting the federalist cause through the 1995 Quebec referendum on separatism and its aftermath. This meant that, with Trudeau's death in 2000, the biographers could not engage personally with their subject—no doubt a substantial loss.

As well, the authors faced competition from Trudeau's official biographer, John English, who was a trusted and skillful biographer of a previous Liberal Prime Minister, Lester Pearson. English's *Citizen of the World: The Life of Pierre Elliott Trudeau, Volume One, 1919-1968* (Knopf Canada, 2006) had the advantage of using the Nemnis' biography, which was published first. Trudeau has been served well by these biographers; both biographies are thoroughly researched, and complement each other in their revelations on Trudeau's intellectual and political formation. What the Nemnis contribute is a more detailed and completely revisionist appraisal of Trudeau's youth, the influence of his wealthy family, his education and cultural formation at the elite Jesuit Collège Jean-de-Brébeuf, and his engagement with the intensely Catholic political culture of Quebec in the interwar period. Central to this appraisal is an understanding of the status and functions of religion in Quebec through this period, and the linkages of Quebec Catholicism with the world of Catholic philosophy and the political engagements of the Vatican through the crises of the 1930s. It is to the Nemnis' credit that they have acquired an understanding of the religiously charged world of Trudeau's socialization, a world so different from contemporary Quebec. They are also assisted by the richness of the records that Trudeau generated and preserved, in correspondence, school reports, reading notes, and introspective diaries.

The young Trudeau that emerges in this biography is a brilliant, disciplined student, a born leader, a highly skilled athlete, an omnivorous reader, close to his family, but not, as previously speculated, deeply affected by the sudden death of his father when Trudeau was still an adolescent. Trudeau was devoted to his mother, Grace Elliott Trudeau. Nothing new in this. What is new is the evidence of Trudeau's increasing immersion in studying and embracing the ultra-Catholicism prevalent in the Quebec of the 1930s. Along with intense Catholic piety went corporatism, anti-socialism, anti-liberalism, anti-Semitism, and an admiration for Catholic dictators like Spain's Franco and Portugal's Salazar, along with Fascist Italy's Mussolini and later France's Pétain. One has to admire the candor of the Nemnis in painting Trudeau with these early ideological blemishes that the authors themselves found distressing, almost to the point of dropping the project. The revelations no doubt add grist to the detractors of Trudeau, on the Left, on the Right, and especially from the ranks of Quebec separatists—of which he was a youthful devotee to the point of plotting terrorist revolution.

The Nemnis' explanation for the dark side of Trudeau's extended political adolescence, including his misreading and avoidance of the European war, is the power of his intellectual formation in Quebec Catholic culture, becoming "the very exemplar" of Jesuit education. What is more remarkable is his rapid liberation from this world view upon graduating from the University of Montreal and leaving Quebec to study at Harvard in 1944, the point at which the Nemnis conclude their first volume. For

the rest of his life, Trudeau would adopt a convenient amnesia that seemingly blotted out memory of this xenophobic past, as he soon became "the exact opposite" of what he was. Or did he? What are the traits of character which endure even as ideology changes? Certainly Trudeau was always preparing for political leadership, despite the myth of reluctance. It is to be hoped that the Nemnis' second of three projected volumes will provide understanding of the radical transformation and continuities which empowered Trudeau's leadership in the admixture of character and circumstance which generated Canada's contemporary constitutional structure.

Writing Black Canadas

Donna Bailey Nurse, ed.
Revival: An Anthology of Black Canadian Writing. McClelland & Stewart $29.99

Wisdom J. Tettey and Korbla P. Puplampu, eds.
The African Diaspora in Canada: Negotiating Identity and Belonging. U of Calgary P $39.95

Reviewed by Maureen Moynagh

Donna Bailey Nurse announces "the coming of age of a black Canadian literature" in her introduction to the anthology *Revival*. Nurse's metaphor signals both the proliferation of black Canadian writers in recent years and the history of the corpus on which her anthology builds. Nurse acknowledges the work of previous anthologists from Lorris Elliott and Cyril Dabydeen through Ayanna Black to George Elliott Clarke. These efforts to represent the range of black Canadian writing might also be usefully set alongside genre-specific collections like Djanet Sears's two-volume *Testifyin': Contemporary African-Canadian Drama* and regional collections like Wayde Compton's *Bluesprint: An Anthology of Black British Columbian Literature* and George Elliott Clarke's two-volume collection of African-Nova Scotian writing, *Fire on the Water*. What Nurse adds in this anthology, that gathers fiction, memoir, and poetry from across the country, are works by a number of newer writers, including writers who have recently immigrated from continental Africa. *Revival* is a welcome addition to extant anthologies of contemporary black Canadian literature.

Most of the established writers are represented, including Andre Alexis, George Elliott Clarke, Claire Harris, Lawrence Hill, Dany Laferrière, M. Nourbese Philip, Olive Senior and H. Nigel Thomas. The absence of Dionne Brand and Austin Clarke is unfortunate and a little odd in an anthology presenting itself as the "coming of age" of black Canadian literature, given the importance of the contributions these two writers have made. Nurse attests to Clarke's importance in her introduction and expresses regret over his absence from *Revival*. The strength of the collection lies in what it does differently from previous anthologies. Even in the cases where writers' work has appeared in other anthologies—particularly the more recent collections edited by Black and Clarke—Nurse does not duplicate the individual selections. She includes memoir, an important genre under-represented in earlier collections, publishing excerpts not only from Ken Saro-Wiwa's *In the Shadow of a Saint* and Rachel Manley's *Drumblair*, but Lorna Goodison's *From Harvey's River*, which appeared in Nurse's anthology prior to its publication in book form. Finally, Nurse includes the work of emerging novelists Kim Barry Brunhuber and Esi Edugyan, poets Shane Book and Wayde Compton, dub poets Motion and Jemeni. Other writers not previously represented in national anthologies of black Canadian literature include Tessa McWatt, Nalo Hopkinson, Robert Sandiford, and Okey Chigbo. Taken together, the entries amply attest to the richness of the black Canadian literary corpus. It offers those of us teaching courses in

African Canadian literature another potential course text, and it offers general readers a wonderful sampling of contemporary black Canadian writing. If, moreover, the anthology introduces readers to some of the newer black Canadian writers, it will fulfill an important mandate.

Nurse's collection encompasses works by writers born in Africa and the Caribbean as well as those born in Canada. The collection of scholarly essays edited by Wisdom J. Tettey and Korbla P. Puplampu, in contrast, focuses exclusively on black African immigrants to Canada within the last forty years and on first-generation black African Canadians with traceable genealogical links to continental Africa. In their introduction, Tettey and Puplampu represent this project as an effort to redress the "scant attention" accorded African immigrants in Canada as compared with Asian or Caribbean immigrants, and indicate that their aim is to explore the "specificities of the experiences of Africans in Canada." They identify some of the tensions attending the use of the term "African Canadian," and while they acknowledge those who claim a right to the term because of ancestral linkages to continental Africa through the history of the slave trade, they nonetheless contend that these "African Canadians" occupy a significantly different position from those who are African born. Their collection of essays "seeks to highlight the peculiar, transnational characteristics of the [latter] group that may not be shared by other Blacks or non-Black Africans" and to explore black African immigrants' negotiation of a relationship to Canada. While several of the essays in the volume do focus on the difficulties that attend identity and belonging in Canada, the editors' stated interest in "the peculiar, transnational characteristics" of this African Canadian diaspora does not come across as clearly.

Tettey and Puplampu work in the fields of communications and sociology, respectively, and the other contributors represent the disciplines of education, anthropology, sociology, economics, social work, and women's studies. This multidisciplinary approach to the subject matter seems likely to yield rich results; in fact, the essays are of uneven quality, and some shed little if any light on the experiences of Africans in Canada. Following their introduction, the editors contribute a chapter that explores the tensions between Canadian government policies on immigration and multiculturalism and the inconsistencies between this official discourse and the experiences of African Canadians. It usefully lays the groundwork for what follows, although there is little that is surprising or new here. Similarly, the chapter by Ali Abdi that proposes to contextualize the experiences of African Canadians by offering a historical overview of the experiences of blacks in Canada is essentially a review of the extant historical literature. Readers new to the history of blacks in Canada will find a competent survey, but more specialized readers will find little that is new.

The weakest essays in the volume are those in the section on knowledge production and the experiences of African Canadians in the education system. These essays disappoint chiefly because so little of what they address concerns the group this collection is meant to focus on. Indeed, George Dei does not address the experiences of African immigrants or their children at all in his essay, and Henry Codjoe devotes only four pages of his essay to his original research on young African Canadians in Alberta. The essays on the socio-economic context provide useful information, and the strongest essays in the volume are those by Martha Kumsa, Philomena Okeke-Ihejirika and Denise Spitzer addressing the ways young Oromos in Toronto and young African women in Alberta negotiate their identities and the challenges of belonging in Canada.

Témoignages d'existence

Mariel O'Neill-Karch et Pierre Karch
Dictionnaire des citations littéraires de l'Ontario français depuis 1960. L'Interligne 26,95$

Georges Arsenault, traduit en anglais par Sally Ross
Acadian Christmas Traditions. Acorn 19,95$

Compte rendu par Pénélope Cormier

À quoi peut bien servir un dictionnaire de citations littéraires? Quoi qu'il en soit, il faut croire que l'entreprise de Mariel O'Neill Karch et Pierre Karch répond à un réel besoin, puisque leur *Dictionnaire des citations littéraires de l'Ontario français depuis 1960* (DICLOF) en est à la deuxième édition. L'édition de 1996 a été revue pour inclure les œuvres parues depuis, puis augmentée d'environ 50% pour atteindre le total imposant de 3360 citations, réparties en 1200 catégories.

Quoiqu'on ne sache pas trop sur quel critère on pourrait juger de la qualité des citations, ces dernières sont loin d'être toujours inspirantes ou simplement attachantes. Hors du contexte de leur œuvre, les citations individuelles perdent de leur intérêt. Leur accumulation est cependant significative en soi, comme affirmation performative de l'existence collective d'une littérature franco-ontarienne.

Les citations expriment donc un point de vue collectif sur maintes thématiques, principalement des sujets délocalisés comme l'exil, l'art ou la guerre, mais également sur quelques sujets à pertinence locale : Franco-Ontariens, Ottawa ou Sturgeon Falls. Si l'on peut considérer que le choix des catégories reflète l'état de la littérature, on constate que derrière son identité collective, l'écrivain peut s'exprimer sur des sujets universels.

On voit comment le DICLOF peut suggérer des parentés thématiques entre certains auteurs et ainsi fournir de nouvelles pistes de recherche sur la littérature franco-ontarienne. C'est à ce délicat statut de produit autant que producteur de la littérature franco-ontarienne que l'on comprend mieux la nature de son rôle et la responsabilité de son entreprise.

De façon un peu similaire, la fonction immédiate de l'ouvrage de Georges Arsenault est d'attester l'existence du peuple acadien. Si on peut définir un peuple par ses coutumes et qu'on peut témoigner de traditions de Noël respectées historiquement par l'ensemble des Acadiens, alors ils doivent bien exister comme peuple.

Une partie des recherches sur des sujets acadiens est encore le fait de chercheurs indépendants ou n'ayant qu'une idée relative des conventions du travail scientifique. Ceci explique certaines maladresses méthodologiques de l'auteur, notamment le peu de mise en perspective des sources historiques, ainsi que le manque d'objectivation entraîné par son enthousiasme. En définitive, le livre se ressent encore du rapport informel au savoir qui prévalait il n'y a pas si longtemps en Acadie.

Par ailleurs, l'ouvrage n'est pas particulièrement bien écrit, ni structuré avec sophistication. Ceci est dommage, parce que la passion de l'auteur aurait facilement pu porter le lecteur. Dans l'état actuel, l'ouvrage est platement prosaïque, à parcourir strictement pour son contenu factuel. Certes, le lecteur y développera très certainement de l'intérêt pour l'information proposée, de la satisfaction de voir certaines de ses intuitions confirmées et de la surprise envers certaines révélations, mais la passion (pourtant manifeste) de l'auteur n'est malheureusement pas contagieuse.

Tantôt historien, tantôt folkloriste et tantôt ethnographe, Arsenault est peut-être avant tout chroniqueur et ses écrits gagneraient à ce qu'il adopte explicitement cette perspective. De toute façon, on sait bien que la rigueur scientifique est chose plus facile à acquérir que l'enthousiasme pour son objet d'étude, et sans doute est-ce mieux ainsi…

La fatalité de l'autofiction fabulatrice

Michel Ouellette
Willy Graf. Prise de parole 14,00 $

Compte rendu par Louis Patrick Leroux

L'obsession de Sara Rosenfeld pour Willy Graf est totalisante. L'auteure est consommée par ses projections sur un homme qui lui servira de déclencheur à l'écriture. Elle se livre à un exercice d'autofiction fabulatrice empruntant à Willy Graf son nom, voire sa *gestus*. Elle vampirise l'homme pour mieux nourrir le personnage de son récit, le soumet à des rencontres éprouvantes et intervient à divers moments afin de mieux scruter les réactions de Willy Graf, à la manière d'une cruelle réalisatrice de cinéma-vérité. Le personnage éponyme de la pièce est pompier—antithèse rêvée chez Ouellette dont la pièce fondatrice, *French Town*, reposait sur le récit de l'incendie dévastateur du village familial.

L'œuvre de Ouellette trouve ses assises dans un rapport tendu avec le passé irrésolu qui s'imposera sur toutes les décisions que prendront les personnages. L'anamnèse est sollicitée par une figure étrangère, souvent un écrivain (que le fait d'écrire rend « autre » aux yeux des siens). Ses textes, après avoir été des prises de position communautaristes, s'articulent de plus en plus autour des défis et des aléas de l'écriture.

L'auteur Sara Rosenfeld revendique l'autorité du texte à écrire. Elle est convaincue que Willy Graf et elle formeront un couple inévitable et ne ménage pas les moyens pour l'impressionner par ses prémonitions bien orchestrées. Les personnages vivent tous une relation trouble avec le passé, ils dialoguent sinon avec des fantômes, du moins avec des projections qui défigurent. Le passé n'est jamais loin, il fait irruption en coups de théâtre successifs: arrive Nina, la sœur de la petite Bishop que Willy Graf a tuée accidentellement; arrive le fils né d'un don de sperme anonyme; arrive une Chinoise jadis donnée en adoption qui offrira son enfant à naître à l'impuissant Willy Graf dont le projet d'adoption d'une enfant devait consolider sa relation interdépendante avec Nina Bishop.

C'est un monde où le présent n'existe qu'en fonction d'un passé impossible à évacuer. Par exemple, Willy Graf attend patiemment que justice soit faite; lorsque Nina s'offre de vivre en couple avec lui, il accepte fatalement la paradoxale punition afin de concrétiser l'absence qui les relie—celle de la sœur accidentellement tuée. L'amie asiatique Ping mise son enfant à naître sur une relation impossible avec le protagoniste de la pièce, en argumentant qu'elle évitera à une autre petite Chinoise adoptée une existence confuse. Le fils retrouve son géniteur—donateur de sperme anonyme retrouvé—; il ne voit pas en lui un père mais une matrice génétique, une solution à l'énigme de ses origines.

Les personnages s'appellent Willy Graf, Sara Rosenfeld, Nina Bishop, Jacob Bassine et Ping, des noms marqués par l'altérité. L'action se déroule dans une grande ville, bien que Willy Graf et Nina Bishop soient originaires de *Fallings*, un village nordique évoquant le Smooth Rock Falls natal de l'auteur. La langue des personnages est dans un français normatif presque sans coloration, comme s'ils étaient doublés. Telle une tragédie classique, la portée de la pièce se trouve dans la parole même. Même si la pièce renvoie parfois à Pinter dans ses rapports humains tendus et à l'absurdité des décisions prises sans hésitation par les personnages, on sent qu'il s'agit ici d'un univers tragique où tout est régi par l'acceptation qu'ont les personnages de la fatalité et de leur destin. Conception du monde que seule l'écriture sait imposer.

Papiers couchés

Pierre Ouellet
Dépositions. Noroît 18,95 $

Compte rendu par Thierry Bissonnette

Comme plusieurs recueils de Pierre Ouellet, *Dépositions* met en scène un soliloque tiraillé, ambigu, où la question de Dieu et du Sens se pose et se propose, sur un ton parfois si décidé qu'il fait contraste avec l'omniprésente thématique de l'incertitude. C'est, entre autres, cet alliage de maîtrise et d'abandon qui fournit son dynamisme à la poésie de Ouellet, informée par un imposant réseau intertextuel, et dont l'extrême rigueur risque à tout moment de devenir un défaut, tout comme le fréquent usage de l'homonymie et de la paronomase. Malgré ce danger, l'aventure du poète n'en finit pas de fasciner par ses détours et ses renaissances.

Dans ce livre (couronné, l'an dernier, par le Grand Prix Québécor du Festival international de la poésie de Trois-Rivières), on observe une syntaxe qui déborde régulièrement le vers afin d'épouser le cours d'un questionnement vif, aux pôles multiples, ce qui crée un entre-deux original entre la poésie et l'essai. Le titre lui-même, *Dépositions*, est à prendre à la fois au sens du témoignage et à celui d'un corps qu'on va placer à l'horizontale. Parole singulière et mortalité forment ainsi le principal couple d'opposés offerts au lecteur pour amorcer sa gravitation, favorisée par les liens transversaux entre les sept sections du recueil. Consignation tragique, presque à l'aveugle, « faute de frappe que l'on commet » pour « tirer à blanc sur les mirages », cette parole médite sur ses échecs avec obstination, ce qui, au détour d'une strophe ou d'une autre, permet d'entrevoir des avenues que l'on n'attendait pas. Davantage que de transmettre un message, il s'agirait ici de déstabiliser la pensée, d'y susciter des bifurcations, d'y planter des germes, des os (« j'écris comme on enterre un os »).

À la manière d'une théologie négative, cette poésie s'attache en quelque sorte à magnifier les paradoxes d'une conscience qui s'ignore, mais qui, par le fait même, reprend contact avec ce qu'elle ne peut savoir. Docte ignorance, certes, mais aussi, incursion chirurgicale dans cette inconnue que notre bouche abrite : une langue jamais vraiment possédée ni maîtrisée, et que nous devons coucher sur le papier afin de mieux saisir ce que nous aurons été : « effacez tout depuis le début / et vous saurez où je m'en vais, d'où rien / ne revient qu'avec un lourd / silence entre les dents / et sous la langue : une pièce de monnaie / qui n'a plus cours depuis longtemps ».

Que ce soit par le thème de la rue ou celui de l'os, c'est toujours cette inadéquation qui semble auscultée, palpée sous divers angles, dans une passion formelle qui n'a d'égal que le fantôme (le cadavre?) romantique déployé dans ces pages. Déposée rituellement, la plainte redevient peu à peu question, dût-t-elle passer par l'enfouissement dans les lettres.

Transcending the Body

P.K. Page
Up on the Roof. Porcupine's Quill $18.95

Reviewed by Cynthia Messenger

Up on the Roof is P.K. Page's most recent collection of short fiction. *A Kind of Fiction*, which collected pieces across a number of decades, was published in 2001. In this latest volume, Page reworks and refines the central themes and motifs that run throughout her poetry, prose, and even her visual art (especially the post-Brazil pieces from the early 1960s). The familiar themes are broadly these: art can produce transcendence; God is not God but a stand-in for the fourth dimension; the human brain, more exactly the artist's brain, can generate a connection to the cosmos. The recurring motifs—prisms, Chinese boxes, the spiral curl of a snail, "interlocking

cogwheels"—have appeared in poems and in Page's visual art over the decades and remain, in these recent stories, gestures that suggest the point of infinity for which art should bravely reach.

Page's stories in this collection also feature, however, a preoccupation with death and the impulse to escape the aging body. Varieties of out-of-body experiences occur in several stories in *Up on the Roof*. In "Ex Libris," the protagonist becomes a dog: "I was that dog. And hostile. I strained at the leash." Readers familiar with Page's work will think of Kristin in *The Sun and the Moon*, whose flesh becomes stone, and the wood of a chair: "She has known the pressure of the molecules in the wood . . .". The out-of-body experience is one means by which Page explores transformation in "Ex Libris." The "I" is a male voice, as it is in a few other stories in the collection. The protagonist, Ivor, in "Ex Libris" moves backward to move forward, leaves his wife (who has become a celebrity), reconnects with aging and dying parents—and, importantly, with their paintings and books, to which he constructs a kind of shrine, "my shining palace," near the end of the story. Ivor himself becomes a celebrity as a result of the art collection, in one of several satiric undercurrents in the story. The piece ends with a one-paragraph epilogue. We learn that, entering the body of a dog, Ivor dies when he is struck by a car.

Books appear again in "Birthday" and this time are integrated with an out-of-body experience: the protagonist dreams of being born, and the birth canal is a passageway of books:

> And then she remembered the dream. Those little red fists had brought it back. It was bizarre, of course. One's dream scenarist tends to be antic.
>
> Head foremost, she was forcing—and at the same time being forced—down a long book-lined corridor. Books on both sides. How tight it made the passage! Painful. Cramped. Intolerable, actually. And an area between her shoulder blades—not usually one of her more sensitive spots, though she had many these days—was unbearably tender. But as she struggled, constricted, half blind, she was comforted by a series of brilliant images: butterfly; bird; man; angel. Her own joyous laughter had wakened her that morning. She remembered it now with a matching lightness of heart.

The "curious dislocations" and "Reassemblies" in this story speak to the need to re-see identity, to detach in order to transcend. The protagonist is not at home in her body because something unnamed in her is attempting to escape to another dimension. She is plainly sprouting wings, and at the end is being transformed into a bird/angel, a being that, in Page's poetry is part of the symbology of hope. In "Ex Libris" and "Birthday," books may suggest the limits of intellection, but they also suggest the writer's art, the poet's verse, and both, for Page, are conduits.

Deux musiciens

Clermont Pépin
Piccoletta : souvenirs. Triptyque 25,00 $

Pierre Jasmin et Jeanne Gagnon
Notes d'espoir d'un « joueur de piano ». Triptyque 25,00 $

Compte rendu par Catherine Lefrançois

Mis à part quelques analyses de John Schuster et de courts articles encyclopédiques présentant surtout des données biographiques, peu d'écrits ont été publiés sur le compositeur Clermont Pépin. Dans *Picoletta,* livre paru quelques semaines après sa mort (survenue en septembre 2006), le compositeur relate ses souvenirs, s'attardant autant au récit de sa vie de musicien qu'à la description de ses propres œuvres.

Pépin consacre plus de la moitié de son ouvrage à son enfance et à ses années

de formation. Il souligne avec insistance l'importance de sa sœur Germaine, son premier professeur de piano, celle de Georgette Dionne qui enseigna par la suite au frère et à la sœur. C'est elle qui, avec Wilfrid Pelletier, assura à Pépin une formation musicale complète et une place au prestigieux Institut Curtis dès l'âge de quinze ans. Le compositeur, qui fournit somme toute peu de détails sur sa vie personnelle après son enfance, parle pourtant abondamment de la vie et de la mort de sa sœur, qui a épousé le compositeur Rosario Scalero avec qui elle a vécu en Italie. Pour la description de leur rencontre comme pour celle des efforts déployés par ses maîtres pour son éducation musicale, l'auteur utilise une abondante documentation composée de la correspondance de sa sœur et de son époux et de celle de Georgette Dionne (en particulier avec Wilfrid Pelletier). Les citations tirées de ces sources ajoutent au caractère décousu d'un récit soutenu par une écriture parfois maladroite et parsemé d'anecdotes souvent banales comme cette description d'un voyage en avion : « À peine étions-nous en route que les hôtesses de l'avion nous servirent un repas plantureux et bien arrosé. Elles installèrent ensuite un écran pour présenter un film. » Pépin admet d'ailleurs lui-même les faiblesses de son livre dans l'épilogue, où il écrit : « En comparaison de ce que j'avais songé à écrire et du résultat final, il a bien fallu que je me résigne à accepter le caractère "inachevé" de mon livre. » L'intérêt de l'ouvrage réside surtout dans la description des œuvres du compositeur. Les procédés compositionnels de Pépin y sont présentés de manière claire et accessible et l'auteur évite de s'adresser aux seuls spécialistes. Il expose les techniques d'écriture ayant présidé à l'élaboration de ses principales œuvres, mais aussi ses sources d'inspiration, souvent de nature scientifique ou encore spirituelle. Ces descriptions sont accompagnées de nombreux exemples musicaux et des dessins qui servaient souvent de première esquisse à Pépin.

Les entretiens de Jeanne Gagnon avec le pianiste Pierre Jasmin sont eux aussi accessibles à un lecteur non spécialisé. Les questions que l'auteure adresse au musicien touchent autant à la technique instrumentale et à l'interprétation des œuvres qu'aux politiques culturelles, et visent souvent à faire mieux connaître les exigences des métiers d'interprète et de pédagogue. Jasmin, concertiste et professeur de piano à l'Université du Québec à Montréal, raconte ses années de formation et dévoile sa conception de la musique, plaidant en faveur d'une vision humaniste de l'art. Jasmin critique sans gêne les institutions culturelles québécoises, s'attaquant notamment à l'élitisme d'une partie du milieu musical. Il se montre entre autres assez sévère envers les « conservatoires à la mission rétrograde et exclusive de la haute culture classique ». Tout en manifestant respect et reconnaissance pour ses maîtres, le pianiste remet constamment en question certaines traditions qui perdurent dans l'enseignement de la musique. Il insiste notamment sur la primauté des sons sur le texte musical, et prône une approche physique et gestuelle de l'instrument. Et bien qu'il manifeste peut-être une certaine incompréhension à l'égard de certaines de ses formes, Jasmin se fait le défenseur de la musique populaire et de son enseignement.

À ces réflexions sur la musique se mélangent des anecdotes de la vie personnelle du pianiste, notamment sa première rencontre avec Pierre Péladeau qui allait devenir à la fois un mécène et un ami, relation qui allait éventuellement mener à la création du Centre Pierre-Péladeau. Jeanne Gagnon interroge aussi Jasmin sur son implication au sein d'Artistes pour la Paix, organisation pacifiste intervenant dans les débats publics et récompensant chaque année un artiste ayant œuvré pour la paix et la justice sociale.

Pictures of Other Worlds

Elizabeth Quan
Once Upon a Full Moon. Tundra $24.99

Baba Wagué Diakité
Mee-An and the Magic Serpent. Groundwood $16.95

Jorge Luján; Elisa Amado, trans.; Piet Grobler, illus.
Sky Blue Accident/Accidente celeste. Groundwood $17.95

Reviewed by Karen Crossley

In the picture book *Once Upon a Full Moon*, author and illustrator Elizabeth Quan takes her readers on a journey to another place and time—quite literally. The story of *Once Upon a Full Moo*n is the story of a journey. Through Quan's diary-like text and busy, sketchy watercolours, the readers of this story are thrust into the world of controlled confusion that confronted travellers early in the twentieth century. This particular trip, as seen through the eyes of the story's child narrator, involves a complicated passage from Canada to China, by train, ship, bus, cable car, rickshaw, ferry, steam engine, and finally by foot. But the focus of the tale is not really the wonders of 1920s transportation, or even the exotic sights, sounds, smells and tastes of a long, long expedition—although the text is full of such details. Rather, the narrative is powered by the pull of longing: of a father's longing to return to the land of his childhood, and a child's longing to fulfill a fairy-tale dream to arrive at last at the home of a grandmother she has never known. This powerful desire for connection and reconnection is what drives the story forward. Textually, Quan focuses always on her heroine's goal, but her visuals work against this focus in the same way that the chaos of travel works against the trajectory towards destination. While the text maintains a certain coherence, Quan's kaleidoscopic images of travel appear in disconnected panels on the right side of every two-page spread, like visions of a voyage glimpsed through the windows of a train. Thematically appealing, this artistic decision risks interrupting the forward thrust of the story, as Quan relies on her readers' desire for closure to keep them on board until the end of the tale.

In *Mee-An and the Magic Serpent*, author-illustrator Baba Wagué Diakité takes readers on a journey into another kind of world—the world of myth and magic. However, it soon becomes apparent that, in Diakité's world, fantasy is to be accepted as a matter of fact. The story of *Mee-An and the Magic Serpent*, told by a less-than-objective third-person narrator, follows the fantastic adventures of a vain young woman in search of a perfect husband. In choosing marriage to the magic serpent, Mee-An finds that a beautiful exterior does not always indicate interior virtue. Based on a folktale from Mali, *Mee-An and the Magic Serpent* is a story that features astonishing transformations interwoven with heart-warming, homespun moments. These are richly illustrated by pictures originally painted on glazed ceramic tiles—Diakité's signature technique. The technique works wonderfully for picture-book illustration. The colours seem to explode off the page, so it does not seem at all surprising to find details from each painting breaking loose and floating free from the illustrated right-hand side to the text-dominated left-hand side of book, giving readers the added pleasure of matching the floating puzzle pieces to details from the bigger pictures. This lack of containment visually echoes the manner in which everyday life erupts into the fantastic throughout this engagingly simple-yet-complex story.

If Quan takes readers on a road trip to the past, and Diakité steers them towards the supernatural, Jorge Luján is the one who most clearly invites them into a world of imagination in *Sky Blue Accident/Accidente celeste*. Unlike Quan's and Diakité's single

author-illustrator visions, *Sky Blue Accident/ Accidente Celeste*, a bilingual (English and Spanish) picture book, is very much a collaborative effort—a meeting of the creative minds of poet Luján, translator Elisa Amando, and illustrator Piet Grobler. The spare text tells the skeleton-thin story of a boy who breaks the sky. The fun comes in as the details of what happens next are left to be fleshed out by the reader. Wherever Luján's text is silent about exactly what is going on, Grobler's illustrations sprawl all over the pages with the freedom of a child's drawings, daring the reader to fill in the blanks. Rather than being flaws, the textual spareness and artistic simplicity of *Sky Blue Accident/Accidente celeste* are in fact the story's greatest strengths, as both text and illustrations work together to invite the reader into a world that is only half-created. Significantly, *Sky Blue Accident/ Accidente celeste* both begins and ends with Grobler's endpaper pictures of a silent blue sky, implying a freedom that allows the story that goes on between the blue pages to be created as much by the readers as by Luján, Amando, and Grobler. Luján's world is not one that the reader will find on any map; it can only be traced out by this kind of literary sky-writing—the kind that Luján does best.

Une nouvelle littérature en ébullition

Ali Reguigui et Hedi Bouraoui
Perspectives sur la littérature franco-ontarienne.
Prise de parole 35 $

Compte rendu de Kathleen Kellett-Betsos

En 2000 paraissait *La littérature franco-ontarienne: état des lieux*, recueil d'articles où des critiques présentaient passionnément une littérature méconnue à l'époque. Cette réédition après à peine sept ans sous le titre *Perspectives sur la littérature franco-ontarienne* témoigne du développement important de l'étude critique dans ce domaine. Avec cette mise à jour, les éditeurs Hédi Bouraoui et Ali Reguigui tentent de combler certaines lacunes, notamment avec l'ajout de deux articles sur le théâtre. Certains essais plutôt personnels ont été enlevés de cette édition dont « L'écriture nomade. Lettre à mon ami Hédi Bouraoui » de Pierre Raphaël-Pelletier.

Il est évident d'après l'article d'ouverture d'Elizabeth Lasserre que l'institution littéraire franco-ontarienne ne se défait que lentement de la tendance à mesurer les œuvres selon leur degré d'implication communautaire ou leur « sociativité ». Lasserre explore la façon dont l'évolution de la société franco-ontarienne, notamment l'essor des écrivains migrants et la diminution d'une certaine méfiance envers le Sud de l'Ontario et surtout Toronto, commence à transformer les anciennes préoccupations de cette littérature. La poète Jacqueline Beaugé-Rosiers fournit des clés de compréhension de la « grammaire du migrant-poète » qui permettent de dépasser « l'exotisme facile ». Des articles de Robert Yergeau, François Paré, Lucie Hotte et Johanne Melançon contribuent à approfondir notre compréhension de l'institution littéraire franco-ontarienne. Celui de Yergeau mérite une mention spéciale pour la verve que déploie l'auteur à décrire la réception critique en Ontario français et au Québec de la pièce *French Town* de Michel Ouellette ainsi que du recueil de poèmes parodiques *Les Franco-Ontariens et les Cure-dents* de « Béatrice Braise ». Pour sa part, Melançon souligne le développement récent de la professionnalisation de l'édition ainsi que d'un sentiment d'appartenance culturelle à la région de l'Outaouais, indépendamment des frontières.

Malgré les nouveaux courants critiques, il semble qu'on s'éloigne peu des questions de sociativité, même dans les études axées sur le genre littéraire. Une exception serait « Le roman de l'écriture au féminin » où François

Ouellet offre des analyses percutantes de la réflexivité chez Rachelle Renaud, Marguerite Andersen et Gabrielle Poulin, entre autres. Michel Lord souligne les rapports entre écrivain, territoire et quête identitaire chez des nouvelliers tels que Daniel Poliquin, Maurice Henrie et Pierre Karch. Ce volume consacre plusieurs articles au genre privilégié de la poésie : Lélia Young présente les membres de la Société des écrivain(e)s de Toronto; Louis Bélanger examine le trajet littéraire de Patrice Desbiens, transfuge ontarien en milieu littéraire québécois; Jules Tessier analyse l'hétérolinguisme dans la poésie de Jean-Marc Dalpé et Louise Fiset; Pierre Léon offre une série de portraits des poètes tels qu'Andrée Christensen, Cécile Cloutier et Stefan Psenak. Dans « La Régionalisation de l'institution théâtrale franco-ontarienne », Joel Beddows trace l'évolution du théâtre depuis les années 1970, âge d'or du théâtre communautaire, jusqu'à l'époque contemporaine où la quête identitaire pèse moins que les préoccupations formelles de l'art de la mise en scène. Comme Melançon, Beddows remarque la tendance pour l'institution littéraire à chevaucher la frontière établie par la rivière des Outaouais que les dramaturges comme Michel Marc Bouchard et Jean-Marc Dalpé traversent allègrement. L'article de clôture de Simon Laflamme et Sylvie Mainville, une étude sociologique des amateurs de théâtre à Sudbury, Toronto et Ottawa, quoique intéressant en soi, détonne par rapport aux autres textes et offre peu de conclusions définitives. La fin abrupte de cette édition fait regretter la postface originale de Reguigui.

La mise à jour de cet ouvrage est un signe de la vitalité de la littérature franco-ontarienne qui n'est plus vraiment « en émergence » mais représente plutôt une « littérature en ébullition », comme « ce transfuge québécois » Gérard Bessette l'a déjà dit à propos d'une autre jeune littérature.

Essais polémiques

François Ricard
Chroniques d'un temps loufoque. Boréal 19,95 $

Compte rendu par Christian Vandendorpe

Ce livre regroupe une vingtaine de chroniques parues entre 1994 et 2004 dans la revue *L'Atelier du roman.* Parfaitement accordés à leur contexte parisien de publication originel, ces essais sont presque toujours ensemencés par une trame narrative—anecdote ou fait divers—qui, pour être ténue, n'en est pas moins savoureuse et menée de main de maître.

La plupart des textes célèbrent l'apport irremplaçable de la littérature : « il y a bel et bien une manière proprement romanesque . . . de vivre et de penser, une manière que seules la fréquentation et la méditation des grands romans permettent de découvrir et de faire entrer en soi ». Peu tendre à l'égard du discours festif contemporain, François Ricard fustige volontiers notre société postmoderne qui habite « un univers de carton-pâte dans lequel la frivolité et la rigolade sont la loi commune ». Il se range pour sa part à la position de Saul Bellow pour qui « les romanciers qui adoptent la vision la plus amère de notre condition moderne tirent le meilleur parti de l'art du roman ».

Très critique à l'égard des *Cultural Studies,* Ricard revendique le droit d'admirer les grandes œuvres et, à ce propos, il raconte avec humour comment une étudiante l'avait un jour approché pour diriger une thèse qui s'emploierait à « défétichiser » la littérature. Inutile de préciser qu'elle était particulièrement mal tombée. La même étudiante réapparaîtra plus tard pour lui demander de diriger une thèse où elle procéderait à une réécriture féministe des grands romans, sorte de transposition au féminin d'une littérature dominée par des mâles (« Stéphanie en (re)belle infidèle »). Au-delà du côté anecdotique, l'essayiste voit dans cette idée

véritablement *loufoque* un trait caractéristique d'une époque où la « mort de l'auteur » est entrée dans le discours public, ce qui incite tout un chacun à s'approprier les oripeaux ainsi laissés libres. Une telle attitude serait bien en place dans le discours de certains traducteurs, qui se présentent comme faisant un travail de « co-création » et dont la théorie avait fourvoyé la pauvre étudiante.

On aura deviné que l'auteur porte un jugement plutôt désabusé sur l'état actuel de la critique. Un exemple inattendu en est l'étonnante postérité qu'a connue un numéro de la revue *Liberté* consacré à des pastiches d'écrivains, dont Ricard a découvert avec surprise, dix ans plus tard, que certains avaient été répertoriés comme des originaux par la critique universitaire et étudiés comme tels (« Histoire d'une blague »).

L'auteur ne ménage pas ses sarcasmes à l'égard du structuralisme, qui n'aurait apporté que jargon pédant ou schématisations froides comme des « devoirs de chimie », et mis sur un même plan grandes œuvres et produits hollywoodiens. Il attribue le déferlement subséquent de la « théorie » dans les études littéraires à la « peur née de l'immense orgueil moderne, qui ne redoute rien tant que de se reconnaître héritier », à moins que ce ne soit la peur du « pouvoir déstabilisateur et [de] l'énigmatique beauté de la littérature ». Commentant la parution de *Devoirs et Délices, une vie de passeur,* dans lequel Todorov revient sur son itinéraire intellectuel, Ricard épingle ce dernier pour avoir en son temps incarné le structuralisme triomphant. Il va jusqu'à lui faire grief d'avoir été « le traducteur et le champion des Formalistes russes, le comparse de Barthes et de Genette ». Rien de moins! Il déplore enfin que le théoricien n'assume pas « une petite part de responsabilité dans la déliquescence de l'enseignement littéraire qu'il constate autour de lui—et conséquemment dans la dévaluation, la banalisation et le détournement moralisateur qui frappent aujourd'hui la littérature (ou ce qui en tient lieu). »

Ce polémiste et fin observateur de la scène culturelle ne s'arrête pas aux questions de littérature, mais pourfend avec allégresse divers travers de notre temps. Il évoque ainsi le mouvement de purification du lexique, le choix des représentants de la Reine au Canada et au Québec, les stratégies de recrutement de l'Union des écrivains du Québec, le mariage homosexuel, ou ces « bacchanales touristico-citoyennes » que sont les festivals de poésie, qu'il définit comme « la rencontre festive de l'exhibitionnisme et de la propension grégaire ».

D'autres essais prennent fait et cause pour des auteurs qui lui sont chers : Kundera, Déon, Houellebecq, Muray, Duteurtre, Gombrowicz . . . En revanche, Ricard n'a pas de termes assez durs pour disqualifier Nancy Huston à la suite du réquisitoire qu'elle a dressé contre tout un pan de la littérature actuelle dans *Professeurs de désespoir.* Dans une réfutation cinglante, il évoque le procès jadis intenté contre *Madame Bovary* et suggère qu'un peintre représente le combat de Nancy Huston dans une grande allégorie qui s'intitulerait « La Maternité guidant les écrivains vers les joies de l'espérance ».

L'auteur, qui manie la formule lapidaire et l'ironie caustique, ne se départit jamais d'une légèreté de ton qui fait de cet ouvrage, en dépit de sa partialité affichée, une lecture délicieuse.

Games and Gifts

David Adams Richards
Playing the Inside Out/Le jeu des apparences: The Antonine Maillet-Northrop Frye Lecture. Goose Lane $14.95

Carol Malyon, ed.
Imagination in Action: Thoughts on Creativity by Painters, Sculpters, Musicians, Poets, Novelists, Teachers, Actors... Mercury $19.95

Robert Kroetsch and John Lent
Abundance: The Mackie House Conversations about the Writing Life. Kalamalka $10.00

Reviewed by Owen Percy

Is it even possible to teach creative writing? The spectres of this question and the various ways in which it might be answered seem to lie in the margins of these three recent publications on the victories and vagaries of the literary life. One returns to the mystique of the alienated artist who must become a social exile in order to maintain artistic integrity; one offers a selection of musings on what it is to be and act creatively; and one explores the practicalities of the writing life and its potential for evincing hope. While the three works demonstrate markedly differing approaches to writing, all three also assume a certain degree of legitimacy behind the very notion that the *je ne sais quoi* of creative output might be usefully offered to future generations.

Playing the Inside Out, David Adams Richards' Antonine Maillet-Northrop Frye lecture delivered at Université de Moncton in April 2007, is printed here in a bilingual edition prefaced by Marie-Linda Lord and Paul M. Curtis. The lecture is directed at "young writers" and specifically young Maritime writers whom Richards assumes will face a "double disadvantage": writing against convention in a region that is "looked upon as conventional anyway." His closing notes sum up the gist of the largely anecdotal address: "What I am saying to the young writer is never fear that you, too, will be evaluated most harshly in your life for telling the truth. Know that the truth, not as others see it, but as you do, can only be told by you. And if you do it well enough, it not only sets you free, but your characters as well." Not surprisingly, the path to this freedom seems to run through staunch regionalism, blue-collar characters, and violent plotlines which are sure to offend "affluent, intellectual, urban Canada"—Richards' convenient, if predictable, straw man here.

Set up as a diatribe (Richards, who is not yet sixty, posits "I am an old man, so I can say what I want"), the lecture in fact comes eventually to defer to the very mythology of the writer-as-rebel that it purports initially to demythologize. Ultimately, its conclusion is that "to be a writer, one must take on the conventional and, in doing so, be a renegade." It relies too heavily on the more than thirty-five literary, artistic, and popular references (almost entirely masculine and ranging from Alden Nowlan to Nietzsche to Beethoven to Bart Simpson, but referring most often back to Tolstoy) in twenty-three short pages. According to Richards, only those willing to endure the "unimaginable dark nights of the soul" that come with playing the inside out will maintain artistic integrity. Ultimately, this lecture offers little more to the young writer than a series of vague exhortations on how Richards believes himself to have remained outside of the "game" of popular literature thanks to his staunch refusal to acquiesce to what he calls the mediocre and safe "like-mindedness" of the literary world.

Imagination in Action is fittingly subtitled *Thoughts on Creativity by Painters, Sculptors, Musicians, Poets, Novelists, Teachers, Actors . . .* and offers just that. Comprised of forty-four short essays by "cultural workers" like poet/performer bill bissett, jazz musician/writer Kent L. Bowman, painter/poet Marjory Smart, and choreographer/ teacher Edith Hodkinson, the collection is successful in bringing together "Canadians who

are creative in more than one field." How creativity itself might be defined, and how it might work, are the axes upon which most essays hinge, with various possibilities being offered. Creativity is variously discussed as "invention" (Adrian), as "imagination in action" (Lee), as "a combination of the heart and mind, spirited through one's soul" (Latcham), as "an attempt to process, understand and cope with passionate feelings" (Caplan), and as "a natural process of [an] ever-active mind" (Jenoff).

While the entries take many shapes (essays, poems, reports, a play), their brevity (one to six pages) proves frustrating. We find ourselves desiring more of certain essays—notably those by Adam Dickinson, Stan Rogal, Renee Rodin, and especially Antanas Sileika—and much less of the more numerous forgettable pieces which focus on uninteresting procedural details, repetitive comparisons between writing and other activities, and an implied conception of creativity as an exclusive gift bestowed upon the few. Too frequently, and especially in many of the self-penned artist-bios, these pieces prove self-indulgent and only tangentially related to the topic of the collection. In Malyon's introduction, she writes: "Artists create. How lucky for the rest of us. Perhaps we should simply celebrate that they spend their time this way." More often than not, this is the extent of what the artists in *Imagination in Action* accomplish. And while we might certainly agree with David Lee that often "the anecdotal can be more revealing than the theoretical," it rarely is here.

Transcribed as part of Okanagan College's *Mackie House Conversations about the Writing Life*, *Abundance* consists of five discussions between Robert Kroetsch and John Lent on everything from comedy, experimental writing, and cinema, to creative writing pedagogy, which Kroetsch calls "a serious undertaking for us in a culture that distrusts the very notion of artist." With an apt introduction by Sean Johnston which offers a more balanced alternative to Richards' heroic story of the writer ("You begin your life as a writer alone. This aloneness is sometimes heartening, often frightening. Then you begin to realize you're not alone, and this is by turns annoying and encouraging"), *Abundance* demystifies the very concept of the Romantic artist that seems to be taken for granted in the other two books reviewed here. Ranging from the first conversation's intense discussion of experimentalism and how "the realistic novel is not *natural*," to the sheepish admission in the closing conversation—the book's most thoroughly engaging—that, in writing comedy, "[t]here's nothing like a fart to make everyone giggle," *Abundance* does much of the spadework that Kroetsch and Lent attribute to creative writing programs by giving students permission to say "I can be a writer."

At times this conversation reveals *itself* as an exercise in pedagogy as the elder statesman seems to do the lesser share of the talking but the majority of the prompting. With typical candor, Kroetsch's questions barely contain his love for the crafts of writing, teaching, and mentoring. Lent is only too happy to engage with equal vim. The mutual respect of genuine friendship that permeates these discussions provides the book with a generous and ultimately hopeful tone. There is little prescription or proscription in *Abundance*, but rather more encouraging and personal contextualizations of the writing life. Lent also speaks of creativity as a gift, but is quick to clarify: "I don't mean a gift *in* us but a gift *to* us . . . a chance to play with these things." The "new writers and their voices and stories" to whom *Abundance* is dedicated will be hard-pressed to find two more generous and sage mentors. For, as Kroetsch notes of the writing life, "you need a guide. You can't do it on your own. Even in *The Divine Comedy*, Dante had to meet Virgil." These Virgils, by not steering potential Dantes in any one

definitive direction, still provide them with the glimmer of hope and abundance that we might assume brought them to writing in the first place.

Impossible nostalgie

Sandra Rompré-Deschênes
La maison mémoire. Triptyque 17,00 $

Daniel St-Onge
Bayou mystère. Triptyque 19,00 $

Compte rendu par Adeline Caute

Les deux citations liminaires de *La maison mémoire,* « Envers et contre tout, la maison nous aide à dire : je serai un habitant du monde, malgré le monde » (Bachelard) et « Là où ça sent la merde ça sent l'être » (Artaud), donnent le *la* d'un roman où inscription dans le monde et présence du corps apparaissent dans un rapport d'articulation aussi difficile que nécessaire, pour finalement éclater dans la folie et la mort.

Flora, infirmière dans un centre pour personnes âgées, mène une existence isolée et terne. Entre des parents *hippies* et désintéressés de son sort, et une grand-mère cruelle et oppressante, l'enfance de l'héroïne s'est écoulée sous le signe du rejet et d'une incompréhension généralisée. Bien des années plus tard, la mort de sa grand-mère Alphonsine continue de hanter la jeune femme qui décide de prendre un congé pour faire son deuil dans la maison de la défunte. Commence alors un dialogue avec Alphonsine—ou plutôt, une série de doléances liées à des souvenirs précis de Flora, et adressées à la disparue.

« Tu te souviens, Grand-maman, de cet après-midi de juillet qui nous a détachées l'une de l'autre et qui a bien failli nous perdre . . . par ta faute? Moi je suis incapable de l'oublier. »

Et peu à peu, les souvenirs prennent le dessus et l'action recule, au point d'atteindre une immobilité faite d'escarres, morbide. Puis soudain, sans s'annoncer, le présent fait irruption dans la « maison mémoire ». La nostalgie est tuée, nette. D'obsessionnelle, de malsaine, d'indulgente, quoique essentielle, la mémoire devient alors mise en échec par un présent certes médiocre et insupportable, mais irréductible—que seule la folie peut sublimer.

À ce titre, dans une lignée lointaine de Marie-Claire Blais, *La maison mémoire* illustre ce que Pierre Nepveu définit comme l'impossibilité de la mémoire nostalgique : « La mémoire romanesque romantique ou nostalgique est morte : seul ce recyclage, sur un mode qui frôle la caricature, reste possible ».

Aux antipodes de *La maison mémoire*, *Bayou mystère* de Daniel St-Onge est ancré dans la contemporanéité. Dans la Louisiane de l'après-Katrina, l'intellectuel Michel O'Toll se rend à Lafayette pour assister à une conférence sur la littérature francophone en Amérique du Nord. C'est là le début d'une cascade de colis piégés, de meurtres, d'attaques de *cocodries* (alligators) déchaînés et d'aventures amoureuses dans les nuits chaudes du sud des États-Unis.

Toutefois, sous la surface d'une intrigue policière au rythme vif et aux rebondissements toujours inattendus, *Bayou mystère* représente au lecteur la précarité du fait francophone aux États-Unis : par une galerie de personnages qui rivalisent d'obstination dans leurs valeurs opposées sur la renaissance de la culture et de la langue françaises en Louisiane, St-Onge peint avec adresse les réalités distinctes des différents fronts d'un phénomène qui, à la fois, cherche à s'inscrire dans une généalogie dont les sources remontent à une culture française caduque bien qu'idéalisée, et qui tend vers un avenir rien moins qu'incertain.

Aujourd'hui encore, les « défenseurs de la suprématie de la race blanche et des vraies valeurs américaines » veillent. La mémoire nostalgique n'a pas sa place dans la Louisiane de 2007 tant la lutte pour l'héritage acadien reste acharnée.

Aussi bien *Bayou mystère* que *La maison mémoire* invitent à ne pas négliger le présent

au profit d'un passé obscur ou d'un avenir inconnu. Peut-être est-ce là ce que Nepveu entend quand il pose que « la conscience historique transcende elle-même l'histoire ». Flora et Michel, à leur manière, montrent la nécessité de l'inscription dans un présent pluriel, mouvant, effréné, où tout est à faire et où il appartient à chacun d'être au monde.

Into the Wild, Again

Bonnie Rozanski
Borderline. Porcupine's Quill $22.95

Iain Lawrence
Gemini Summer. Delacorte $21.00

Drew Hayden Taylor
The Night Wanderer: A Native Gothic Novel. Annick $10.95

Reviewed by Suzanne James

An oft repeated trope of writing for adolescents is that male protagonists, however perceptive and creative they may be, cannot be good students (though an English teacher may recognize their potential, now and again). And when no one understands or appreciates the protagonist, he bonds with a dog or wild animal (or better yet, a bit of both: a tamed wolf), and heads off into the wilderness.

One really wants Bonnie Rozanski's *Borderline* to move beyond these tropes, as she confronts some serious social issues—obesity, autism, fast food—often overlooked in the glib world of fast-paced fiction for "young readers." But her approach is too heavy-handed. With no hint of sarcasm, a grade six teacher announces, "All the children who need to see the nurse for insulin, Ritalin, Flovent, Vanceril, please go now," and then moves on to a math lesson "sponsored by Hamburger Haven." Adults deliver lectures on the evils of fast food and the possible environmental causes of autism, the public school is chronically underfunded, and caged animals are abused as scientific test subjects. Although Rozanski's narrative picks up toward the end as the text veers away from presenting either a simple cause or treatment of autism, or providing a completely predictable conclusion, her message remains paramount, sidelining more subtle characterization or plot development.

Gemini Summer, by Iain Lawrence, exploits the same boy-and-dog-run-away-from-home trope, but instead of a larger-than-life urban setting, we are nostalgically drawn back to 1965, when life was simple, mothers baked cookies and fantasized about Rhett Butler, and fathers worked hard at honest, but dirty, blue-collar jobs. Danny River and his brother play happily in the local ravine, the older sibling dreaming of becoming an astronaut (hence the reference to the Gemini space program in the title) while our protagonist merely wants a pet dog. Tragedy strikes when Danny's brother is impaled after playing on the site of his father's partially constructed backyard bomb shelter—though why the father might be obsessed with the fear of a nuclear threat at this point in history is never really explained; similarly, the numbers tattooed on the arm of a neighbour, mentioned in passing by our curious protagonist, seem to beg for an explanation the text fails to provide (a lost "teaching moment," if there ever was one). And while Lawrence seems unconcerned about whether his youthful readers will catch those nuances, he takes for granted that they will recognize the repeated references to *Gone With the Wind*, the site of our protagonist's mother's daydreams.

But perhaps the most problematic aspect of *Gemini Summer* is the reincarnation theme. We are led to believe, through the earnest eyes of twelve-year-old Danny, that his brother has been reborn as a dog, yet the author draws back from this interpretation on the final page, closing with the folksy (almost Wordsworthian) declaration: "He came to believe that maybe there were things in the world that only children could understand, and that as long as he

thought that a boy could die and live again as a dog, it would be a swell world after all."

By comparison, Drew Hayden Taylor's *The Night Wanderer* includes some refreshingly creative elements, fusing a vampire tale onto a coming-of-age story set on an isolated First Nations reserve. Yes, we have an unappreciated teenager who is "not a nerd," and who escapes into the wilderness and announces, "A Native Vampire! That is so cool!" But we also have a narrative with a strong sense of momentum, dominated by a female protagonist who does not remain passive or become a victim of the Europeanized vampire who has returned home to reclaim his roots. The town bullies are humorously punished, and the vampire delivers an impromptu history lesson in the middle of the night, yet Taylor avoids condescending to his adolescent readers.

A lingering question about all three of these books remains, however: just who is their ideal audience? None of these writers succeeds at consistently capturing the rhythms of adolescent speech, and too often we feel as if the authors are attempting to recreate their own childhoods or provide their readers with the plots and themes they feel adolescents and teenagers should appreciate. And nothing destroys a work of children's literature more quickly than the obtrusive presence of an adult consciousness.

Adventures in Ontario

Richard Scrimger
Into the Ravine. Tundra $12.99

Curtis Parkinson
Death in Kingsport. Tundra $14.99

Irene N. Watts
When the Bough Breaks. Tundra $12.99

Reviewed by Rick Gooding

As the term suggests, Young Adult fiction can be disingenuous about its readership. If adolescents are the ostensible audience, the real prize is often their elders (witness the critical acclaim garnered by Philip Pullman and M.T. Anderson). To their credit, Richard Scrimger, Curtis Parkinson, and Irene Watts aim squarely at readers in their early teens. It's a tricky strategy, of course, because of the risks of underestimating adolescent readers' sensitivity to characterization and literary form, and any writer who fails does much to support the still widespread notion that even good YA fiction is bad writing.

Richard Scrimger assesses his readership well. In *Into the Ravine*, Jules and his friends Cory and Chris build a raft and spend a day journeying from their Scarborough homes to Lake Ontario. What ensues is a modern *Huckleberry Finn*, a cluttered and enormously enjoyable tale of misadventure told by thirteen-year-old Jules, whose precocious awareness of the possibilities of language buoys the narrative. As the three boys negotiate their way past street people, juvenile offenders, and rich suburban teenagers, it becomes clear that their real destination is a meeting with Bonesaw, the enigmatic and menacing figure who casts a shadow over almost everyone they meet.

Scrimger typically writes very funny novels featuring young narrators confronting the crises of childhood inexpertly but with great good luck. Jules is no exception. Self-conscious if not exactly self-aware, he presents his tale as a work in progress, a partly drafted, often-interrupted account of accidental intrusions into same-sex funerals, community service details, and private garden parties. Jules distrusts his own diction, fabricates and then retracts episodes, forces readers to revisit earlier passages, and even archly imagines how events could be adapted for a movie. But for all his verbal skill, Jules also exhibits an adolescent naivete that allows him to report much more than he understands. The effect is a series of quick and delicate evocations of the social issues that often overwhelm YA

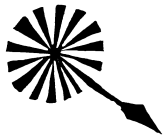
fiction. Mental health, race relations, gay marriage, bullying, and homelessness all emerge as possible concerns, but the mostly generous-minded Jules makes little of them—and he understands even less—and they tend to fade in the light of the more immediate concerns of keeping on good terms with friends, impressing pretty girls, and getting to the waterfront by sundown. The overall effect, I think, is a subtler, more honest treatment of such issues from a teen's perspective than many more earnest novels offer.

At the beginning of Curtis Parkinson's *Death in Kingsport*, suspicious sounds emanate from the coffin of Neil Graves' beloved Uncle Chester. Ignoring reminders from his mother that he's prone to imagining things, Neil convinces his best friend, the smart but pretentious Graham, to help him investigate a series of suspicious deaths in a fictional Ontario town. While the two are playing Hardy Boys, Neil meets and falls for Crescent Trimble, who is searching for her father. As the three sleuths pursue their inquiries, they are led to the secret medical research of the aptly named Dr. Savage.

Set in 1941, Parkinson's novel handles historical details well, though the references sometimes feel like "research." Parkinson emphasizes the kinds of things adolescent boys would no doubt have cared about—comics, hockey and baseball, movie stars, the war—but there are also brief insights into adult anxieties about race and sexual orientation. For the first three quarters of the novel, the narrative moves briskly, building and then resolving mystery after mystery. Although the shifting narrative perspective resolves the main question of guilt early on, the novel mainly follows its protagonist's point of view, and even older readers are likely to share Neil's struggles to understand the complicated professional and family rivalries at the heart of the murder mystery. Unfortunately, the story's resolution is precipitous: with melodramatic flair all mysteries are solved, justice is meted out, and the requisite reconciliations occur in the space of a very brief final chapter. The effect is necessarily disappointing.

In Irene Watts' Depression-era *When the Bough Breaks*, the companion novel to *Flower*, twelve-year-old Millie Carr is forced to assume adult responsibilities when her mother dies just after giving birth. Worried that her family will be broken up, Millie struggles to take care of her infant sister and assert some authority over her younger brother, all the while trying to read her uncommunicative father's intentions and manage household finances. Millie also has misgivings about the intentions of an itinerant fortune teller, who seems to have designs on the baby. At times the narrative hints that supernatural forces are in play, but ultimately the novel is about how Millie matures through confronting her anxieties.

Watts' novel is an unrelentingly humorless account of the importance of family in the face of economic and personal hardship, one of those earnest and eminently disposable historical novels that abound in middle-school libraries. Any sense of historical moment comes from the plot—unemployment is high, vagrancy is too, the home families are a traumatic living memory—rather than the concrete details of Millie's life. The narrative itself is readable, if predictable, but the dialogue can be embarrassingly stilted: Millie says things like "Meanwhile, Eddie's overdue for his afternoon nap," and the homeless comment on their lot by saying, "Anger and hopelessness grow worse each year." It's hard to imagine any teen giving this book a second read, and indeed, it's hard to see what could be gained from one.



Words across the West

Glen Sorestad
Blood and Bone, Ice and Stone. Thistledown $15.95.

Andrew Suknaski
Wood Mountain Poems. Hagios $17.95

Robert M. Stamp, ed.
Writing the Terrain: Travelling through Alberta with the Poets U of Calgary P $29.95.

Reviewed by Neil Querengesser

Here are three fine books of poetry from Alberta and Saskatchewan.

Glen Sorestad's latest collection, *Blood and Bone, Ice and Stone*, is characterized by self-confidence and control, the kind of poetry one might expect from an experienced poet who has spent many years honing his craft. Sorestad, a long-time Saskatchewan resident and a vital if understated force behind the province's literary and cultural scene, moves in these poems with grace and perception across landscapes both close to home and abroad. Some are set in his ancestral Norway, some in Italy, some on the Canadian coasts or the Gulf of Mexico. Many are set in the prairies. The poems are populated as much by magpies and herons as they are by famous writers and musicians. The apt synecdoches of the collection's title recurringly assert themselves in the many poems that explore kindred relationships between the elements of the body and the landscape. Whether Sorestad is examining his grandfather's house and the stone fences in Norway, or feeling his way across the blueberry patches or mist-shrouded waters of Theriau Lake in northern Saskatchewan, his acute perception and description of the elements often leads to intellectual and aesthetic insight. One or two poems bend our perception and responses in some interesting and surprising ways, and the second-person lines about the tragic death of Lawrence Wegner, "On the Outskirts of Saskatoon," tread a razor's edge of tone. Overall, many of the poems have the feel of effortless anecdotes or vignettes, the stories of an old friend, ordinary enough to begin with but subtly smoothed and shaped into polished epiphanies.

Andrew Suknaski, by contrast, has always been fired by a wilder muse. Passionate and probing, his poetry is the record of a restless spirit, as is evident in what is arguably still his most important work, *Wood Mountain Poems.* The first edition of these poems in 1976 came to be seen as groundbreaking, giving distinctive voice and imagery to a specific site of constant struggle between a land and its inhabitants. Suknaski casts himself in the role of prophet/poet returned to visit his dying home town a final time, claiming

> this is my right
> to chronicle the meaning of these vast
> plains
> in a geography of blood
> and failure
> making them live

In making them live, the poet ranges back in time to possible migrations several millennia ago by Sandia man, through the more recent Aboriginal history of Sitting Bull and Crowfoot, to a mixture of twentieth-century European settlers, including his own family, Métis, and First Nations peoples; he ranges in space from the town of Wood Mountain itself to the wider distances of southern Saskatchewan and beyond. The poems are remarkable for their diversity of dialect and characterization. If Wood Mountain must inevitably be swept under the prairie dust, its memories will certainly live on in Suknaski's poetry. This thirtieth anniversary edition should challenge its readers today as much as if not more than the first edition.

Robert M. Stamp's rich collection, *Writing the Terrain: Travelling through Alberta with the Poets*, features 168 poems by 105 poets from Ian Adam to Jan Zwicky. Stamp takes his readers on a literary journey from southern to northern Alberta, capably representing the province's wide and varied landscapes, including its two major cities.

Although most of the poems were written in the last few decades, the collection spans an entire century, including a generous sampling of works by earlier poets such as P.K. Page, Wilfred Watson, and Margaret Avison. It is impossible to mention all the excellent poets contained in these pages, but Robert Kroetsch is represented with a fitting excerpt from *Seed Catalogue*, and there are several fine selections from Erin Mouré. Creative pieces by such accomplished poets as Nancy Holmes, Alice Major, Sid Marty, and Monty Reid all reveal powerfully imaginative connections between the engaging mind and landscapes both urban and rural. The collection also contains some interesting curios, such as a Leonard Cohen poem set on Edmonton's Jasper Street [sic]. If there is a weakness to this book, it may be that many poems are characterized by a recurring earnest understatement and similarity of phrasing, it being apparently impolite for some poets to get too excited about the landscape. Also, aside from one poem by Colleen Thibaudeau, little is written about the profound environmental and economic impact of the Athabasca tarsands or other major developments throughout Alberta. Nevertheless, the abundance and variety of this collection should satisfy and delight its readers in their literary travels.

Persistence through Pedagogy

Blair Stonechild
The New Buffalo: The Struggle for Aboriginal Post-Secondary Education in Canada. U of Manitoba P $24.95

Fyre Jean Graveline
Healing Wounded Hearts. Fernwood $24.95

Reviewed by Sam McKegney

The New Buffalo and *Healing Wounded Hearts* testify to harrowing, ongoing struggles for Indigenous access to and control of post-secondary education in Canada against a deluge of systemic and ideological opposition. Composed by scholars in the vanguard of Indigenous pedagogy—a Cree professor of Indigenous Studies at First Nations University and a Métis chair of the First Nations Studies Program at UNBC, respectively—these works seek, in Blair Stonechild's words, to guide and inspire "those . . . who believe in the power of Aboriginal-controlled higher education, the dignity it brings, and the promise it holds for future generations." Despite an overarching confluence of purpose, however, Stonechild and Fyre Jean Graveline could scarcely have brought more disparate tools to bear on their subject matter. Stonechild's *The New Buffalo* offers "the first major exploration of First Nations post-secondary education policy" in chronologically ordered, academic prose. Graveline's *Healing Wounded Hearts*, meanwhile, fuses autobiography, poetry, traditional storytelling, scholarly research, and visual art in a work of "Indigenous Creative Non-Fiction" designed to dismantle oppressive hierarchies embedded in language and ideology that stifle the re-imagining of classroom spaces according to Indigenous world views.

Despite Stonechild's deep personal commitment to Indigenous education, as evidenced by his work with Manitou College and First Nations University, he opts in *The New Buffalo* for a detached and objective tone, broken only occasionally by passionate exasperation (as when he describes the Saskatchewan chiefs' decision to close Manitou College, thereby obliterating the country's only Indigenous-controlled post-secondary institution at the time). Fortunately for Stonechild, the history he relates is so gripping that any reader interested in Indigenous issues will nonetheless remain riveted by this sordid tale of buck-passing, avoidance, and apologetics by federal and provincial governments, and perseverance, resistance, and activism by Indigenous organizations and individuals.

The foundation of Stonechild's argument is that post-secondary education is an Indigenous *right* rather than a *benefit* to be meted out selectively by the federal government. Although there is no explicit mention of post-secondary education in the treaties, the Supreme Court of Canada has ruled consistently that "the spirit and the intent of the treaties are as significant as the actual wording." Educational responsibility was insisted upon by First Nations leadership during the treaty process to facilitate the flourishing of future generations in radically changing economic environments. Because post-secondary education is essential to success in contemporary Canadian society, Stonechild argues convincingly that Indigenous access is therefore an undeniable federal obligation by virtue of treaty intent. The *Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples* agrees, recommending "that the government of Canada recognize and fulfill its obligation to treaty nations by supporting a full range of education services, including post-secondary education." However, even demonstration of governmental commitment in this regard—which has yet to be shown—will remain only part of progressive strategies for Indigenous empowerment until higher education is rendered more relevant to Indigenous students, thereby fostering retention and success, which is why Stonechild calls for Indigenous control over post-secondary education and why Graveline promotes Indigenous pedagogical praxis.

In *Healing Wounded Hearts*, Graveline dramatizes her personal journey to bring Indigenous world views into the post-secondary environment in an attempt to divest what she calls "Mooniyâs" ideologies—meaning the ideologies of "White peoples" who "Talk with Money"—of their power to alienate Indigenous students. Tearing apart and reconfiguring the English language with unique capitalization, punctuation, and sentence structure, Graveline strives to dig up and display to view the patriarchal roots of mainstream Canadian thought. By turns engaging, inspiring, aggravating, and confusing (at times, all at once), Graveline's methodology at its best forces the reader to self-perceive within a context of ongoing colonial disparity and violence, as in the appallingly beautiful and biting poetic section "She Fought Back," about Cree rape and murder victim Helen Betty Osborne.

Healing Wounded Hearts, however, at times borders on patronizing, as when its author self-identifies as a vehicle for the reader's emancipation from oppressive ideologies. "I am revealing. core Truths about Me.You. Humanity," she writes. "You," on the other hand, "are experiencing MedicineStories." "can I be Midwife to you? in a difficult but necessary Transition. / from Consent to Resistance." Here Graveline constructs the imagined reader as a "Mooniyâs" thinker in need of ideological rebirth. But she must, of course, anticipate a wider audience of "Nehiyâw'ak" (or Indigenous peoples), "Mooniyâs," and others less readily categorized. Also, while she contends that traditional Indigenous pedagogies are non-coercive, allowing the learner to extrapolate meaning for her or himself, Graveline guides the reader repeatedly through her stories, explaining their significance in a multitude of passages that reflect a lack of confidence in the reader's interpretive ability. This is most notable in the final traditional-story section where "Mahê'kun," the wolf—who has quite obviously been an allegorical representation of the author throughout the book—is renamed "FyreMahê'kun," just in case the reader didn't get the connection.

Despite these minor weaknesses, *The New Buffalo* and *Healing Wounded Hearts* are important works, particularly when read in dialogue, with the excesses of the latter recuperated by the clarity of the former, whose dryness is then moistened by a sensual mix of poetry and rage.

New Short Fiction

Carol Windley
Home Schooling. Cormorant $22.95

Caroline Adderson, David Bezmozgis, and Dionne Brand, eds.
The Journey Prize Stories 19: The Best of Canada's New Writers. McClelland & Stewart $17.99

Reviewed by Heidi Darroch

Since 1989, an annual selection of stories by new and emerging writers has been culled from Canadian literary journals and published as *The Journey Prize Stories*. This year's Journey Prize winner is Victoria writer Craig Boyko, whose story "OZY" (first published in *PRISM International*) is also included in his recent first collection of short fiction, *Blackouts*. Many of the past nominees for the award, including Thomas King, M.G. Vassanji, Eden Robinson, and Caroline Adderson (one of this year's editors), have gone on to enjoy substantial acclaim for their subsequent short fiction or novels. Several of the authors represented in the 2007 anthology have already secured book deals, and the diverse efforts of the contributors suggest that the short story continues to flourish in Canada despite conventional publishing wisdom that new novels are easier to promote than short fiction.

"OZY" is a clever and unexpectedly affecting depiction of the battle between neighbourhood boys for "high scorer" supremacy in a local store's video game. The middle-aged narrator looks back on his precocious public success with earnest pride, reflecting on weighty themes of time and memory in poetic prose that sometimes risks bathos. "Every message is a message to the future," Boyko writes. "The feverish, grandiloquent *billet doux* stashed with trembling hand in the coat pocket of the girl you're in love with; the casual note to your wife jotted in haste and posted to the fridge before you leave in the morning; the drunken, desultory jeremiad left on your ex's answering machine—they will be read or listened to, if they are read or listened to at all, by people of the future."

The other two finalists are journalist Krista Foss and recent University of Toronto Creative Writing graduate Rebecca Rosenblum. Foss' "Swimming in Zanzibar" (from *The Antigonish Review*) uses clipped sentences to explore the impact of gender and nation on two documentary crew members working overseas who are involved in a near tragedy. Rosenblum's "Chilly Girl," first published in *Exile*, is a confident and romantic contemporary fairy tale.

Other stories in this anthology touch on fraught family relationships, as well as childhood and adolescent experiences with loss, and offer a combination of humour, whimsy, and elegy, sometimes all in the same story, as in Nicholas Ruddock's quirky "How Eunice Got Her Baby." Patricia Robertson, who has already published two accomplished story collections, creates a believable portrait of a young girl obsessed with the fate of a young refugee in "My Hungarian Sister." Pasha Malla's "Respite" explores a young writer's involvement with the family for whom he provides respite care. Malla avoids succumbing to sentimentality or easy emotional effects, and the descriptions of the narrator's assistance to a fatally ill disabled child and his own crumbling romantic relationship are nicely juxtaposed.

Carol Windley's work was featured in a Journey Prize anthology fifteen years ago, prior to the publication of her first collection, *Visible Light*. In her second set of stories, *Home Schooling*, the British Columbia writer pays close and rewarding attention to the Pacific Northwest setting of her stories, and nicely captures the impact of the rain-sodden landscape on her mostly female, mostly hypersensitive characters and narrators. There is a sense of menace in several stories, as adult characters reflect on half-forgotten (or all too memorable)

personal and family collisions with violence, or acts of betrayal and loss. As in Alice Munro's work, there is a sense here that everyday life can erupt unexpectedly into tragedy, leaving survivors to assess their own role and responsibility.

In the title story, a family struggles to regroup after the father's long-cherished project, a small island boarding school, is disbanded after a student drowns. One of the two rival adolescent daughters demonstrates a preternatural perceptiveness about her unusual family. She reflects on how patient the young students had been with her father's approach to teaching, "which he insisted wasn't pedagogy, but a flamboyant careless engagement with life's unevenness and unpredictability and wildness. Wildness tamed, that was, lined-up and biddable, waiting for further instruction before ripping itself loose and going on a rampage." In "Sand and Frost," Lydia is in her first year of university, oppressed by the weight of her family's melodramatic history and increasingly preoccupied with a sense of possibly false empathy for her poetry professor, who is rumoured to have suffered his own tragic loss. As in many of Windley's stories in this collection, the plot remains largely unresolved, as Lydia settles for merely imagining a moment of connection with her professor and his young child: "They would stand there in each other's arms, silent in their shared knowledge of what could happen in the world and indeed did happen, continually, without respite: acts of passion and bile, regret and love. At the same time, she'd see how ordinary the room was, a book open on the table, a coffee cup. A place of shelter. Yet there would be in that house the memory of tragedy, of loss." At times Windley's stories return too insistently to this kind of elegiac paradox, but there is a quiet wisdom here that rewards attentive reading.

You Can Never Go Home Again

Eric Wright
Finding Home. Cormorant $22.95

Gail Anderson-Dargatz
Turtle Valley. Knopf $32.00

Reviewed by Marlene Goldman

The ghost of Northrop Frye haunts Canadian writers and readers who remain fascinated by the unsettled and unsettling question: Where is home? Two recent books, Eric Wright's *Finding Home* and Gail Anderson-Dargatz's *Turtle Valley* address this fascination in different ways. In *Finding Home*, Will Prentice, the middle-aged, recently separated and soon-to-be divorced partner in a Toronto ad agency, finds himself returning to England, the country of his birth, to attend his mother's funeral. Known for his detective novels, Wright portrays Will's trip to England as a quest to solve the mystery of his mother's hidden income and of the identity of two enigmatic figures who appear in the photographs his mother left behind. Indifferent to the loss of his wife and the death of his mother, Will tours through the English countryside and engages in an existential meditation on where, exactly, a British-Canadian hybrid like himself belongs.

Although the opening is promising, the novel quickly descends into a tedious and superficial rant about the differences between Canada and England. In the end, Wright has crafted a travel guide that, no doubt, folks across the pond will enjoy. But Canadian readers, who contend on a daily basis with the problems of "the two solitudes" and the ongoing rivalry between the filthy-rich east and the laid-back west coast will likely feel trapped in the car, pining for an end to the road trip.

In contrast to Wright's existential jaunt across the pond, Anderson-Dargatz's *Turtle Valley* remains firmly rooted in the B.C.

Shuswap Lake region, in the valley between Salmon Arm and the village of Promise. Revisiting the captivating setting and characters of her earlier novel *The Cure for Death By Lightning*, and relying once again on the genre of Gothic romance, *Turtle Valley* portrays a host of bizarre minds and bodies—often radically dissociated owing to injury, old age, and disease—wandering restlessly in search of home. Readers familiar with Anderson-Dargatz's earlier novel will recognize characters such as Beth Weeks with her strange lightning arm that "would fly off and do things by itself," as well as Beth's incestuous, and abusive father. *Turtle Valley*, however, focuses on the experiences of Beth's daughter Kat, who returns to the valley with her husband, Ezra, and their young son because the fire raging over the hills threatens her elderly and ill parents with evacuation. Packing up and leaving the farm is no easy task because Kat's mother, Beth, has gone "squirrelly"—she suffers from profound memory loss—and Kat's father, stricken earlier with prostate cancer, has only days to live and refuses to die in hospital.

In addition to contending with these crises, Kat is also forced to grapple with the repercussions of the sexual and psychological abuse that shaped her grandmother's and mother's life. The ghosts of her grandmother and grandfather literally and figuratively haunt the family—a shadowy old man repeatedly appears at the well, jingling his keys and, inside the house, the gas burners suddenly glow red in the middle of the night. These ghostly visitations prompt Kat to solve the mystery of her grandfather's sudden disappearance the night he threatened his wife and children with a gun: Did the old man storm off and die of exposure on the mountains, or was he shot in self-defense by Kat's uncle, Dan, or was he murdered by her great-uncle, Valentine? The grandfather—a veteran of WWII utterly changed after "part of his skull had been blown away by the shells that first buried him and then unburied him"—and his plight are poignantly relevant since Kat, like her grandmother Maud, must decide whether to run off with her lover or to remain loyal to her brain-injured husband. Owing to a stroke, Ezra speaks in oddly poetic phrases, suffers from terrifying seizures and, worse, is prone to violent outbursts over which he has little or no control. Perhaps Kat's uncle, Dan, puts it best when he says: "You're supposed to love your father . . . But how do you love a man who acts like that?" Although *Turtle Valley* solves the mystery of the grandfather's disappearance, Anderson-Dargatz leaves readers with the far more profound conundrum, namely, what is our responsibility toward people whose minds and bodies—scarred by trauma and disease—stray far from civilized, domestic boundaries that delineate the norm, making it ever so difficult, if not impossible, for everyone concerned to find their way home.

Canadian Adventures

Harrison Wright
Probing Minds, Salamander Girls and a Dog Named Sally. Gaspereau $27.95

Barbara Kingscote
Ride the Rising Wind: One Woman's Journey across Canada. NeWest $24.95

Reviewed by Stephanie Dickison

It's odd to read a memoir of a twenty-six year old. Usually books written by a young person are filled with tales of drug abuse, urban decay, and parental malaise. But in *Probing Minds, Salamander Girls and a Dog Named Sally* the reader is enveloped in stories about growing up in Pereaux, Nova Scotia, "For the most part on a small winding dirt road called the Hubbard Mountain, with a 'No Exit' at the end of it." It is a small town lined with farms and the neighbourhood all play together, getting up to no

good, but in a Huck Finn manner—like heading into a dark basement, riding an old snowmobile onto the slippery, thin ice, and something called "the propane condom trick"—not at all like the young boys of Jay McInerney's *Bright Lights, Big City* and ilk.

This is Wright's first book and by the second sentence—"This is not your conventional style of book"—you know that this is something off the beaten path. The path that leads you along with the MacInnis and Parent boys—Paul, Scott, Matt, and Jeremy ("Jer")—and a host of other seemingly mythical characters, including some girls studying salamanders and a happy-go-lucky dog named Sally. They seem mythical because such small town experiences seem from long ago, from simpler times before email and cellphones that you can watch television on. In "The Bizarre Particulars of a Day (& a Dried-Up Frog)," Wright spends the day on the tractor and thoroughly enjoys the process:

> I find driving around a field is the best for thinking: long stretches of sitting idly with periodic quick turns at the corners. The stretches allow me to think and the small bit of compulsory thought at the corners keeps me from growing weary and possibly falling asleep.

So while the stories are not filled with riveting action like car bombs or childbirth, Wright's ability to talk about friends, family, and moments that matter is better than any best-selling novel, because these are what make up our lives. This is what makes up our day as young 'uns: stopping at a garage sale and picking up an item that may or may not work (chapter 4, "Aerial Runway"), watching cattle crossing a creek (chapter 6, "Barebone, Moonlit Wonders") and boiling up a heap of spaghetti after venturing outside all day with friends (chapter 14, "On Thin Ice with a Moped"). The world has not filled up yet with career woes, rent hikes and commuting for three hours a day. It is still simple and yet absolutely fascinating.

As Wright says about the book, "It is a collection of stories, just as all lives are collections of stories. In life there is not necessarily a climax, a grand finale, or symbolism in every object. When you focus on the details, the overall structure of life is sometimes lost, and maybe this is not so bad. This is not a tragedy or a comedy, and the ending will not necessarily be punctuated with a wedding or a funeral, no scripts or protocols are followed, things simply are."

With Kingscote's *Ride the Rising Wind*, the adventures are a little more widely spread:

> On Sunday, May 15, 1949, I rode out from my farm house at Mascouche, Quebec, on a little black mare named Zazy. I was twenty and she was fifteen. We traveled the open road, living wherever we happened to be, with strangers becoming friends, within the rugged warmth of lumber camps, and in welcoming wilderness. This is the story of our sixteen-month journey to the Pacific Ocean, four thousand miles from Mascouche. Along our way, I lost the need for certainty about tomorrow, and found instead the generous heart of my country.

Kingscote's writing is sharp yet simple, allowing for the story to unravel naturally and the picture to become clear without complication or muddy language:

> Dominic changed the tenor of my life, but spring changed it more. The snow softened, rushing the company to complete its contract before the bush roads broke. Already the horses were punching through the crust, and often the men were caught out in the rain. More and tougher lumberjacks were hired to speed the winter work to a finish. They scowled and cursed about the food, and on pouring wet days, they passed their time throwing knives at the bunkhouse stove pipes.

This is an incredibly enveloping story of not just the actual distance covered on horseback, but the relationship between man and animal, man and nature, and man and man.

And then there are the extraordinary revelations that Kingscote discovers along the way. Often the hardships of such a journey are what people end up talking about, but in this case, it should be how the story is written. You do not have to love horses, travels, or Western Canada to love this book. You just have to love great writing and a fascinating story.

Dreaming Toronto, Then and Now

Phyllis Brett Young
The Torontonians. McGill-Queen's UP $24.95.

Bruce MacDonald
Coureurs de Bois. Cormorant $22.95

Reviewed by Maia Joseph

Given that Toronto has, in recent years, undergone a period of reassessment and a small cultural renaissance, the re-issue of Phyllis Brett Young's *The Torontonians* by McGill-Queen's seems particularly timely. First published in 1960, Young's novel offers a view of the city at an earlier stage of transition, as Toronto began to shed its provincial status and emerge as an economic and cultural player on the international stage. More specifically, *The Torontonians* is about female, upper-middle-class experience during this period of change. Over the course of the novel, Young's protagonist, housewife Karen Whitney, rejects the consumption-driven domestic culture of postwar suburbia, and opts instead for a more cosmopolitan way of life in the increasingly thriving central city. In exploring the circumstances that inform Karen's decision, the novel provides historical insight into the roots of an urban lifestyle that has itself now become highly commodified.

In a new introduction and an appendix explicating the novel's many references to actual people, places, and things, Nathalie Cooke and Suzanne Morton make clear *The Torontonians*' value as a historical document, especially for Canadian urban studies and gender studies scholars and students. They note Young's passionate dedication to recording the details of her time and place—a project that she felt the preceding generation of Canadian writers had disregarded. Cooke and Morton's introduction situates the novel within the context of postwar politics (especially emergent Canadian nationalism and American neocolonialism), and emphasizes Young's prescience as a chronicler of middle-class female experience. Published three years before Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique*, *The Torontonians* offers an important early articulation of that particular form of modern alienation that would fuel second-wave feminism. Noting that an abbreviated version of the novel appeared in serialized form in *Chatelaine* during the fall of 1960, Cooke and Morton observe that *The Torontonians* reflected the magazine's progressive editorial mandate. They also highlight Young's ability to appeal to a broad audience (her novels were bestsellers) while undermining conventions of the commercialized romance genre. As well, they remind us of the risk Young took by setting her work in Toronto, as she was writing many years before the city became widely accepted as a setting for urban fiction.

Toward the end of *The Torontonians*, Young's protagonist stands looking west across the city from the heights of a downtown office building. At first she sees only what she refers to as "Toronto"—the collection of landmarks that play a role in her upper-middle-class existence—but then she begins to try see the rest of what she terms "the city," including spaces of poverty that unsettle her limited personal idea of "Toronto." Karen does not go far with this line of thought, but her instinct to understand the city as an intricate system in which she is but one, particularly privileged

component is pushed much further by Bruce MacDonald in his recent novel, *Coureurs de Bois*.

Indeed, MacDonald's strength lies in conceptualizing the city as an economic system, and in developing outsider characters that enable him to communicate an often sharp, rather brutal critique of that system. After a brief confrontation in a downtown building not unlike the one Young's protagonist finds herself in, MacDonald sets much of his novel in the west Toronto neighbourhood of Parkdale, prior to its recent gentrification. But the action of *Coureurs de Bois* remains in tension with the financial centre of Toronto and the economic system that shapes the city, as MacDonald explores the possibilities and ethics of an alternative, underground economy.

Central among MacDonald's outsider characters are Randall "Cobb" Seymour, a Mohawk/Ojibwa cigarette trafficker just released from prison, and William Tobe, a young economics student and prodigal son from a well-to-do Ottawa family. Both arrive in Parkdale in the early stages of the novel, Cobb driven by a dream of Crow, Will by a vision he does not understand. The two quickly become business partners, with Will taking on a role that he likens to the seventeenth-century "coureurs-de-bois," the renegade traders who defied colonial authorities in developing economic alliances with Native people.

At times, the pair succeeds in creatively undermining the dominant system; at others, they appear only to mirror it. After all, Cobb and Will are far from perfect—Cobb is more than a bit of a bully who prefers submissive women, and Will, still very young, is emotionally immature. What distinguishes them is their recognition that, as Will puts it, "The dreams of human beings are the boundaries of an economy." Dreams open up potentiality by placing dreamers in relationship with otherness; they are also, as Will and Cobb understand them, ethical contracts, situating the dreamer in a position of responsibility toward the thing dreamed. The pair recognizes that what Cobb calls "the white man's system" (based on the transcendence of identity and place through prosperity) has become devoid of dream. But by the end of the novel, they are only beginning to understand that "most basic human exchange," love, and seem still rather far from dreaming an economy that places less restrictive limits on compassion.

Contributors

Articles

Sophie **Bastien** est professeure adjointe au département d'études françaises du Collège militaire royal du Canada. Son livre *Caligula et Camus. Interférences transhistoriques* (Rodopi, Amsterdam/NewYork) a remporté le prix 2007 de l'Association des professeurs de français des universités et collèges canadiens (APFUCC). Elle a surtout publié sur le théâtre du XX^{e} siècle mais a également produit des articles sur le roman québécois de la décennie 1970.

Amelia **DeFalco** is a postdoctoral fellow at McMaster University researching the ethics of caregiving in contemporary Canadian literature. She is author of *Uncanny Selves: Aging, Identity, Narrative* (forthcoming with Ohio State University Press) and has published essays on fiction by Margaret Atwood, Nella Larsen, and on filmmaker Todd Haynes.

Stephen **Dunning** is the author of *The Crisis and the Quest: A Kierkegaardian Reading of Charles Williams* (Paternoster Press, 2000) and of a number of articles on modern British and Canadian literature. His current research interests include contemporary conceptions of nineteenth-century intellectual culture in "dual setting" Canadian and British fiction, and more generally the emergence of secular society. He is currently an Associate Professor in the English Department at Trinity Western University.

Brian **Johnson** is an Assistant Professor of English at Carleton University, where he teaches courses on Canadian literature, literary theory, and genre fiction. He has recently published a series of essays on the relation between northern Gothic and indigeneity in a variety of journals and edited collections.

Jenny **Kerber** earned her PhD from the Faculty of Environmental Studies at York University in 2007, and is currently a SSHRC Postdoctoral Fellow in the Department of English at the University of Calgary.

Benjamin **Lefebvre** is a SSHRC Postdoctoral Fellow in the Department of English and Film Studies at the University of Alberta, Research Associate at the Modern Literature and Culture Research Centre at Ryerson University, and Director of the L.M. Montgomery Research Group. He is currently completing a monograph on child protagonists in Canadian fiction for adults published between 1947 and 2007 and, with Irene Gammel, editing a collection of essays on *Anne of Green Gables* for University of Toronto Press.

Poems

Tammy **Armstrong** lives in Fredericton, NB. John **Barton** lives in Victoria, BC. Aaron **Giovannone** teaches at Brock University. Alan **Hill** lives in Burnaby, BC. Paul **Huebener** lives in Hamilton, ON. Vincent Charles **Lambert** lives in Saint-Philémon, QC.

Reviews

Bert **Almon** teaches at the University of Alberta. Heinz **Antor** teaches at the University of Koln, in Germany. Anderson **Araujo** teaches at the University of Western Ontario. Thierry **Bissonnette** lives in Sudbury, ON. Robert **Budde** teaches at the University of Northern British Columbia. Alison **Calder** teaches at the University of Manitoba. Rebecca **Campbell,** Maia **Joseph**, Juliane **Okot Bitek**, and Meredith **Quartermain** live in Vancouver, BC. Adeline **Caute,** Sarika P. **Bose,** George **Egerton,** Rick **Gooding,** and Suzanne **James** teach at the University of British Columbia. Mélanie **Collado** teaches at the University of Lethbridge. Pénélope **Cormier,** Louis Patrick **Leroux,** and Kate **Morris** live in Montreal, QC. Karen **Crossley** lives in Winnipeg, MB. Natasha **Dagenais** teaches at Sherbrook University. Heidi **Darroch**, Marlene **Goldman,** and Cynthia G. **Messenger** teach at the University of Toronto. Emir **Delic** lives in Ottawa. Adam **Dickinson** teaches at Brock University. Stephanie **Dickison** and Katherine **Verhagen** live in Toronto, ON. Louise **Frappier** and Cecile B. **Vigouroux** teach at Simon Fraser University. Jennifer **Fraser** lives in Victoria, BC. Julie **Gaudreault** teaches at Laval University. Sudeep **Ghosh** teaches at Kodaikanal International School in India. Stéphane **Inkel** teaches at Queen's University. Karl E. **Jirgens** teaches at the University of Windsor. Kathleen **Kellett-Betsos** teaches at Ryerson University. Catherine **Lefrançois** lives in Québec City, QC. Jodi **Lundgren** teaches at Thompson Rivers University. Ursula **Mathis-Moser** teaches at the University of Innsbruck, Austria. Sam **McKegney** teaches at Mount Royal College in Calgary, AB. Paul **Milton** teaches at University of British Columbia Okanagan. Maureen **Moynagh** teaches at St. Francis Xavier University. A. Mary **Murphy** and Owen **Percy** teach at the University of Calgary. Therí Alyce **Pickens** lives in Los Angeles, CA. Fiona **Polack** teaches at Memorial University. Ryan **Porter** lives in Kingston, ON. Neil **Querengesser** teaches at Concordia University College of Alberta. Wendy **Roy** teaches at the University of Saskatchewan. Robert **Thacker** teaches at St. Lawrence University in Canton, USA. Hilary **Turner** teaches at the University of the Fraser Valley. Christian **Vandendorpe** teaches at the University of Ottawa. Andrea **Wasylow** teaches at St. Thomas More College in Saskatoon, SK. J.R. **Wytenbroek** teaches at Vancouver Island University in Nanaimo, BC.

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SUBSCRIPTION AND MEMBERSHIP INFORMATION

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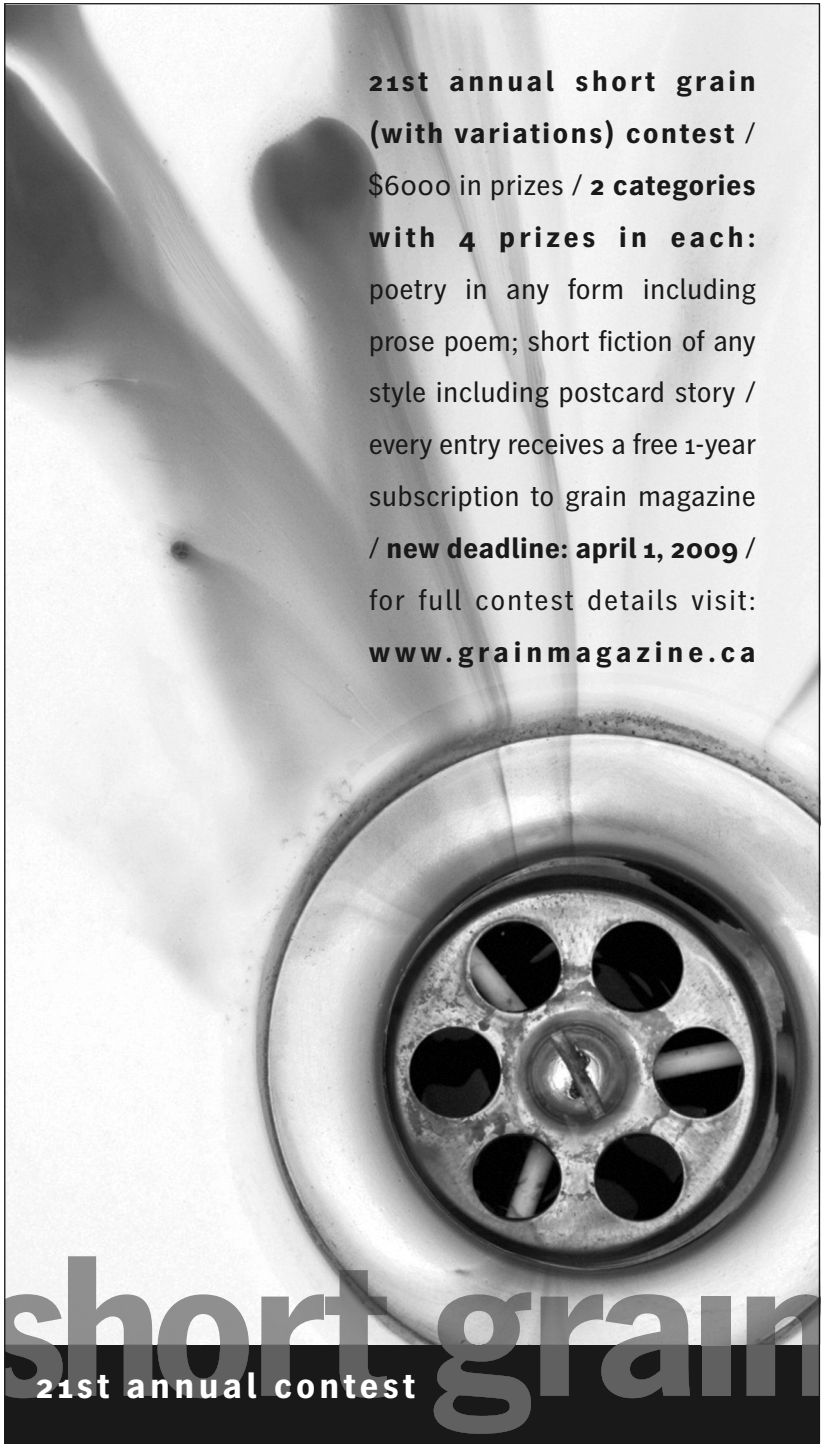
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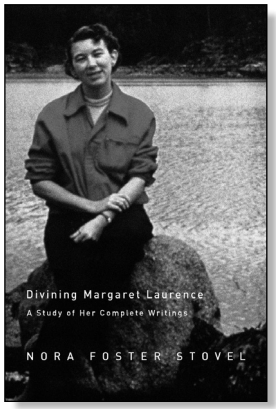

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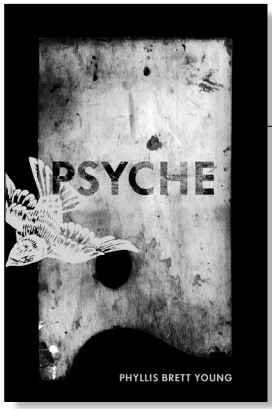

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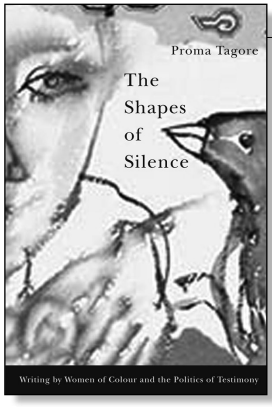

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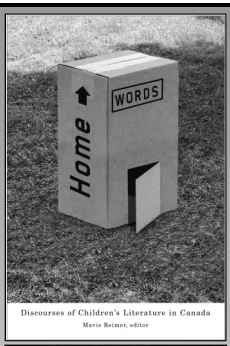

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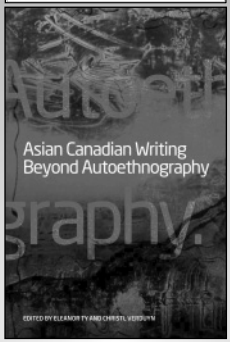

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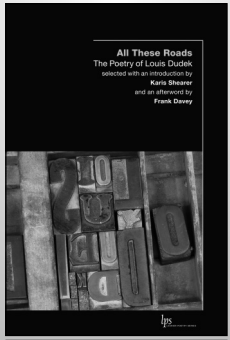

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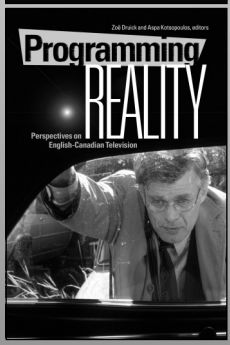

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